

The Virtues of Breaking One's Word: Derrida, Metaphor, and the Philosophy of Language

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Philosophy

May 31, 2020

Nashville, Tennessee

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For Julia, who gave me life, and taught me to be kind.  
For Gertrude, who taught me the value of faith and perseverance.  
For Thanos, who kept me running.  
For the Philosophy Department at Mary Washington College, who gave me space to grow.  
For the Philosophy Department at Vanderbilt University, who gave me a chance, an opportunity,  
and the time and space to find my voice.

Table of Contents

Page

List of Abbreviations: .....	v
Introduction: Before Letting Ourselves Get Carried Away ... ..	1
<i>The Purview</i> .....	1
<i>A Review</i> .....	9
<i>A Preview</i> .....	16
Chapter	
I—Field Conditions: The Status of Metaphor in the Philosophy of Language .....	26
<i>Seeing What they Mean</i> .....	26
<i>The Things they Carry</i> .....	36
... <i>No Longer of Account as Coins</i> ... ..	46
<i>Kill the Messenger</i> .....	55
<i>Wandering Toward the Meaning of Its Death</i> .....	68
II—Of Death and Wellsprings: The Paradox of Dead Metaphor .....	82
... <i>But Merely as Metal</i> .....	82
<i>The Rule of Watchmen</i> .....	92
<i>Of Rebirth in Death</i> .....	105
III—Narrowing Our View: An Inquiry into the Meaning of “The Literal” .....	125
<i>Narrowing Our View</i> .....	125
<i>Boundary Testing</i> .....	136
<i>A Narrow Path, An Unthought Destination</i> .....	159
IV—Of a Possible Encounter in the Field: Derrida, Austin, and Speech Act Theory .....	180

<i>An Unheard of Graphics</i> .....	180
<i>Risk and Regulation</i> .....	188
<i>A Vehicle for Intentionality?</i> .....	203
<i>The Force of Meaning, the Meaning of Force</i> .....	221
<i>The Effect of Meanings, The Meaning of Effects</i> .....	231
<i>Fields, Loss, Perdition</i> .....	241
<i>Concerning Near Misses in Open Spaces</i> .....	251

V—Calling Out to an Original Movement: Embodiment, Force, and The Structure of Metaphor  
 ..... 267

<i>A Last Appeal</i> .....	267
<i>The Use(s) of Force</i> .....	272
<i>Body to Body, Face to Face</i> .....	287
<i>The Promise of A Return</i> .....	304
<i>A Preliminary Outline</i> .....	316
<i>Metaphor, Perlocution, and Solicitation</i> .....	324
<i>A Post-Liminary Outline</i> .....	335
<i>Poetry and Seduction, Life and Death</i> .....	339

VI—A Break from a Life in the Fields: Dead Metaphor, Social Death, and the Metaphors of  
 Mastery ..... 356

<i>Outline of The Metaphor of Metaphor: An Analogy</i> .....	356
<i>The Death of Metaphor; A Metaphor of Death</i> .....	361
<i>The Subject of Mastery</i> .....	366
<i>A Message Thus Conveyed</i> .....	370
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	378

## List of Abbreviations:

J. L. Austin, *How to do things with Words*, HW  
Gordon C. F. Bearn, “Derrida Dry: Iterating Iterability Analytically” “DDA”  
Max Black, “Metaphor” “MT”  
Max Black. “More About Metaphor.” from *Metaphor and Thought* “MAM”  
Pierre Bourdieu. *Language and Symbolic Power* LSP  
Stanley Cavell, “What Did Derrida Want of Austin?” “WDA”  
Donald Davidson, *Truth, Language, and History* TLH  
Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” from *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. “WMM”  
Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* MP  
Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc. a,b,c... LI*  
Jacques Derrida, “The Retrait of Metaphor” from *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* “RM”  
Morny Joy, “Derrida and Ricoeur: A Case of Mistaken Identity (And Difference).” “MI”  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Untruth*, OTU.  
Leonard Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance*, IC  
Raoul Moati, *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language*. D/S  
Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, SSD  
Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* TRM  
John Searle, “Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts” “ALI”  
John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society* MLS  
John Searle, “What Is an Intentional State?” “WIS”  
John R. Searle. *Speech Acts* SA  
John Searle “Metaphor” in *Metaphor and Thought*, “Searle ‘79”  
John R. Searle, *Consciousness and Language* CL  
John Searle, “Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida” “RD”  
John R. Searle, “Consciousness, Unconsciousness and Intentionality.” “CUI”  
Giuseppe Stellardi’s *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor* HDPM  
Josef Stern. *Metaphor in Context*. MIC

## Introduction: Before Letting Ourselves Get Carried Away...

### The Purview

“now that we’ve returned to the topic of poetry—that, in view of its nature, we had reason to banish it from the city earlier, for our argument compelled us to do so. But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let’s also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy.<sup>1</sup>”

—Plato

“The outside, ‘spatial’ and ‘objective’ exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not appear without the gramme, without différance as temporalization, without the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present, without the relationship with death as the concrete structure of the living present. Metaphor would be forbidden.<sup>2</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

Clarity, focus, insight, and original vision are among the central aims of any philosophical work. Nevertheless, we often find ourselves stifled and constrained by the use of language, finding that its usefulness appears to have limits, that its descriptive force may fail us in the end. Philosophers, working on the frontiers of thought, are perhaps the most likely to be at a loss, to have ideas that cannot be conveyed, to seek truths that have not yet been put into words. It is the philosopher’s work to discover the hidden meanings in the words we speak, to transform the truths that are already there, to see these truths from a different position, and, on that basis, to build new perspectives.

This is, of course, easier said than done. It doesn’t much help that philosophy appears to harbor a little secret, a hidden difficulty that, at first glance, may appear to be a trivial matter. A review of the first sentence of this essay reveals no less than five metaphorical expressions. The several subsequent sentences are also littered with figurative claims. Presumably, without prompting, one reads these sentences without the slightest consideration that what is said is not

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<sup>1</sup>Plato. *Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper. p. 1211

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. trans Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997p. 71

meaningful, not meant, nor that the claims they state are deviant or inherently false. In fact, without prompting, it is likely that most readers would not pick up on the fact that these expressions are metaphorical at all. In spite of this strange, but common, phenomenon, many—if not most—theories of meaning fail to explore, or even to acknowledge, this dimension of language, this odd fact about the unconscious use and comprehension of metaphors. It will be the work of this essay to address this problem.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this problem appears to stem from yet another problem. It might be surprising, however, to find that the source of this neglect is a direct result of a hidden allegiance to the meaning of the metaphors that constitute the very concepts that are meant to clarify the meaning of meaning, metaphorical or otherwise. Perhaps more surprising still—and certainly more interesting—is the fact that the roles and meanings of these constitutive metaphors are largely disavowed, and often quite explicitly so, in service to preserving the integrity of philosophical “concepts.” This, by itself, would not be so serious a problem were it not for the broad and dominant tendency that has been established in philosophy to characterize all meaning as primarily and centrally defined on the basis of literal language. In this, a thorough analysis reveals that any theorist who holds such a commitment is ultimately faced with an interesting conundrum. To the extent that one is seeking secure theoretical concepts that have their bases in literal meanings, it would seem that any allegiance to figurative language must be eschewed at the conceptual level. Despite this, it is demonstrably the case that many of the most theoretically rigorous treatments of language meaning and use draw heavily, centrally, and perhaps necessarily, on metaphorical expressions. The fact that metaphors constitute some of the most important concepts in the philosophy of language and semantics suggests that the foundations of these studies cannot simply be based on literal language as many thinkers assume

and imagine. Assessing this problem will form the foundation of this essay. More directly, I will be pursuing some of the general consequences of this problem and how its treatment might inform a rethinking of metaphor in particular, and theories of meaning more generally.

In service to clarifying the problems associated with this common and intuitive tendency, I will draw on the work of Jacques Derrida, for whom the problem of metaphor strikes at the very meaning and possibility of philosophy. The history of philosophy, according to his view, is centrally conditioned by the possibility of imagining that words are, at bottom, characterized by their duality, that they are best conceptualized according to the precise oppositional distinction between meaningful truths and the modes and manners by which said truths can be conveyed. Thoughts and ideas are, on this view, characterized by “an essence *rigorously independent* of that which *transports* it.”<sup>3</sup> Meanings, essences, truths, etc., are radically distinct from the signs by which they can be expressed, the signs which serve as their vehicles. Modes of communication are mediators of some sort, capable of facilitating the movement, transport, and transfer of ideas, of meanings and thoughts, between interlocutors, between conscious subjects. Buried deep within the philosopher’s lexicon (and hidden in plain sight in the first paragraph of this essay) is the metaphor that supposes that *words are containers or vehicles which can contain, carry, transport, and convey meanings, ideas, and intentions.*

This is the metaphor of theory.<sup>4</sup> Its tacit supposition is that that the essences of thought, whatever they may be, are isolable objects whose integrity can be maintained and effectively communicated, *so long as they are properly contained, carried, conveyed, and transmitted.*<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. p. 229. Hereafter, *MP*. Italics mine.

<sup>4</sup>The metaphor of theory is tightly allied with the myth of logocentrism. It constitutes the “theoretical basis” upon which the logocentric myth can pass for being properly literal.

<sup>5</sup> There is, therefore, a certain risk of loss that must be avoided.



maintenance of the integrity of that which is conveyed is essential for its proper reception, and for the essential function of communication, which is shared intelligibility. This metaphor, and its associated implications, is what Derrida, in his essay “White Mythology,” refers to as “philosophy’s *unique thesis*, the thesis which constitutes the concept of metaphor, the opposition of the proper and the nonproper, of essence and accident, of intuition and discourse, of thought and language, of the intelligible and the sensible.<sup>6</sup>” This figure and its various theoretical consequences are built into, and subtend, the common sense understanding of meaning as well as a range of intuitions that support the intelligibility of many of the common conceptual oppositions which have proven to be persistent, and perhaps intransigent, features of the Western philosophical tradition. The development of this thesis in and through these and other similar oppositions is repeatedly rehearsed in this tradition, and its script centrally marks the history and development of metaphysics in general.

This metaphor is pervasive. It is, first of all, both a necessary and sufficient condition for the possibility of any conception of language that can treat “communication” as the *transmission* of a determinate *content*. Its use is coextensive with any theory whose development and articulation bears its marks. The most common contemporary conceptions of linguistic use, and their various theoretical consequences have this metaphor built into them, hidden in their foundations. Crucially, the function of this thesis, this metaphor, is doubly occluded. While it is a widely employed tool according to which language use is theoretically articulated, its own structure forms a blind-spot, continually put out of question within the scope of the traditions that depend on its use. As a consequence, the question of whether the descriptions of communication that rely on the metaphor of theory can, themselves, convey determinate contents cannot be

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<sup>6</sup>MP p. 229

asked without some irony. Further, they cannot be answered in the affirmative without empty presupposition or tautology, and they cannot be answered in the negative without contradiction or paradox. Coupled with this theoretical problem, is the long historical tendency in philosophy to distance itself from its own metaphorical and figurative dimensions—a possibility that is made all the more plausible *because* of its unique thesis. This, because what philosophy is about—thoughts and ideas—is presumed to be fully distinct from the words which happen to be used to communicate them. Thus, if it is even noticed, the figurative character of philosophical theses can be thought of as a side-effect, as a feature whose nature never affects the essence, as a supplement.

Here is where the profound insight of “White Mythology” comes to the fore. It is not simply the claim that the metaphor of theory centrally thematizes a wide array of the oppositions, and hence a wide array of the problems and conceptual formations which have shaped the development and history of Western philosophy; what precedes even these claims, and is of crucial importance, is that this metaphor also centrally defines philosophy’s unique mark of distinction: *its mastery over meaning, its mastery over language, and the presumed product of such mastery, the philosophical concept.*<sup>7</sup> That this mark takes its distinction by distinguishing itself from the figurative, from mere rhetoric, from poetic, mythic, and metaphorical language, is among the oldest and longest-standing traditions in philosophy.<sup>8</sup> The crucial contribution of

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of the “concept” is central among what many contemporary philosophers would claim to be a long “dead” metaphor. The death, or dying nature, of such metaphors will be a central concern in this essay. Of the concept, Derrida has this to say: “the concept of the concept cannot not retain the gesture of mastery, taking-and-maintaining-in-the-present, comprehending and grasping the thing as an object.” *MP* p. 224.

<sup>8</sup>In *Margins of Philosophy*, on p. 263, Derrida refers to this as the classical distinction between metaphor and concept. In his essay, “‘White Mythology’ Revisited,” Bernard Harrison characterizes this classical distinction in the following way: “According to the terms of that opposition, a name used to designate a concept brings some aspect of reality, some part of the truth of things, before the mind; whereas a name used metaphorically merely establishes some link, based on some perceived similarity or analogy, between two names. The link established by metaphor, in other words, is a linkage between linguistic entities—a linkage forged entirely within the sphere of language. The name-concept link, on the other hand, is not ultimately a linguistic relationship at all. It is a link between Mind and World, which language merely represents or expresses. Metaphorical discourse may have some value nevertheless

“White Mythology” is the recognition that this very distinction, and its opposed terms, are themselves metaphorical, are *established* metaphorically. Consequently, figurative language in general, and metaphors of a very specific sort, form the very basis for the possibility of philosophical language and some of its most persistent assumptions.

It is with this in mind that Derrida writes that “Philosophy, as a theory of metaphor, first will have been a metaphor of theory.<sup>9</sup>” In other words, *theory, as a foundational metaphor*—or perhaps more directly, as the consequence of the tacit assumption and application of the metaphor of theory—is the central condition for the possibility of any concept of metaphor. As such, in undertaking a philosophical study of language one will inevitably find that the very language of theory and its goal of conceptualization will inherently problematize any attempt to *fully articulate* its structure and its function.<sup>10</sup> The question of the nature of metaphor will always emerge in such an endeavor and will always present itself as a conspicuous and difficult case for such analyses. This is for the simple reason that the conditions of stability that have classically been pursued in the form of the univocal philosophical concept cannot be extended to cover the wandering equivocality of metaphor. Defining the nature of metaphor thus becomes an exercise in marking out and constraining the appropriate limits of the use of language. Left uncontrolled, this equivocality appears to cascade and scatter, disrupting any center or unifying integrity upon

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but only if it serves to put us on the track of a new concept...Metaphor is thus admissible in philosophy, but only to the extent that it promises a return, with augmented resources, to the literality of the concept.” p. 513.

<sup>9</sup>*MP* p. 254. The importance of articulating the meaning and consequences of this claim is, in many ways, the central concern of this project. We might distill the problem in the following way: If theory (or perhaps the theoretical attitude) is, itself, a product of metaphor, then the way we think about metaphor’s functioning will bear heavily on how we think theory functions. To the extent that the metaphor of theory is tacit, or unconsciously employed (or “dead”), the character of its function will remain occluded so long as one follows the strategies for defining metaphor that have broadly characterized 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of language and semantic theory. This tradition is marked by its emphasis on theories of meaning and metaphor in which consciousness and literality are central.

<sup>10</sup>This is a general feature of Derrida’s work as a whole. Bernard Harrison characterizes it as such: “Derrida’s insistence on difference and deferral as essential to the relationship between sign and significatum certainly yields as a consequence the denial of all versions of the philosophical thesis that the full semantic content of a concept can be given, and given exhaustively, to some special, nonlinguistic or extralinguistic, act of consciousness.” p. 519

which philosophy could presumably be based. So, in a manner of speaking, the goal of *conceptualizing* metaphor is both an effort to fully articulate the nature and structure of communication, and a struggle aimed at controlling its inevitable drift.

When one considers the persistence of the use, the consequences, and the presumed indeterminate meaning of metaphors, together with the centrality of their employ within philosophical discourse, it appears to be the case that philosophy is threatened with instability at its foundations. Any thinker who hopes to define the appropriate vocabulary, or the essential concepts, for characterizing meaning will therefore inevitably run into this problem; it is a concern that has consistently proven to be a limit. This limit is exemplified by a common tendency in philosophy: the persistent inability to cope with metaphor, the inability to produce coherent and/or consistent definitions of metaphor, and the inability—or explicit unwillingness—to accept the depth and range of its function within philosophy’s texts. In his readings, Derrida finds that philosophers who are seeking the appropriate kinds of language according to which one can best characterize meaning are inevitably confounded in their efforts to bring the essence of metaphor under philosophy’s jurisdiction.

But, of course, this is not for lack of effort. On Derrida’s reading and treatment, there is a near obsession in the history of the philosophical study of language with setting forth the appropriate conceptions and uses of metaphors. This obsession is coupled with a persistent resistance to the consequences of metaphorical meaning and its influences in philosophy, as its equivocal character is likely to misdirect, distract, or otherwise unnecessarily complicate the direct communication of ideas. With such concerns in mind (whether consciously or unconsciously), much ink has been spilled in service to carefully defining the roles and meanings

(or lack thereof) of metaphors. This endeavor appears to follow a well-worn script:<sup>11</sup> broadly speaking, one either makes the claim that metaphorical language is not actually part of the proper structure or function of language, or one must make a special, secondary, category for the nature of its distinctive character.

Either strategy becomes centrally disruptive once any such pursuit begins to reveal that even the concepts which compel the sense of stability that a philosophical analysis of language requires are themselves irrevocably metaphorical. In the first case such a revelation would imply that the very bases of philosophical discourse, philosophical concepts, cannot qualify as part of the proper structure and function of language. In the second case the discovery that philosophical concepts, themselves, belong in the special category has two very similar outcomes: it either elevates the secondary status of the metaphorical, thereby actually making metaphors and their potentially wandering equivocity foundational, or it devalues the philosophical concept as secondary, as merely metaphorical. In any of these cases, the philosophical goal of univocity, or even the more modest goal of defining the components and conditions of clear, direct, communication appears to be thwarted at its foundations. This inevitable disruption, in the many forms it might take, is a product of philosophy's unique thesis, the metaphor of theory. This thesis, this metaphor, has consistently proven to condition the analysis of language by establishing, and taking for granted, the intuitive sense that effective communication is the conveyance of a determinate cognitive or spiritual content.

Rather than accepting such unacceptable conclusions, there has been a marked tendency in philosophy to obscure, obliterate, and occlude the role that metaphor plays in serious and

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<sup>11</sup> Derrida writes that "There is a code or a program—a rhetoric, if you will—for *every* discourse on metaphor: following custom, in the *first place* the Aristotelian definition must be recalled, at least the one in the *Poetics* (1457b)." *MP* p. 231 first italics mine.

rigorous conceptual discourse. As a result, this project and its history is characterized by frequent and conspicuous exclusions of metaphors from philosophy as secondary, meaningless, aberrant, deviant, impertinent, or as a kind of exemplary case of falsity.

### A Review

“To what extent can philosophy—without terminally damaging itself—*accept* metaphor?<sup>12</sup>”  
—Giuseppe Stellardi

“The recourse to a metaphor in order to give the “idea” of metaphor: this is what prohibits a definition, but nevertheless metaphorically assigns a checkpoint, a limit, a fixed place: the metaphor/dwelling.<sup>13</sup>”  
—Jacques Derrida

As early as Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates gives an account of philosophy as an effort in pursuit of something “quite wonderful,” that is, of mastering the kind of art by which one could grasp the world of things according to its own, natural, order, to develop a language which could express and articulate reality along its own “natural joints.<sup>14</sup>” Such a language could collect various things under their appropriate categories and put one’s intellect in direct encounter with the order of the world as it is in itself. In this, Plato idealizes, exemplifies, and perhaps inaugurates, the essential goal of philosophy and, in connection with this, the role that language should play in service to attaining this goal. Characterizing the noble forms of speech-making and writing are thus matters of crucial importance: to the extent that proper forms of communication may help to put our intellect in connection with the natural order of things, they are no less than matters of life and death: they are the key to understanding the proper forms of

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<sup>12</sup>Giuseppe Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor*. New York: 2000. Humanity Books.  
p.46

<sup>13</sup> *MP* p. 253

<sup>14</sup>Plato, *Phaedrus*. trans. Alexander Nehemas & Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis, IN: 1995. Hackett Publishing Company. 265D-E, pp. 63-64

life, and they are the source of our access to, or development toward, understanding the true and the good, and are hence preparation for the afterlife and the eternal.

With such a worldview, it becomes clear that speech and writing are exceptionally powerful, and potentially dangerous, tools. The source of the power of linguistic expression is that it can be used toward various ends. As effective as its use might be in setting one's intellect in proper relation to the order of things, there is always the risk that it can be equally effective in misdirecting the mind toward fantasies, illusions, and falsehoods. With these considerations in mind, Socrates sets his project against the dangerous and shameful uses of language, those that serve to dissimulate and disorganize the natural categories. The task of the philosopher is to identify and preserve the order of language so as to preserve the tools which enable access to the rational order of things. The tools of the sophist—rhetoric, myth, and metaphor—are all seen as threats to the development of a truly philosophical discourse, and thereby as potential threats to establishing and maintaining access to the order of the eternal.<sup>15</sup>

Much of this concern has been regularly echoed, in various ways, throughout the history of philosophy. It has, in a certain sense, established a linear tradition in the history of the study of language. Time and again, we see a noteworthy repetition in connection with this concern: among the dangerous and misleading forms and uses of language, metaphor presents itself as a unique difficulty. Whereas myth and most forms of rhetoric can often be easily and readily identified, metaphor can work its power surreptitiously, passing itself off as informative while at the same time disorganizing the categories that make knowledge possible. The lesson of guarding against this risk has been well-heeded in the subsequent development of philosophical

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<sup>15</sup> Of this, Derrida writes: "This is an undoubtedly philosophic, and certainly Platonic, ideal, an ideal that is produced in the separation (and order) between philosophy or dialectics on the one hand and (sophistic) rhetoric on the other, the separation demanded by Plato himself. Directly or not, it is this separation and this hierarchy that we must question here." *MP* p. 224

thought, and it is often revisited with quite elaborate and explicit pronouncements which are meant to proscribe metaphor from philosophical language. For this reason, coping with metaphor—in order to define, theorize, and often to excise—has been a recurring theme in philosophy. The danger, however, in spite of the philosopher’s vigilance, has proven to be exceptionally persistent.

If we take Socrates’ statement of this goal as exemplary, we might say that the philosopher seeks a language that presents a reality beyond mere appearance, a language that eliminates falsity and preserves only the truth. Such a language would grant the philosopher the deepest of vision, revealing the most sublime of mysteries, and making the universe fully accessible in its totality. The value of such a language would be in its boundless applicability. Properly equipped, the philosopher can see into every sphere and every possibility is open to her gaze. This goal, according to Derrida, is inextricably linked to philosophy and its historical development. He writes that “Univocity is the essence, or better, the *telos* of language. No philosophy, as such, has ever renounced this Aristotelian ideal. *This ideal is philosophy.*<sup>16</sup>” This goal, according to Derrida, is the impossible task of philosophy. It is, as the corpus of his work seeks to demonstrate, impossible to attain; it has, as his reading of the corpus of the Western philosophical tradition demonstrates, proven to be impossible to renounce.

In any event, whether genuinely impossible or otherwise, it seems that no such language—purely conceptual and fully autonomous from the power and dangers of metaphor—has been yet been discovered or devised. The subtle and secretive force of metaphor has proven

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<sup>16</sup> *MP* p. 247 Derrida’s position is that univocity is the goal of all philosophy. While I find this position compelling, I am satisfied with a far less ambitious stance. I will therefore be limiting my allegiance to this claim. On the other hand, I will be using it as part of a hypothesis which I will apply exclusively to the scope of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers of language whose positions can be shown to seek to establish the primacy of literal language over and against metaphorical language.



resistant to this philosophical goal of a purely rational and properly conceptual discourse. A careful review of many common philosophical terms, concepts, and patterns of reasoning, suggests that philosophy is foundationally, and perhaps inherently, metaphorical. If so, the goal of attempting to purify philosophy of figurative language may very well be a lost and misguided cause. Furthermore, there is some reason to believe that philosophy is so deeply metaphorical that actually achieving the excision of metaphor from philosophical thought would be tantamount to the destruction of philosophy itself.

An overview of the history of this project suggests that the stakes and conditions from which this problem stems have not significantly changed although the theoretical resources have.<sup>17</sup> While so much appears to have changed, and the conceptual vocabularies in which this

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<sup>17</sup>The stakes and conditions I'm describing here are based on a few persistent assumptions: that 1) there are forms of communication that uniquely function as the basis of all meaning. These forms are taken to be the most *natural*, and *foundational* forms of communication. They are often characterized in terms of their primacy, sometimes in terms of appropriate use, sometimes in terms of efficiency, as the most *direct* and/or truth *bearing* forms of communication. 2) These forms of language use are marked by *specific properties* (although such properties are not always readily identified) and are exemplified in "literal" forms of communication. 3) Any attempt to *define* metaphor will depend first on the established basis of meaning in the literal, and furthermore 4) the fact that metaphors are intelligible at all—that they are not nonsense—is a consequence of the properties they have by virtue of their dependence on the literal. 5) Despite this dependence, the metaphorical is qualitatively distinct from the literal; its mark of distinction in this regard is a peculiar form of *misuse or misapplication* of the literal and that is often characterized in terms of deviance, impertinence, or disruption. 6) That because of its indirect and deviant nature, metaphorical language is dangerous, unsuitable, or otherwise problematic for the work of philosophy. Its basic function depends on disrupting the structure of literal language, which has *its source* in knowledge and which is only properly characterized in philosophical concepts, the generation or discovery of which is the philosophical goal to be attained (or toward which one must return).

For some examples we might look to as wide an array of thinkers as the following: In Cicero's *De Oratore*, metaphor is described in terms of putting a word in a foreign or strange place, implying an appropriate space of natality or origin (Latin: *alienus*) (§161). Similarly, in Plato's *Cratylus* metaphor and literal language are taken to be radically distinct, the literal demonstrating the proper relationship that language should have to the world, the metaphorical being a dangerous deviation from the truth of literality. Likewise, in the *Statesman*, poetry is described as the kind of rhetoric which "persuades the multitudes but does not teach." (304 A-D) With a similar general framing, but a different set of emphases, Aristotle attributes a kind of imperfection to the functioning of metaphor, suggesting that if this imperfection is not fully recognized, that its duplicitous nature is a significant danger to rational thought. So central is this concern that it is the basis of his dismissal of Plato's theory of forms: "And to say that [the forms] are patterns and the other things share in them is to use empty words and poetical metaphors" (*Metaphysics* A 9, 991 a 19-22). Although he does suggest that metaphor may have some value, it is merely as a place-holder, to aid in understanding until a more adequate literal description can be devised. At the end of Chapter 5 of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, he writes: "To conclude, the light of human minds is perspicuous words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity; *reason* is the *pace*; increase of *science* the way; and benefit of mankind the *end*. And on the contrary, metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui*; and reasoning upon them a wandering innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention and sedition, or

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contempt.” Locke singles out metaphor as unfit for philosophical argument, as it obscures any semblance of the order of things in themselves. For Locke, metaphors disrupt our otherwise direct (if limited) access to reality by needlessly rearranging the natural pathways of our access to knowledge—our senses: “Since wit and fancy finds easier entertainment in the world than dry truth and real knowledge, figurative speeches and allusions in language will hardly be admitted as an imperfection or abuse of it. I confess, in discourses where we seek rather pleasure and delight than information and improvement, such ornaments are borrowed from them can scarce pass for faults. But yet, if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so indeed are perfect cheat; and therefore however laudable or allowable oratory may render them in harangues and popular addresses, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided and, where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them...it is evident how much men love to deceive and be deceived, since rhetoric, that powerful instrument of error and deceit, has its established professors, is publicly taught, and has always been had in great reputation...” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton. (London and New York, 1961). pp.105-6

In his assessment of cognitive development, Piaget tells us that figurative thought is “a lower form of mental activity which plays no active role in mental development after early childhood, and which, because of its personal, individualistic nature, lacks any cultural significance.” (see *Genetic Epistemology*. Columbia University Press, New York: 1970 p. 14) Hans Blumenberg, in *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, writes “The traditional classification of metaphor among the ornaments of public speech is hardly fortuitous: For antiquity, the logos was fundamentally adequate to the totality of what exists. Cosmos and logos were correlates. Metaphor is here deemed incapable of enriching the capacity of expressive means...The perfect congruence of cosmos and logos rules out the possibility that figurative language could achieve anything for which common speech could not furnish and equivalent. In principle, the orator and poet can say nothing that could not just as well be presented in a theoretical, conceptual way...” (p. 2)

In the opening paragraph of his essay “Metaphor and Epistemology,” Paul de Man writes that philosophy would be better off if it “could at least learn to control figuration by keeping it, so to speak, in its place, by delimiting the boundaries of its influence and thus restricting the *epistemological damage* that it may cause.” (emphasis mine, from *On Metaphor* ed. Sheldon Sacks, p. 11. It should be noted, however, that de Man appears to be caricaturing standard philosophical assessments of metaphor.) In his book *Philosophy at the Limit*, David Wood refers to this position as “the purity thesis,” which he defines in the following way: “The purity thesis is the thesis that philosophy can and must dispense with metaphor to realize its goal of rational clarity” (p.28). Later he claims that “The purity thesis typically combines two claims: the *desirability* for philosophy of having clean tools, a language that reflects reality and clearly defined concepts; and the *possibility* of eliminating the figurative from rational discourse.” In his book *Contexts of Metaphor*, linguist Michiel Leezenberg suggests that the tendency to make the sharp distinction between the literal and metaphorical can be attributed to an unarticulated folk theory of language. He refers to this unarticulated theory as a “language ideology” (See *Contexts of Metaphor*. Elsevier Science Ltd. New York: 2001 p. 1) which, though he appears to be unaware of (or unconcerned with) this, bears the basic marks of logocentrism, the tacit assumption that each word could or should have a unique, literal, and proper meaning of its own.

My basic claim is that while new ways of describing this distinction between the literal and figurative have emerged (along with the many other considerations that characterize the explosion of interest in language in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy), the basic “ideology” is still maintained. As the specifics of the implementation of this “ideology” is as varied as the range of thinkers who adhere to it, I will try to focus on the most salient conceptual distinctions that bear its marks. Derrida’s isolation of the metaphor of theory is an exceptionally insightful and valuable starting point for thinking about this problem. In addition to this, it importantly resonates with some of the most influential 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers who have tried—and failed—to give theoretical treatments of metaphor’s function and meaning. For an even more direct connection to Leezenberg and the language of “ideology”, see *MP* p. 314; *LI* p.6 where Derrida is presenting the classical model of writing: “If we now say that this analysis is ‘ideological,’ it is not primarily in order to contrast its notions to ‘scientific’ concepts, or in order to refer to the often dogmatic—one could also say ‘ideological’—use made of the word ideology, which today is so rarely examined for its possibility and history. If I define notions of Condillac’s kind as ideological, it is against the background of a vast, powerful, and systematic philosophical tradition dominated by the self-evidence of the idea (*eidōs*, *idea*), they delineate the field of reflection of the French ‘ideologues’ who, in Condillac’s wake, elaborated a theory of the sign as a representation of the idea which its, which itself represents the perceived thing. Communication, hence,

project takes place is far more nuanced today, especially given the central role that inquiry into language has played in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, the problem of how one goes about characterizing metaphor persists. Further, the effort of defining the function of meaningful language still appears to hinge on the metaphor of theory, its isolation of the concept, and its associated exclusion of metaphorical meaning much in the same ways that Derrida's reading of this history indicates.

On his reading, the metaphorical drift of philosophy's discourse can never be finally arrested, although philosophy's goal—as he states it—demands the possibility of the stability and order of the conceptual. And thus it stands: the ends of philosophy are marked by its central means which signal the conditions of its own inevitable failure. Furthermore, the effort of pursuing this goal leaves evidence not only of its failing, but of the implicit and sometimes explicit repressive strategies that inevitably mark the statements of the *assumptions of philosophical success*. This evidence, on his view, can be found *in the very text* of philosophy, in the very language which is employed to describe and define, in this case, the nature of language. As noted above, what one finds at the center of such texts, whose expressed goal is to define and delimit the appropriate forms of language and their appropriate uses, are the very figurative forms and uses whose presence in the text of philosophy occasioned the ordering and disciplinary strategies of the philosophical study of language in the first place. In other words, one finds that the most centrally definitive concepts which are taken to characterize the primacy of literal and conceptual language are themselves metaphorical. In some interpretations, this amounts to the damning claim that the language by which one can justify the bases of defining truth and falsity is not even the right kind of language. This leads to the powerful revelation that

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*vehiculates* a representation as an ideal *content* (which will be called meaning); and writing is a species of this general communication.” Final italics mine.

according to the various definitions forwarded in service to identifying the proper forms of communication, the most basic components of said definitions cannot even properly qualify. Thus, we are left with the unsettling realization that the very concept of truth has its foundations in misdirection, errors, and even falsity; this is an origin that any philosopher seeking finality and univocity must either overcome or hide if she is ever to be taken seriously. Such are the origins of metaphysics.

The broad goal of Derrida's work is to confront the field and discipline of philosophy on these terms. It might be fair to say that his project is meant to reveal what philosophy is hiding or to reveal what philosophy has held in store. Likewise we might say that his project is meant to performatively intensify the philosophical desire to regulate and master meaning, generalizing this desire to the point at which the desire itself is made conspicuous. In its perspicuity, the desire for mastery reveals its source: the evident *lack* of mastery which initially occasions this desire. In any event, Derrida's is an effort in becoming alert to the labor that has gone into, and continues to support, the maintenance of philosophy's unique thesis. It is an effort in working through the consequences of the oppositions which have emerged in service to this maintenance; it is an effort in learning to reread and disrupt our traditional concepts in service to opening up new perspectives, to creating space for new kinds of thinkers and new kinds of thought.

On the face of it, this kind of project does not seek to yield a theory of its own. It does not pursue a set of true axioms or propositions, nor does it provide solutions to traditional philosophical problems. While some may view this as a short-coming in his work, this is not, from his perspective, a problem at all. In fact, it demonstrates the general and deliberate tenor of his strategy. Derrida rejects what he takes to be the illusion of finality in the project of thinking. If we want to call his position problematic or incomplete, such a criticism simply exemplifies the

motivation of metaphysics, the unyielding philosophical desire for clarity, mastery, finality, and access to the essential truths which linger beneath the surface of our perceptions. Such a defense, of course, does not imply that his position is immune to criticism. In fact, it seems to me that this defense simply strengthens that which fuels the common philosophical practice of criticism: that as long as there are people, there will always be another unexpected twist, another unexpected turn in the development of discourse. The field will never be saturated.

### A Preview

“If we have learned anything since the explosion of interest in metaphor that began about twenty-five years ago, it is that the classical and standard definitions of “metaphor” are unreliable, and so every sensible person, I think, must suppose that we are dealing with formally undefined phenomena.<sup>18</sup>”

—Ted Cohen

“But to ask *about what* a metaphorical statement is, is something other and something more than to ask *what* it says.<sup>19</sup>”

—Paul Ricoeur

Provoking alternative positions and opening new space for continually rereading and rethinking settled concepts guides all of Derrida’s work. He poses the potential danger of discourse in philosophy from the opposite direction, suggesting that the pursuit of, belief in, and the acquisition of, final concepts is a threat to the possibility of thinking. I read his view to define metaphysics as the unyielding pursuit of such concepts. Whether such concepts are actually secured is up for debate, but the centrally defining method of metaphysics is clear. Its method is the *active maintenance* of, and surveillance over, a restricted economy of signification; it is a *practice* which is characterized by various *acts of restriction and regulation*, marking out the

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<sup>18</sup>Ted Cohen, “Identifying with Metaphor: Metaphors of Personal Identification” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Autumn, 1999) p. 399

<sup>19</sup>Paul Ricoeur, “The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” in *On Metaphor*, p. 150

appropriate range and order of discourse.<sup>20</sup> On his view, despite the many and varied efforts directed at this project, it always leaves evidence of its failure; it always leaves a surplus within the text of philosophy. This inevitable surplus in the economy of signification and communication is the persistent motivating force, if not topic, of his writing. On his view, the work of metaphysics is the attempted erasure of this surplus, and with it, the openings which mark out the possibilities for the future of thinking. As such, his projects are presented as interventions, as *acts* or *countermeasures*, designed to transgress the boundaries set forth by the *process* and *labor* of metaphysics. He writes:

There is no metaphysical concept in and of itself. There is a work—metaphysical or not—on conceptual systems.<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere he writes:

There is no such thing as a “metaphysical-name.” The “metaphysical” is a certain determination or direction taken by a sequence or “chain.” It cannot as such be opposed by a *concept* but rather *by a process of textual labor* and a different sort of articulation.<sup>22</sup>

In this essay I will be attempting to think through an oppositional strategy that responds to the determination set forth by the metaphysics of meaning that, I think, fits these criteria. In the broad scope of this project I will also forward a position that seeks to characterize, and respond to, the guiding acts of restriction which prove to be the inevitable conditions of a metaphysics of

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<sup>20</sup> See *Limited Inc* p. 93 where Derrida gives a fairly thorough account of what he means by metaphysics. He articulates two central features that are ubiquitous: “1. The hierarchical axiology, the ethical-ontological distinction which do not merely set up value-oppositions clustered around an ideal and unfindable limit, but moreover *subordinate* these values to each other (normal/abnormal, standard/parasite, fulfilled/void serious/non-serious, literal/nonliteral, briefly: positive/negative and ideal/non-ideal)...2. The enterprise of returning “strategically,” ideally, to an origin or to a “priority” held to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order *then* to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc. All metaphysicians from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded this way, conceiving good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation. And this is not just *one* metaphysical gesture among others, it is *the* metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound and most potent.”

<sup>21</sup> *MP* p. 329

<sup>22</sup> *Dissemination* p. 6

the literal, and I will seek to organize my response along the lines of a different sort of articulation.

In a somewhat-Derridean spirit, I will be offering this work as an intervention of sorts. Specifically, I will be looking to undo some of the persistent restrictions and attempts to regulate the appropriate roles that metaphor should play in philosophy. Because of the range of the thinkers who are implicated in this problem, and the various reasons for which they hold stake in a well-regulated range of the acceptable use and function of metaphors, I will focus my attention primarily on what has persisted among these thinkers: a shared set of assumptions that seems to mark out an implicit, almost unconscious, tradition. Above all else, some distinction which bears the long historical marks of the Platonic dichotomy between the subjects of rhetoric and philosophy, and its concomitant distinctions between the sensible and intelligible, and the figurative and conceptual, will remain central. However the distinction is elaborated, it has the central ostensible concern of distinguishing the literal, rational, conceptual and philosophical, from the rhetorical, figurative, mythical, non-rational, and metaphorical.

That the spirit of this distinction has persisted for so long and has remained so prevalent, irrespective of the various changes that have taken place in the study of language over the past two thousand years, is enough to raise the suspicion that whatever has contributed to the maintenance of this opposition is not strictly theoretical. I will therefore look to reorganize a path of inquiry concerning the conditions of this distinction. I will follow the intuition that if the dichotomy between the literal and the metaphorical has persisted for so long—irrespective of the many changes that have arisen in the basic conceptual and descriptive tools one uses to characterize the topic of study—then there is likely to be a different, and perhaps even more basic, level at which this distinction is maintained. With this in mind, I will argue from the

perspective that what preserves this dichotomy is a certain *will to regulate* discourse and its proper function, which is exemplified by, and built into, the visage of the philosopher and her mastery over the concept. With this in mind I will be evaluating philosophy as a very particular form of linguistic behavior, organized by particular attitudes, habits, tropes, rituals, and practices. The central advantage that this strategy affords is in dispensing with the need to presuppose the integrity of the opposition between the literal and the metaphorical. On the contrary, I will argue that the distinction is an enactment and realization of this regulatory attitude. In this, many of the common pitfalls associated with this problematic can be avoided, and a new way of reading metaphor can be pursued.

This move will open the door to developing a non-semantic approach to this problem. As such, I will call upon the vocabulary of speech-act theory in order to respond to the arrayed concerns which are associated with the problems of metaphor in philosophy. On my view, the persistent dependence and pursuit of linguistic integrity on the basis of literal meaning inevitably marks out too narrow a focus. This is for the very general reason that metaphor and other figurative uses of language are, in fact, the norm in acts of communication. Literal meaning—if it is *ever* achieved<sup>23</sup>—is rare, and the sources of the secured status of what might be taken to be literal, are not *semantic* at all, but are better articulated through a pragmatic approach to language, specifically one that characterizes meaning according to varying degrees and intensifications of locutionary force. In this, much of my work will be an effort to refocus and reorganize the centrally relevant factors that will best guide our understanding of the use of language and its structure, with the explicit interest of countenancing the persistent effects of metaphor(s) in language use in general, and in philosophy (of language) more particularly.

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<sup>23</sup> An inevitably open question, although the possibility of answering it, for reasons to be developed in this paper, could never begin and end in a semantic theory.



In what follows I will be attempting to present a theory of language that depends on an assessment and description of locutionary force as temporally and theoretically prior to meaning, irrespective of whether one *subsequently* seeks to characterize meaning as either literal or metaphorical. I will argue that beginning with locutionary force offers a wider explanatory range than what is made available in theories that begin with the literal meaning as a basis. Not only is it the case that locutionary force serves as a more productive starting point for thinking about the many and various uses and functions of language, but it also provides resources for thinking about metaphor that do not succumb to the problems associated with the strategies which define metaphor in opposition to the literal. In addition to this, the position I will forward can address many questions that semantic theories of metaphor cannot. In this, I will seek to explain the pervasiveness of metaphor, the conditions of its necessity, and the general and exceptional oddity—and perhaps impossibility (improbability?)—of the literal.

On my view, it is habit, familiarity, and a kind of persistent effort at discursive regulation that are the sources of the maintenance of this dichotomy. I will refer to this repressive, metaphysical, attitude as “seriousness,” and will attempt to point out the regulatory strategies by which it functions. I will rely heavily on Derrida’s assessment of the role metaphor and the pursuit of the proper forms of discourse has played in the history of philosophy for the articulation of this attitude. Ultimately what is repressed in the metaphysical attitude is the inevitable polyvalence and equivocality of all communicative acts. It is as if this attitude is committed to ensuring the stability and essentiality of meaning in the development of concepts irrespective of the evident fluidity and dynamism of human thought and language. Metaphor, being among the most obvious loci of this dynamism must be brought under philosophy’s ambit if the goals of stability, order, and univocity are to be achieved.

I will focus on the link between metaphysics and seriousness in part for strategic reasons, as it is the topic of seriousness that appears to occasion Derrida's response to J.L. Austin's formulation of speech-act theory in his essay "Signature, Event, Context." It is, likewise, an assessment of seriousness that has dominated the subsequent development of the debates surrounding his response. Although fortuitous, the link here is also substantive. Importantly, it is concern with the very same set of implicit factors that mark treatments of metaphor in philosophy—mastery and control, the centrality of the conscious observing subject, and its potential vigilance over meaningful discourse, in this case, as a "total speech situation"—that form the basis of Derrida's treatment of Austin. It is the connection between these interrelated factors and the problems associated with them that will guide my reading of the theories of metaphor that I will be reviewing as well as the prospect of developing a theory of metaphor whose basis I will establish in the function of perlocution.

Along with its prized product, the concept of the *concept*, metaphysics is about mastery and control. As it is with the concept of *theory*, it connotes the sense of being in position to observe reality in its full, nude, objectivity. Taken together, we have an attitude that seeks to see the truth clearly, and in its totality, and finally to grasp, possess, and contain it. This attitude is about conscious recognition, comprehension, and control over thoughts, ideas, and the reality in which such ideas consist. On my view, this is why in the philosophical study of metaphor, we find three persistent and interrelated tendencies: 1) that the predominant focus in virtually every theory of metaphor concerns how one receives, intuitively, interprets, or comprehends metaphors as a listener or as a reader. Little attention is paid to the conditions of the *production* of metaphor. As we will see, even those thinkers for whom speaker meaning is central neglect to consider *why* a speaker speaks in metaphor to begin with. 2) That the metaphors which are considered relevant

are only those of which we are explicitly conscious—this, with the interesting and important consequence that those of which we are not conscious are treated as if they were irrelevant to the study of metaphor *because they are literal*—as explicitly non-metaphorical—as “dead” metaphors. And 3) that the speakers/writers and hearers/readers for whom such metaphors are intelligible are persistently characterized in so general a way as to divest them of what I take to be the most important aspect of the contexts of communicative circumstances: that they are hearing, reading, writing, reacting and responding *embodied interlocutors*, whose use and interpretation of metaphors depend on sensibilities whose basic resources come from practical—and importantly *sensory*<sup>24</sup>—experiences.

Thus, while my stance takes its initial inspiration from Derrida’s work, the sort of articulation and textual labor I offer here seeks to give an expanded meaning to the concept of the text, and thereby to the meaning of textual labor, seeking the foundations of meaning and text in the speaking, listening, discovering, acting, reacting, and often confused, human body. I will argue that many of the most important questions concerning metaphor in philosophy, and in human thought more generally, can only be asked and answered in conjunction with an assessment of meaning that includes an assessment of the practical, social, and embodied conditions of human interaction. The main questions that I will be hoping to answer are the following: why so much metaphor? Why do we understand it, why do we use it so frequently,

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<sup>24</sup>In this I will be playing on the common and persistent opposition that has captured Derrida’s attention with respect to his treatment of the metaphysics of presence, that between the sensible and the intelligible. As we will see, on my view, “the intelligible” is best characterized as a consequence of taking a range of metaphors “seriously.” This will have to be further explained later, but for now it might be enough for me to claim that “the intelligible” is—at best—discursive. On my view, the metaphors which constitute the intelligible and its related figures are not at all opposed to the sensible, and can be clearly demonstrated to be derivative of our sensory experiences. This means that “the intelligible” is also—at best—sensible. This is because the transposition of metaphoricity and conceptuality is a transposition *from* the sensible *to* the sensible. I think of this relationship as one of tangential redundancy. Furthermore, it will become clear that identifying practical and sensory experiences as the basis for our metaphorical resources is an inevitable consequence of attempting to address the conspicuous absence of the speaking body’s role in many attempts to characterize language production.

and what does this pervasive, and mostly *unconscious*, use tell us about what we are doing as language users? More interestingly, why is it so pervasive in a history of thought that so frequently looks to deny its presence, value, and import? Answering these questions, particularly the question of how and why metaphor persists, entails radical reorientation in theoretical perspective. For this reorientation, I will draw on a reading of speech-act theory that takes its departure from Derrida's overall project and responds to what I take to be a near-miss in what could have been (but was not) a productive "debate" between Derrida and John Searle over their different ways of reading and using Austin's work.

Before undertaking this task, which will ultimately constitute a departure from Derrida's positions, I will first put his insight and strategy to work in connection with a number of his contemporaries whose theories of meaning and language use, and whose treatment of metaphor explicitly depend on explanations that have literality at their foundations. In this, I will seek to demonstrate that these theorists largely depend on the very metaphors that Derrida identifies in "White Mythology" as the central components of the metaphor of theory. Beyond this, I will flesh out the almost universal strategy for disavowing the import of metaphor in philosophy: the dependence on the notably metaphorical, but nevertheless neutralizing, concept of *dead* and dying metaphors. On the basis of Derrida's insights and the arguments he forwards in his early works, I will argue that several prevalent theories of metaphor in mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglo/American philosophy are untenable and ultimately self-destructive. Beyond this, such theories anchor and stabilize general theories of meaning that would be impossible to articulate without the very metaphors that, in order to maintain their integrity, they *must* seek to disavow.

What can be said at the outset is that, by Derrida's estimation, the metaphor of theory has played a centrally relevant role in the development of Western philosophy. Part of what I hope to

show is how this assessment can be applied to debates on the nature of metaphor that were underway while he was writing but that did not engage his project directly. In connection with this, I will be developing several themes that run through his work that I think will help to identify how one might begin to locate his position within these debates. His positions, especially his early writing, provoke the recognition that meaning has never been *primarily* literal. Furthermore, concerning various contemporary attempts at defining the literal, any such literality cannot be the product of “meaning” in the sense of some univocal, essential, *something*, which somehow *inheres in*, or can be *definitively assigned to*, particular words, phrases, or sentences or states of mind.

With such concerns in mind, and with the very value of philosophy at stake, coming to some conclusion about the meaning and function of metaphor has been a long, disjointed, and yet ongoing project in the philosophical study of language. That the status of this *most common form of communication* is still so uncertain, and that its status is so obviously—and as I argue, *oddly*—relegated to a kind of secondary semantic status is, to me, reason enough to find its study to be powerfully compelling. Derrida's treatment of this phenomenon alerts us to the added insight that it is the very nature of the philosophical concept of metaphor, and the centrality of its derivation from the proper and the literal, which has kept the very meaning of metaphor unintelligible, or as he might say, *indomitable*, for philosophical discourse. Derrida's position is a bold one, and one that puts much of the philosophical tradition in question. The breadth and generality of his claims is advantageous to the extent that they stand as an open challenge. In “White Mythology,” he puts his position in conversation with Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Saussure, among others, but his claims are meant to characterize the inevitable problems of philosophy of language in general. These are powerful, broad, claims, the substance of which I

hope to show can be demonstrated in the ongoing text of philosophy. Thus, the first stage of this project will be to put his position on metaphor in philosophy to the test.

What follows is an exposition of various attempts to come to grips with metaphor, its meaning, and its role in philosophy. The thinkers I highlight represent the best of a set of competing visions of meaning and the form and function of communication as it stood in 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglo/American philosophy. Each of their perspectives on the nature and function of language has been highly influential in 20<sup>th</sup> century thought, and their work on metaphor has formed the conditions of much of the contemporary debate on its status in philosophy and beyond. While there are obvious differences in each of these thinkers' perspectives, there are also crucial similarities that may not be obvious at first glance. We will now turn our attention to the work of Donald Davidson, Max Black, and John Searle to see what connections can be drawn from their work. As we will see, their positions bear crucial marks of the metaphor of theory, and are interestingly symptomatic of the very conceptual difficulties that Derrida predicts of any philosophical attempt to define metaphor. But before letting ourselves get carried away, we should take a closer look at their positions to assure that we can be clear about what they mean.

# Chapter I

## Field Conditions: The Status of Metaphor in the Philosophy of Language

### Seeing *What they Mean*

“I take for granted...that nothing should be allowed to obliterate or even *blur* the distinction between a speaker’s meaning and literal meaning...In particular, we must *pry apart* what is literal in language from what is conventional or established.<sup>25</sup>”

—Donald Davidson

“The field is never saturated.<sup>26</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

Metaphor has been an enigmatic and interesting phenomenon in the history of the philosophical study of language largely because its function, even at the most basic level, appears to confound the concept of truth. Metaphors often explicitly state that some object or phenomenon *is* some other phenomenon or object, but imply that this is not *really* so. Such expressions thus appear to be potentially both true and false at the same time, a fact that should be perfectly unintelligible—particularly if the concept of truth is taken to be and represent something which is univocal and objective. Further, their use presupposes knowledge of what things *really are*, while at the same time demonstrating that there is some form of comprehension of objects, phenomena, etc. that can occur by virtue of otherwise seemingly unrelated objects, things, phenomena, etc.—things that they *really are not*. The basis of such connections, often characterized as similitude, appears to lack any of the features or determinants which make similitude intelligible in what are presumably non-metaphorical contexts. There are thus ontological and epistemological questions that naturally follow on the inquiry into any use of

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<sup>25</sup> Donald Davidson, *Truth, Language, and History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005 p. 91 italics mine. hereafter  
*TLH*

<sup>26</sup> *MP* p. 219

metaphor. Further still, to the extent that thought may be shaped and subtended by language, the intelligibility of metaphors—as the stating and comprehension of blatant falsities which are, nevertheless, understood as true—stands in need of explanation.

Can metaphors really be true? Can they really be meaningful? If so, what kinds of truth and meaning can metaphors bear? Is there some other special kind of phenomenon which is expressible in metaphor that exceeds meaning or truth? Is there space for a special semantic category of *metaphorical* meaning? *Metaphorical* truth? However they are characterized, how do these presumably metaphorical properties stand in relation to the wider, more readily defined, conceptions of meaning and truth? Are these categories even appropriate to begin with, or are metaphors to be assessed according to some other kind of property that has yet to be identified? If understanding metaphor exceeds these categories, how does that reflect on the efficacy of the theories which depend on them? If semantic theories, for example, cannot make sense of this very common—and I will argue, indispensable—linguistic phenomenon, then how valuable a set of theoretical tools does its field really offer?<sup>27</sup> Finally—whether they can be true, false, or

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<sup>27</sup> As an analogy, we might ask similar questions of other disciplines. How much mastery would we presume a chemist had over her field if she told us something their like that their discipline dealt exclusively with “atomic bonds” and that therefore the purview of chemistry concerns only covalent bonds? Perhaps they would continue that ions, strictly speaking, are unstable particles, and aren’t in the truest sense, even atoms. Ionic bonds are therefore marked by their deviance which is, in part, indicated by the relative weakness of their interactions, for that very reason, do not really qualify as bonds. Therefore ionic “bonds” should be studied in some other way, but not by chemistry proper. It seems fairly obvious to me that any such claims must call into question the integrity and stability of the discipline. It indicates the limits of its purview, and hence marks out a range of problems that it must solve if it can be taken seriously as an adequate treatment of the phenomenon it seeks to study. It would mean one of two things: 1) that the conceptual resources available were in need of significant extension in such a way that the currently unthought could be brought under the mastery of a more robust conceptual frame that includes the terms over which the discipline already had mastery. Or 2) that an entirely new approach to the phenomena under consideration must be established, thus abandoning the apparatus that calls for closure and exclusion in the first place as too limited in scope to be definitive. This problem is a general one and we will revisit it in many different forms throughout this project. I will give it careful and explicit attention in Chapter 3, in the sub section “Boundary Testing.” In chapters 4 and 5 some of the extant consequences of the persistence of its theme will be explored in connection with Derrida’s encounter with speech act theory. Concerning the Searle’s approach to the idealization of illocution, Derrida has this to say: “a theory of nonmarginal cases is only possible, interesting, and consistent if it can account, in the structure of those cases said to be nonmarginal, for the essential possibility of cases interpreted as marginal, deviant, parasitical, etc. How are the latter possible? What must the structure called ‘normal’ or



meaningful—how and, perhaps more interestingly, *why*, do we think we know what metaphors mean when we read, hear, write, or even speak them? It seems obvious that something different is happening between the use and assessment of metaphors and that of literal language, but interestingly, giving an account of this difference has proven to be a vast and, as of yet, inconclusive undertaking.

Provided that we know what the word “meaning” means, it seems to be a perfectly reasonable starting point in the assessment of metaphor to establish how the meaning of a metaphor differs from that of a literal expression. To use a common example, when Romeo claims that “Juliet is the Sun,” the typical line of reasoning is that so long as we know what those words mean, we also know that if what Romeo says is even intelligible, then this utterance cannot be literal. In other words, we know that the meaning of this statement cannot be equivalent to a statement such as “the exceptionally bright object that traverses and lights the daytime sky is the Sun.” Whatever is meant by the claim that “Juliet is the Sun” it is not a straightforward identity claim, and it does not mean that Juliet is the exceptionally bright object that traverses and lights the daytime sky. The difficulty of assessing this claim is exaggerated and made a bit more interesting if we commit ourselves to the claim that Romeo is correct in his assessment, or that his claim is, *in some manner*, true—even if just for him. Even without recourse to the possibility of a truth claim, there is still the fact that the claim is, in some way, intelligible. Though it may very well be false, it isn’t nonsense; and most of us would hardly opine that the claim was meaningless.

The fact that this statement doesn’t immediately come across as nonsensical is enough to

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‘normative’ be, what must the structure of the field where it inscribes itself be for the deviant or the parasitical to be possible?’ (LI p. 126)

demonstrate some level of intelligibility.<sup>28</sup> The difficulty is in figuring out how to characterize such a statement's intelligibility given the received views on the nature of meaning and communication more generally. The problem seems to begin in the fact that in spite of its apparent intelligibility, and the fact that we may know what each word in the sentence means, it still is not obvious that we know what the sentence means; neither is it obvious that we know what Romeo means when he utters it, nor what Shakespeare meant when he wrote it. There is also the matter of what Shakespeare meant for Romeo to mean when he utters it; and further still, what (if anything) Shakespeare meant for his audience(s) to understand when encountering the passage. And while this may seem to be pushing it, we might also consider what an actor on stage means when she, playing Romeo, utters it.

Even if we simply stick with the first level of analysis—with what Romeo meant—there are many reasonable interpretations. We might suggest that Romeo meant that his encounters with Juliet helped him to see all that is beautiful in the world, or that her physical presence provides his body with a kind of life sustaining warmth. He may very well have meant to indicate that her presence marked the beginning of a new day full of new possibilities. Alternatively, he may have meant something like that she was so attractive that she could capture anything below a certain mass/velocity threshold within her orbit. He may have thought that Juliet's sheer radiance was the catalyst for the photosynthetic process which is the basis upon which all life on Earth rests, or perhaps he simply meant to indicate that Juliet was a brilliant, large, and gaseous body. While some of these interpretations seem more likely than others, it is certainly possible that he could very well have meant any or all of these at once *or none of them*

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<sup>28</sup>Note the difference between what kind of falsity that we might attribute to "Juliet is the Sun," and the utter confusion that (for the uninitiated) comes along with Chomsky's famous line that "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously."

*at all*. It could also be the case that any of the interlocutors—Shakespeare as the writer, Romeo as the character, some random actor portraying Romeo as the speaker, the audience as the readers/listeners—are simply mistaken about the meaning of the sentence “Juliet is the sun” or of some combination of the words and/or rules of its formulation.

No matter how we interpret the sentence, if we trust the model of discourse as communication, our interpretive strategy will either assert or implicitly assume the locus of the utterance’s meaning. The interpretation or misinterpretation will be either of the meaning of the sentence itself and/or its component parts, or it will be of the speaker’s meaning or intention. According to most definitions and/or theories, the broadest defining characteristic of metaphor lies in a particular kind of divergence: the words/sentences are used in an importantly deviant fashion in which they acquire a new kind of meaning, or that there is a definitive split in a speaker’s intended meaning and the literal meaning of the words/sentences themselves. In either case, whether as a matter of deviant usage or of some kind of split or dual content, the nature of the literal, or at least the fact of its primacy, is assumed. This tendency to characterize metaphor as divergent in some sense lends itself to the belief that metaphor is unique precisely because of the nature of its two forms of meaning or of the two forms of meaning which can be revealed in its use. And while this is a common view, it is not without its detractors.

Among the most influential essays on metaphor in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is “What Metaphors Mean.” This essay details Donald Davidson’s presentation of the interesting, but counterintuitive claim that “metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more.<sup>29</sup>” This thesis is, on his view, an attempt to counter this longstanding tradition in philosophies of language which define metaphor on the basis of two distinct meanings: 1) the

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<sup>29</sup>Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984. p. 245 hereafter this will be cited as “WMM”

word's (or expression's) clear, literal, meaning, and 2) its more enigmatic and mysterious metaphorical meaning. Broadly speaking, Davidson's account is meant to excise the notion of an enigmatic or confusing secondary meaning which any explanation of metaphor must define. In so doing, he hopes to show that, in general, whether we are dealing with metaphor or any other kind of expression, that there is, in principle, only one kind of meaning. That kind of meaning, he says, is always literal.

Metaphor, of course, is typically defined as an expression or figure of speech that attempts to describe an object or idea in terms of some other object or idea that is distinct but that is taken or presented to be, in some relevant way, similar or analogous. Thus, for many theorists, characterizing the nature of similitude must be a central part of characterizing any meaningful metaphor.<sup>30</sup> On Davidson's view, part of the mistake which is common to traditional theories of metaphor is that they simply extrapolate from what is taken to be literal similarity. The argument then posits that if literal similarity is the basis of literal meaning which establishes the ways in which we can categorize (e.g. the literal meaning of "red" has its basis in the basic reliability of being able to classify different phenomena under the same category by virtue of their similar color), then metaphor, too, must have its own, metaphorical, kind of basis that supports the possibility of classifying objects in unpredictable and perhaps counterintuitive ways. Words and expressions that operate both literally and metaphorically are therefore taken to have two, separable, kinds of meaning.

In response to this, Davidson claims that if there really were some metaphorical meaning that metaphors *immediately referred to*, then such expressions could no longer be called metaphorical. On such a position, the sense of metaphoricity undoes itself since the metaphor, so

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<sup>30</sup>This is often the case for theorists whose positions are classed under the category of comparison theories of metaphor.

described, would then be applied clearly and literally to specific things, phenomena, or the properties by which they can be reliably grouped. In other words, these would just be normal meanings that can pick out reliable forms of categorizing phenomena that should be just as easy to characterize literally as metaphorically, which leaves us with just one, fairly standard, kind of meaning. Words, on Davidson's view, have clear meanings which are assigned independently of their context of use. There is simply no need to suggest another kind of meaning, another vague and mysterious "something" to which words must refer when they are used metaphorically. Even still, if metaphors did refer to some enigmatic referent, then it would be this vague and mysterious "something" to which the word referred—in a direct and literal way.

Davidson extends his argument, saying that if, in some practical circumstances, metaphors can be taken to have anything like a special meaning, "special" here, might best be thought of in terms of novelty. In other words, one must recognize that noting such a meaning is no different than noting a new literal use of a word that one has simply never known before. That one simply did not know this different meaning does not imply that this meaning is somehow different in kind from those with which one has been familiar. While this new meaning may seem mysterious at first, this is no reason to suggest that its character is uniquely or essentially so. Another way of thinking about this is to consider homonyms and homophones. If one had only ever heard the word "train" in reference to a locomotive vehicle running on tracks, but was then introduced to its use in reference to an athlete's workout regimen, it doesn't seem to be the case that one would suspect some secret, enigmatic meaning involved. Davidson suggests that one would be quite satisfied with the understanding that the word simply had another literal meaning which had hitherto been beyond our familiarity. In some ways, Davidson's argument diffuses the problem of metaphor by suggesting that there are no metaphors; there are only

metaphorical *uses* of literal words and sentences. Ultimately, Davidson accuses the traditional discourse on metaphor of having mistaken the *effects* of metaphor for the *meaning* of metaphor. By imagining that metaphor must (like literal language) have its own appropriate content, theorists of metaphor have needlessly doubled the problem of explaining metaphor; and to no avail.

Among the theorists who are the target of his critique is Max Black, whose theory of metaphor presents an entirely different conception of the phenomenon, with an explicit interest in determining how metaphors function. As is common, Black's position depends on a clear distinction between the literal and the metaphorical meanings of language. In his essay, "Metaphor," Black contends that this distinction is to be found within the sentence *structure* of metaphors themselves. In such an expression, certain of the words are used figuratively, and others are used literally. It is in the interaction between figurative and literal expressions that metaphors are composed. He defines these elements as the *focus* and *frame* of the metaphor respectively. He evokes a vague conception of the "rules of language" (without further elaborating or explaining, as Davidson notes<sup>31</sup>) which constrain the possible meanings of words and, as he puts it, "determine that some expressions must count as metaphors."<sup>32</sup> These rules appear to be rules of recognition which give an interpreter insight concerning the uses of the words of an expression. The import of the *focus* and *frame* of a metaphor are largely a function of the intentions of the author or speaker employing the metaphor coupled with the interpretive acumen of the reader or listener.

Black forwards and develops what he calls the "*interaction view of metaphor*."<sup>33</sup> His first

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<sup>31</sup>*ITI* p. 245 "WMM" Davidson tersely responds that "There are no such rules."

<sup>32</sup>Max Black, "Metaphor". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 55 (1954-55) p. 273-294. p. 277, hereafter "MT"

<sup>33</sup>"MT" p. 285

formulation of this view is that our thoughts concerning two different things interact and produce a new meaning “which is *not* quite its meaning in literal uses, nor quite the meaning which any literal substitute would have.” He goes on to say that “The new context...imposes *extension* of meaning upon the focal word.<sup>34</sup>” In the *interactive view*, certain features are selected and drawn from both the *focus* of the metaphor and its subject. Those features selected are taken to be similar on the basis of a “*system of associated commonplaces*,<sup>35</sup>” which recalls the governing rules of grammar upon which all intelligibility rests. The efficacy of metaphor on this view is entirely dependent upon whether the hearer/reader shares the perspective in which this system of commonplaces can be evoked. This system, and all the implications that go along with it, are then transferred from the subsidiary subject (the object referred to in some literal application of what, in the metaphor, becomes the focus) and are mapped onto the principle subject (the target of the focus’ metaphorical description), emphasizing the similarities between the two and passing over the differences.

Unlike Davidson’s, Black’s position has the virtue of, at the very least, tapping into some of our basic intuitions about metaphor and the way it works. On the other hand, to the extent that we are looking for a useful theoretical conception of metaphor, as we will see, his account is both productive and quite limited. In another essay on the topic, “More About Metaphor,<sup>36</sup>” He returns to this conception offering further clarification and some revisions. Notable in his return to the *interactive view*, is the emphasis and augmentation of the important sense that metaphors need not be thought of as isolated ideas or things. What he previously referred to as “a system of

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<sup>34</sup>“MT” p. 286

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. p. 287

<sup>36</sup>Max Black. “More About Metaphor.” Ed. Andrew Ortony. *Metaphor and Thought*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. pp. 19-41. Hereafter “MAM”

associated commonplaces” is replaced with the more precise “implication-complex.”<sup>37</sup> The implication-complex is the set of interrelated concepts and figures that add depth and nuance to a metaphor, affording the possibility of specific forms of reasoning associated with the meaning of particular metaphors. Associated with this concept is a way of categorizing metaphors on the basis and nature of the implication complex. Here, Black introduces *emphasis* and *resonance* as important theoretical resources for better thinking about the consequences and applications of metaphors. The emphasis of a metaphor is the degree to which said metaphor is essential to the intended description of the subject at hand. A sufficiently emphatic metaphor, we are told, is indispensable, irreplaceable, in its use. The resonance of a metaphor is the degree to which a metaphor can become thematic, generating a wide array of background implications that extend the scope and use of the metaphor.

The systematicity of Black’s account is a critical addition to the study of metaphor. It opens the space for talking about metaphor in its broader uses and in its ability to evoke its own kind of organizational logic. Black, however, does not fully explore the range of possibilities that his conception of metaphor appears to suggest. For both Black and Davidson, the metaphors which are under consideration in their work are explicitly and intentionally used, consciously understood and recognized. Black, in his suggested classification scheme, notes that his treatment of metaphor is meant to describe particularly overt or obvious metaphors, what he variously describes as “strong” and as “authentically ‘vital’ or active.”<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in Davidson’s account, many of his examples are overt, and require conscious recognition and negotiation of their effects. It is my contention that such a narrow focus must be avoided as it artificially limits the potential of this study. On my view, these attempts at theories of metaphor miss their marks,

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<sup>37</sup>“MAM” p. 28

<sup>38</sup>“MAM” p. 25



in part, because they constrain their views in such a way that misses the meaning and function of the most common and prevalent uses of metaphor: the accidental, unreflective, and unconscious uses of metaphor. Both Black and Davidson present us with valuable theoretical tools and insights, but neither provides an adequate or realistic account of metaphor. This, as we will see, is largely because of a shared emphasis concerning the characterization of the meaning of “meaning.”

### *The Things they Carry*

“What is going on, today, with metaphor? And what gets along without metaphor?...Nothing...save that the *retrait* of metaphor goes on, happens all by itself—and without itself.<sup>39</sup>”  
—Jacques Derrida

“But gradually the metaphorical element in the use of such a word disappears and by custom the word changes from a metaphorical to a literal expression, because owing to the readiness to grasp in the image only the meaning, image and meaning are no longer distinguished, and the image directly affords only the abstract meaning itself instead of a concrete picture. If for example, we are to take *begreifen* in a spiritual sense, then it does not occur to us at all to think of a perceptible grasping by the hand. In living languages the difference between actual metaphors and words already reduced by usage to literal expressions is easily established; whereas in dead language this is difficult because mere etymology cannot decide the matter in the last resort.<sup>40</sup>”  
—GWF Hegel

Contemporary debates concerning how to theorize metaphor fall generally into three broad and often overlapping camps: those who think that metaphor (or metaphorical use) has properties that make it impossible to give it systematic treatment, those who think that metaphor can be brought under the rubric of traditional semantic theories, and those who suggest that understanding metaphor is a pragmatic, and not a semantic, matter. Depending on which position one endorses concerning what can be said about metaphor, there is, accordingly, a different conception for what a metaphor is/does and/or what metaphors may or may not mean. There is a range of competing classificatory schemes that one may apply in service to characterizing

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<sup>39</sup>Jacques Derrida, “The *Retrait* of Metaphor” from *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. p. 48-80 Hereafter “RM”

<sup>40</sup> GWF Hegel, *Aesthetics*, pp 404-5. Quoted in *MP* p. 225

particular thinkers according to their positions,<sup>41</sup> but for our purposes it is best to avoid the traps of such broad categorization (as most thinkers seem to defy neat categorization on this matter) and to focus on what virtually all such theories and/or classificatory schemes have in common. What almost all such positions have in common, again, is that there is a fundamental distinction between the meaning/function/use/interpretation of metaphorical language and that of literal language. In addition to this, it is worth noting that no matter what aspect of language is being addressed (its function, use, meaning, or interpretation), sentence/word meaning is given priority, and such meaning is, in most cases, defined in terms of the literal. In one way or another, serious literal language is taken to be the standard according to which the figurative and metaphorical aspects of language are to be conceptualized and evaluated. In all such cases, knowing the meaning and/or function of the literal will always be the first step before coming to characterize the metaphorical.

That this focal point seems obvious and intuitive<sup>42</sup> is likely the reason that it is such a pervasive starting point in the analysis of metaphor. The distinction, however, depends entirely upon three problematic conditions: 1) The simple *assumption* of the priority of the literal (considered temporally, logically, or pragmatically) with no argument or explanation, 2) the lack of any clearly defined conception of the literal, and hence the broad assumption of its clarity. This second condition is all the more problematic when we come to recognize, according to Derrida's insight, 3) the odd prevalence of metaphorical conceptions of the literal. So, even when there is some conception of the literal, it is never based on literal language: there is,

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<sup>41</sup>Black (1962); Scheffler (1979); Mooij (1976); Ankersmit & Mooij (1993); Leezenberg (2001)

<sup>42</sup>That it seems obvious and intuitive is something, I think, which is more indicative of the depth and pervasive nature of the metaphor of theory than it is of any obvious fact about language speakers in general. *We* are a specific kind of language speaker—the highly literate kind. This distinction will actually play a fairly significant role in the overall movement of this essay, and will, in some ways, signal my move away from Derrida's position.

demonstrably, no literal conception of the literal.<sup>43</sup> It is simply untenable that any theory of language which takes the literal as primary, serious, cognitive, etc. would be based on concepts which are, by its own standards, none of those things. Irrespective of the nature of their arguments and intentions, these thinkers consistently demonstrate the prevalence and centrality of metaphor; it appears to be the case that language is metaphorical all the way down.

For now, I will focus my attention on this final insight, facing what I take to be the most obvious objection to its seriousness. The common counter-argument against those who are taken to exaggerate the metaphoricity of language is that in most cases, if not in all, there are literal sentences and expressions which can more directly communicate the same meaning without flowery rhetoric and figurative language. In which case, the metaphorical could be entirely dispensed with; it would simply be a matter of being more precise, careful, and *disciplined* in one's use of language. What would be lost is a certain kind of aesthetic enjoyment which can be associated with language use, but meaning, in general, would be preserved. This is a view which is generally necessary for any theory of language which takes the literal to be the basis of all meaning. Following Derrida on this matter, it is my position that this counterargument cannot work if it is shown to be the case that the very concept of literality is metaphorical. If the metaphorical character of the literal cannot be dispensed with in a description of the literal, then literality and everything that is based on it comes into question.

As noted above, both Black and Davidson focus their analyses of metaphor on the more overt, explicit, and conscious uses of metaphor. One consequence of this privileging of consciousness is that metaphors are treated as explicitly and deliberately employed tools whose functions depend upon our awareness of their use. The focus on explicit or "strong" metaphors

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<sup>43</sup>Unless, of course, you say that the literal meaning of literal meaning is *content*, or better, the *effects* that said content has on sentences.

not only constrains the study of metaphor in general, it renders Davidson and Black blind to the degree to which their own thought is conditioned by an unconscious allegiance to a particular set of metaphors. This allegiance—and the explicit constraints on what counts as metaphorical in their work—exemplifies the kind of problematic relationship that philosophy has with its own language and metaphorical nature. As noted above, Derrida’s “White Mythology” articulates the conditions of this troubled relationship, and makes the bold claim that this is an inevitability. While I will not be making the strong claim that the positions of these theorists confirm Derrida’s thesis, they are nevertheless powerfully exemplary.

That of which we are conscious in communication, is referred to, by both thinkers, as the *content*. For Black, the content is cognitive, i.e. its defining characteristic is some kind of subjective event in thought. For Davidson, the content is semantic, i.e. it is asserted as some kind of property that can be attributed to words, sentences, etc. In this, we see that even though their positions differ considerably, both of their conceptions of meaning are already straightforwardly drawing from the aforementioned components of the metaphor of theory. Meaning is *contained* either *in* one’s mind or it is *in* one’s words. While content is central to both of these accounts of meaning it is merely assumed rather than explained. For Black, the central aim of his work is to define how metaphors transmit their content, and how, in some circumstances, this content could not be duplicated in literal language. For Davidson, the goal is to demonstrate that metaphors *as metaphors* transmit no content, and that any form of communication that does, does so in the very same way that literal expressions do—directly and without the detour of secondary forms of meaning.

Neither Davidson nor Black even question their allegiance to this metaphor, and I suspect that it is because neither of them notice it. It is not a conscious, overt, poetic, or “strong”

metaphor, and hence it is not under the purview of their respective studies. What is even more interesting is the fact that they both depend on the same basic implication complex<sup>44</sup> for the articulation for their views. And even though they disagree, neither of them seems to notice this shared center-point of their opposing views. In spite of their differences, both of these thinkers retain the sense that language, in one way or another, carries a message, some form of content. In this regard, meaning can be spoken of as an object or power that is *contained in minds and in words*. Words may then be seen as a *vehicle*, a *mechanism of transport*, by which meaning and truth can be *conveyed*. An accurate portrayal in speech or writing propagates a power that one may *uncover*, *grasp*, and *see*; three words that we have no trouble recognizing as descriptors of knowing. What we can *grasp* is the *content*, that which is *contained within* the words.

I draw attention to this array of metaphors and their centrality to these thinkers' work not to suggest that either Black or Davidson endorse the view that meanings are mysterious powers or some special kinds of objects that one would discover if one could somehow open a word or a mind and peer inside; it just happens to be the case that they write and speak as if they do. My primary intention is to note that neither of them seems to notice this. My secondary intention is to note that while this shared focal point is, in many ways, superficial, it is not trivially so: there is no obvious referent for either use of this term, but it nevertheless seems to provide a stable, and perhaps apt, description of some, indeterminate, aspect of our relationship with language. This metaphor, and many others like it, remains hidden, tacit, and unconsciously employed, unrecognized, and yet productive.

While Black and Davidson identify meaning with the term "content," the locus of that meaning is importantly different in what it is meant to indicate. They thus represent two

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<sup>44</sup> I will be borrowing this term from Black's position.

competing perspectives concerning exactly what is meaningful, or perhaps concerning *where meaning is located* in a communicative act. That in both cases whatever meaning is, is referred to as content is a topic to which we will persistently return, for now though, it is only important to emphasize that meaning is discussed *as if* it is a distinctive isolable kind of object which can be contained in words and/or minds which can be transmitted between conscious subjects in communication. For Davidson, the meaning is primarily contained in the word, for Black, meaning is contained in a kind of cognitive event in a speaker/writer/listener/reader's mind. Their positions thus emphasize different aspects of the commonly assumed distinction between speaker and word/sentence meaning.

The distinction between speaker meaning and word/sentence meaning is often an implicit source for the duality of meaning that is often attributed to metaphor. In his essay, "Metaphor," John Searle writes that "The problem of explaining how metaphors work is a special case of the general problem of explaining how speaker meaning and sentence or word meaning come apart."<sup>45</sup> In a move which is comparable to Davidson's position, Searle contends that sentence/word meanings can never be metaphorical.<sup>46</sup> Metaphors, according to Searle, always have their figurative character as a consequence of speaker meaning. In the use of metaphors, speakers intend to convey meanings which are inconsistent or otherwise at odds with what the sentences themselves mean.

Similar to both Davidson and Black, conscious intention is central to his account, but in a more robust and explicit way. Undergirding his entire position on language is his conception of consciousness and its dependence on intentionality. Consciousness, on Searle's view, has its

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<sup>45</sup>"Metaphor" in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony. Cambridge University Press, 1979 p. 84 Hereafter, "Searle '79"

<sup>46</sup> "Searle '79" p. 90

bases in cognitive states that he calls “intentional.” All such intentional states have the character of being directed at, focused on, and reflective of, some specific state of affairs. Intentional states have a quality of “aboutness.” His perspective is anchored in the fairly straightforward position that human reality and consciousness is essentially defined by its representational character, it is defined by its relationship to that toward which it is directed, by what it is about, by that which it reflects. In his book, *Consciousness and Language*, he writes that “Intentionality is that feature of certain mental states and events that consists in their (in a special sense of these words) being *directed at*, being *about*, being *of*, or *representing* certain other entities or states of affairs.”<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere, in his essay, “What is an Intentional State,” he writes that “Intentionality-with-a-t is that property of the mind by which it is able to represent other things.”<sup>48</sup> To the extent that language has meaning, its meaning is derived from its representational capacities and the degree to which it is capable of mirroring intentional states.

Literal language is therefore defined according to its correspondence to intentional states. At its most basic level, literal predication has two important components: 1) the objects or states of affairs toward which the intentional state is directed, and 2) the existence or nonexistence of the states of affairs that could demonstrate the veracity, realization, or conditions of satisfaction, of the claims being made about the intentional object.<sup>49</sup> Thus, if I say that “Anderson is the biggest man on the block,” the intelligibility of this sentence depends on its capacity to represent some actual or possible state of affairs in which Anderson is, in fact, both a man and bigger than every other man on the block. That this same sentence can be used to mean something completely different than this literal interpretation depends entirely on the subjective states of the

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<sup>47</sup> John R. Searle, *Consciousness and Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002 p. 77 Hereafter *CL*

<sup>48</sup> John R. Searle “What Is an Intentional State?,” *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 88, No. 349 (Jan., 1979), pp. 74-92, p. 85

<sup>49</sup>*CL* p. 77

speakers and hearers involved in its utterance. If it is obviously false—because Anderson is very tiny, or because he is a cat, or because the range of the claim’s application is not the block at all, then the speaker’s and the sentence’s meanings have come apart. What the sentence is about does not correspond to what the speaker intends. Nevertheless, a speaker can mean something over and above what words mean. Metaphorical meaning is simply a special case of intending to say something more, or different, than what one’s sentences mean.

Searle’s position, though generally pragmatic in character, still depends on the semantic primacy of literality. He sees his task in “Metaphor” as trying to “state principles which relate literal sentence meaning to metaphorical utterance meaning.<sup>50</sup>” The relationship between the literal and the metaphorical is regulatory. Literal meaning restricts the possible range of meanings that a speaker can use an utterance to mean.<sup>51</sup> Thus, to understand the systematic relationship between the literal and the metaphorical, one must identify the conditions of this kind of semantic regulation. For Searle, making sense of how metaphors work is comparable to the even broader question of how one thing reminds us of another thing. And while this starting point is quite vague, he contends that metaphors are a special case of this aspect of the awareness of meanings. What makes metaphor unique among the many ways in which we might be reminded of any number of things is the following:

...metaphors are both *restricted* and *systematic*; restricted in the sense that not every way that one thing can remind us of something else will provide a basis for metaphor, and systematic in the sense that metaphors must be communicable from speaker to hearer in virtue of a shared system of principles.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>“Searle, ‘79” p. 84

<sup>51</sup>I think that Searle, among many others, fails to identify the specific character of literal language. What needs explanation is whether and how sentences have meaning apart from individual speakers. My position is that words and sentences simply do not “have meaning” apart from individual speakers, writers, thinkers, etc. Part of the motivation of this project is to identify why so many thinkers contend that words “have meaning” in the first place.

<sup>52</sup>“Searle, ‘79” p. 103. italics mine. The link between restriction and systematicity will be an important factor to consider in connection with Derrida’s treatment of metaphysics. The connection will figure heavily for both Searle and Derrida with respect to theories of metaphor and in speech act theory as well. The centrality of the opposition between Derrida and Searle ultimately concerns what this restriction and systematicity might mean. For Searle, abstraction, idealization, and systematization are the very purpose of philosophy. Hence, restriction is a pragmatic



Interestingly enough, Searle's own account of metaphoricity suffers from similar problems as those theorists whom he charges with being unable to distinguish the metaphorical from the literal. More directly, when Searle makes the claim that explaining metaphor is a lot like explaining how one thing reminds us of another thing, we are still left with the very same question for the literal. Literal language is no less a matter of using one thing, i.e., a word or sentence, to remind us of some other thing e.g., some other word, sentence, object, idea, etc. than is metaphorical language.<sup>53</sup> Shifting scope between the metaphorical and literal does not change the nature of the problem, nor does it change what needs explaining in this case. This conception is even more problematic to the extent that, from Searle's and most other thinkers' positions, literal language is even more systematic and restricted than is the metaphorical. This being the

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necessity which precedes the possibility of philosophy. Thus, he is perfectly willing to accept the role of restriction in philosophy unproblematically as a perfectly reasonable and justifiable inevitability.

Derrida counters that the function of restriction is never *perfectly reasonable* and never *unproblematically* justifiable. The conditions of restriction are always dependent on *decisions*, and as much as restriction facilitates organized inquiry, it inevitably does so at the expense of excluding a whole range of relevant considerations and alternative paths. As such, these acts of restriction are never unproblematic. Treating these acts unproblematically simply reifies the restrictions themselves and covers over the *limited* character of the practical advantages that systematization affords. In the very same motion, once such acts are reified, these restrictions occlude the practical consequences of these acts of exclusion, thereby foreclosing both practical and theoretical inquiry into the phenomena which are excluded by the drive toward systematic thinking—what Searle calls philosophy, and what Derrida calls metaphysics.

Any position which takes such distinctions for granted has made at least one of a number of mistakes: 1) They believe that the distinctions they have made actually designates some kind of essence or natural kind. 2) They have simply forgotten that the initial restriction was practical *decision* and hence *not natural, actual, or permanent*. 3) They think (as it seems that Searle might) that that which is excluded may, at best, be treated as collateral damage—such exclusion is simply necessary for systematicity. The outcome of this exchange is crucially important once we consider the phenomena which are made visible and invisible in such discourses. In this case, concerning theories of metaphor and speech act theory, it is we, the speakers, who are implicated in this debate. With this in mind, the question is no longer simply what is included or excluded; it is *who* is included and *who* is excluded. At worst, speakers speaking from such conditions are simply not communicating at all (as Davidson explicitly holds), or perhaps not seriously, or appropriately rationally, and hence are simply not speakers—in the relevant sense.

<sup>53</sup> One could of course make the argument that there is another step involved in the functioning of metaphor—that perhaps metaphors, like all forms of language, call things to mind, but that in its particular form of calling something to mind, it also calls some other thing into mind indirectly. While this is an entirely plausible account, it still doesn't define anything that is unique to metaphors. Things are called to mind indirectly in all kinds of different ways and for all kinds of different reasons. Some such reasons may be systematic and regular and others might very well be idiosyncratic (for example, in the perceptual lives of synesthetes). In any event, this formulation makes metaphor even less distinctive, and seems to open meaning up in ways that I suspect that Searle would resist.

case, the general features that are supposed to distinguish metaphor as a particular kind of communicative act simply fail to support the kinds of distinction that Searle intends to make here—a fact that is all the more interesting given that this is a mistake that he specifically charges to some broad array of other unnamed theorists of metaphor.

Searle’s solution to the problem, while quite helpful in certain respects, ultimately suffers from the primacy of his conception of consciousness and the representational, intentional, character of his view of meaning. Similar to the way that Davidson and Black seek to explain overt and poetic metaphors of which we are conscious, Searle’s conception of meaning focuses on the explicit, deliberate, and fully conscious aspects of communication. Each of these thinkers give the broad impression that what is important in language is that over which we have conscious mastery. This limits the scope of the kinds of metaphors that can even be addressed in their accounts. Further, this strategy masks a line of inquiry that is virtually nonexistent in the contemporary study of metaphor, and is, for that reason, a central aspect of my project. Specifically, it masks the question of *why* we speak in metaphor, and it wildly simplifies the question of what speakers mean when they speak metaphorically. For Searle, it is clear that whatever speakers may mean can be reduced to a literal meaning. For example, in his metaphor ‘Sally is a block of ice,’ he contends that some speaker who utters this intends to communicate the literal proposition that ‘Sally is an unemotional and unresponsive person.’ And while it may very well be the case that there are times when what can be expressed in a metaphor can also be expressed in more familiar terms, I will argue that this is only the case in the simplest of metaphorical expressions, and in their most deliberate uses.<sup>54</sup> Such uses are simply not the norm.

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<sup>54</sup> It is also worth noting that with this metaphor, unlike many explicitly “philosophical” metaphors, is a reasonable candidate for a comparison or interactive theory of metaphor. The fact that the metaphor has two, distinct, objective referents, Sally and the block of ice, is crucially important.

...No Longer of Account as Coins...

“The metaphor is no longer noticed, and it is taken for the proper meaning. A double effacement. Philosophy would be this process of metaphorization which gets carried away in and of itself. Constitutionally, philosophical culture will always have been an obliterating one.<sup>55</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

“Thus philosophy must neither use metaphors nor speak poetically, not even when it deals with the equivocal meanings of being. But can it help doing what it must not do?<sup>56</sup>”

—Paul Ricoeur

In the opening few paragraphs of “Signature, Event, Context,” Derrida troubles the integrity of the meaning of the concept of “communication” by playing on the multiple fields, applications, registers, and associated implications that, with a certain insistence, intelligibility, and efficacy, tend to appear in connection with its use. The term, he suggests, is of a piece with a set of resonances that, at once, both extend and restrict the range of its meanings, contexts, and possible uses. He shows that while communication is taken to imply the actuality of the specific determination of meaning, and its successful transmission—the essence of literal language—the function and placement of the term itself, taken with its array of implications, suggests otherwise. In this, a term whose reading demonstrates an open, polysemic, character is nevertheless meant to designate and categorize a *specific* set of events whose *unity* is marked by the form and function of using language to convey a limited, *determined*, content. But, of course, it is not obvious that the word “communication” has any such specifically determinate content *itself*, nor is it obvious that *any* act that one may want to designate as “communicative” could reasonably qualify under the strictures of this category. From the opening, he ponders:

Is it certain that there corresponds to the word *communication* a unique, univocal concept, a concept that can be rigorously grasped and transmitted: a communicable concept? Following a strange figure of discourse, one must first ask whether the word or signifier “communication” communicates a determined content, an identifiable meaning, a describable value. But in order to articulate and to propose this question, I already had to anticipate the meaning of the word *communication*: I have had to predetermine communication as the vehicle, transport, or site of passage of a *meaning*, and of a meaning that is *one*. If *communication* had several meanings, and

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<sup>55</sup> *MP* p. 211

<sup>56</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*. London: Routledge, 2003 p. 308. Hereafter *RM*

if this plurality could not be reduced, then from the outset it would not be justified to define communication *itself* as the transmission of meaning...<sup>57</sup>

If we look very carefully at the rhetoric here, we will begin to see that this quote itself is offering a performative example of the specific nature of the problem: characterizing communication has consistently proven to require a range of particular metaphors to articulate the structure of the linguistic acts which have been commonly posited in and through philosophical analysis. The presumption is that these features and properties of communicative acts are crucial for the possibility of sharing meaningful information as we intend. If we could, perhaps, literally designate such features of communicative acts, we may see our way out of this problem. As it stands, however, it is unclear that any of the crucial components and/or implications associated with this now-strange term, “communication,” designates or conveys anything determinate, literal, or even meaningful by its own presumed standards.

On Derrida’s view, this problem reaches well beyond this single term, as its placement and function focuses and organizes a whole line of questioning that disrupts a range of important, and perhaps essential, assumptions that define an entire historical narrative and its associated patterns of reasoning; we’ve already begun to explore this in the work of the thinkers so far reviewed. One way to state this problem is to note that to the extent that the goal of philosophy of language is to define the univocal and primary concepts and mechanisms according to which *any* kind of intelligible language operates, the very bases of such concepts prove themselves to be *equivocal* and secondary to the extent that they are metaphorical. The univocity that philosophers seek, according to Derrida’s reading, is a pure, literal, language, through which the world and its essences can be fully disclosed. With such a language, truth can finally be conveyed in its totality, without remainder. It is this goal that semantic models of meaning which are anchored in

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<sup>57</sup> *MP* p. 309

literality inevitably follow. Literal communication is exemplified by successfully and directly conveying or transmitting meaning, or some form of intelligible content, by way of a linguistic act. The speaker/writer has some idea in mind and, by transferring that idea to the appropriate words in the right kind of act of communication, can convey that idea directly to the listener/reader.<sup>58</sup>

This intuitive formulation of literal communication perfectly exemplifies some of the common theoretical implications of the metaphor of theory: 1) Ideas are objects which are *in the mind* as if it were some kind of container or holding area. 2) *Words are vehicles* which can *contain* and *transport* ideas from one subject to another. 3) There is something definitive about appropriate use in language, often that there is some *direct link*, or perhaps a *pathway*, between the ideas conveyed and the meaning of the linguistic acts which are meant to convey them in literal communication. These tacit figures exemplify the degree to which the concept of the literal depends on metaphors for its articulation.<sup>59</sup> As we've already seen, these various figures consistently anchor theories of meaning and communication that all the while seek to limit, regulate, and restrict the effects of metaphor in philosophy. I've already begun to show, allied with Derrida's thesis, that theorists of language who are seeking univocity and foundations in the literal will inevitably run into their own limits in the face of this pervasive drift of metaphoricity.

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<sup>58</sup>It is important to note that on this model, there is no difference in being a speaker or writer, nor is there any difference in being a listener or a reader. Thought, irrespective of how it is expressed, is in no way altered by its *mode of transport*. In literal language, a written sentence *conveys* exactly what a spoken sentence would.

<sup>59</sup>While these particular metaphors that Derrida identifies in the metaphor of theory are central, the metaphorical bases of the literal are not limited to these. There are other metaphorical conceptions of the literal: Donald Davidson depends both on *content* and on *the common coordinate system*; Similarly, in his essay "Metaphor, Derrida, and Davidson," David Novitz calls upon the established "*programme*" (interestingly including the scare-quotes, as if that absolves the use of metaphor see p.102) *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 44, no. 2 (Winter, 1985), pp. 101-114. In "White Mythology" Derrida alludes to appropriate *domains* and *fields*, metaphors also crucial to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's conception of metaphor. Similarly, Paul Ricoeur's conception of philosophy depends on the integrity of *spheres* of speculative discourse, and the subject as the watchman who presides over their boundaries. What is of central importance here is that while there are many metaphorical conceptions of the literal, there is, as I hope to show, no literal conception of the literal.

According to their own standards and definitions, their claims to the integrity of serious, philosophical, and conceptual discourse are already vitiated—at their foundations—by their own non-literal, their own non-serious, formulations. Further, on Derrida’s view, this fact about such philosophical commitments has built into it the *need* to occlude metaphor’s function in order to maintain the presupposed possibility of the semantic integrity of the literal. In service to this end, metaphor has to be clearly defined, demarcated, regulated, and made fully distinct from the literal and the conceptual. Even this, however, proves to be problematic, as it is generally the case that definitions of metaphor are said to depend on (in some rarely specified sense) that of the literal. As such, these theorists find themselves in an odd circle, or perhaps cycle, which has so far proven inescapable.

The formulation goes as such: the literal can only be theorized on the basis of metaphors whose figurative characters are subsequently forgotten or simply denied. The concept of metaphor is classically taken to be some kind of deviation or derivation from, the literal. Therefore, neither the metaphorical, nor the literal can be adequately stated using exclusively literal language. Based on this, and similar insights, Derrida posits that *any* inquiry into the nature of these concepts will reveal that the distinction between what is literal and what is figurative is tenuous at best. The very language according to which the literal has ever had its own appropriate domain depends on the occlusion of its metaphorical foundations. Thus we might say that the *concept of metaphor* can only be stated once this metaphorical conception of the literal is *codified*<sup>60</sup> and its metaphorical founding fully disavowed. In short, we can say that the concept of metaphor depends on the hidden metaphors for the literal and the conceptual.

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<sup>60</sup> Otherwise we might say that the concept of metaphor can only be stated once the metaphorical conception of the literal has “died off” into literality. For reasons I will argue for in this and the next section, I find this formulation to be untenable.

As we we've seen, according to some of the most common and influential views on meaning and linguistic function, the key mark in defining a metaphor as a communicative act is that a speaker manages to successfully communicate despite the breakdown of one or more of the presumed (and notably figurative) features of literality. Most frequently, the claim is that there is some *breakdown* in the *containment* or in the *link* provided in the *transport* of the idea, which is, as we've seen, commonly called *the content*.<sup>61</sup> It is frequently argued that with respect to metaphors that, if they do have a specific meaning, it is of a special sort or perhaps that they contain some kind of secondary, enigmatic and mysterious, "metaphorical" meaning which somehow interacts with literal meanings. Alternatively, one might argue that in metaphorical communication, whatever would otherwise constitute the link between the ideas and the linguistic act is broken. It is even said by some theorists that the metaphorical meaning *clashes* with the literal, sometimes producing a new kind of meaning in the collision.

In any event, what is of central importance is this: by virtually all accounts, the concept of metaphor depends upon the concept of the literal, while the literal remains radically distinct from the metaphorical. For Derrida, this way of organizing the relationship between these categories is inadequate; failing, as it does, to countenance the metaphorical sources of the literal. The case against this account is stronger still, as there is evidence in the text of philosophy that the suppression of the metaphorical is an active and motivated exclusion. On his reading,

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<sup>61</sup>This is an assessment of the majority of theorists of metaphor that will be considered during this project. To my knowledge, no one has thoroughly worked out the implications of problematizing the first factor (that there may be some problem in the mind as container—as if it would or could be incapable of holding certain meanings or certain kinds of meaning) in considering the meaning of metaphor. While this concern is not explicitly stated in Searle's position, the nature of his conception of intentionality raises important questions about the relationship between literal language and speaker meaning, particularly in the case of the literality of "dead metaphor" as we will see. It is worth noting that in his essay "The Myth of The Subjective," Davidson argues against imagining that meaning might be like some kind of content "in the mind." On the other hand, he depends heavily on the second and third factors, and the metaphor of content, for articulating his theory of meaning and, most importantly, in his articulation of the meaning (or lack thereof) of metaphors.

any such exclusion is an impossibility, as the metaphorical and the literal are mutually constitutive. The two emerge coextensively as products of the metaphysical attitude, *as products of the philosophical desire for total clarity, order, and mastery in language*. At its most basic level, the meaning of literality can only be established in opposition to the figurative and metaphorical. However, because the very effort of attempting to define the opposition between the literal and the figurative proves to *require* metaphorical language, it demonstrates—by its own theoretical standards—a certain *lack* of clarity and mastery. Specifically, this is exemplified in that giving an account of the function of literal language inevitably reveals its dependence on the metaphor of theory, which, in turn, structures all forms of conceptuality *including the concepts of metaphor*. The broad implications of this set of relations will have to be set aside for now, but as we will see, the poetic interplay of these figures plays a pivotal role in the theories that hope to describe that which is taken to establish stability and order in our forms of communication.

Interestingly, the effort that goes into characterizing the status and limits of this order yields, in a very profound way, an inevitable double to the metaphor of theory. In demarcating the boundaries of appropriate discourse, one inevitably finds that there is the sense that some terms have been transported out of their own, natural, fields and have subsequently been imported (with varying degrees of legitimacy) into philosophy's proper domain. In pursuit of a pure concept of metaphor, one inevitably loses the outline of the concept's integrity as it opens up beyond its acceptable, and thereby intelligible, range. In this, Derrida notes that in *any* attempt to define or delimit metaphor's appropriate role in philosophy, one would inevitably discover the following:

If one wished to conceive and to class all the metaphorical possibilities of philosophy, one metaphor, at least, always would remain excluded, outside the system: the metaphor, at the very



least, without which the concept of metaphor could not be constructed, or, to syncope an entire chain of reasoning, the metaphor of metaphor.<sup>62</sup>

This is the surreptitious power of the *metaphor of metaphor*.<sup>63</sup> According to Derrida, this metaphor's depth marks out the original scope of philosophical inquiry, which is predicated on its ability to distinguish itself from all other intellectual domains, and on its insights concerning the appropriate boundaries of any other legitimate fields of study. Once one is alert to the metaphorical aspects of this enterprise, and once one notes the driving force of much of the philosophy of language, one must also accept that such metaphoricity calls the project's legitimacy, and its very basic goals, into question on the basis of its own standards. It is the metaphor of metaphor, its persistence, and its secretive function, that establishes and organizes the maintenance of the deep division between the literal and the metaphorical. It is this metaphor that establishes philosophy's claim to its own, proper, field, and it is in this narrative space that the conscious subject gains coherence as the observer of this domain and the potential enforcer of its limits, of its boundaries.

In spite of this, this very metaphor and its related implications exceed philosophy's purview.<sup>64</sup> In fact, it seems that this very metaphor dominates, and hence constitutes, the

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<sup>62</sup>MP p. 219-220

<sup>63</sup> In Rodolphe Gasche's, *The Tain of the Mirror*; he characterizes the metaphor of metaphor in the following way: "The metaphor of metaphor, since it is no longer derivative of a concept, or an ultimate signified, signifies a *mise en abyme* of the philosophical concept of metaphor. As a relation of figure to figure, of the improper to the improper, it is indicative of a different articulation between metaphor and concept, which substitutes for the classical opposition." (p. 308)

<sup>64</sup> Given my overall position, this claim should be read in two ways. The nature of this excess can be read both semantically and pragmatically, although with very different consequences. Read semantically, this excess demonstrates that philosophy's attempts to regulate and demarcate the appropriate range of the use of metaphor in philosophy will prove to be a lost cause. On this view, it might be reasonable to side with Davidson, at least to the extent that part of his goal is to clarify the reasons why metaphors are not phenomena which can be submitted to semantic theory. Although, of course, one may take the exact opposite view and suggest that if semantic theory is incapable of dealing adequately with metaphor, then it is probably an indicator that semantic theory is either bankrupt altogether or is at least in need of serious revision and rethinking.

Read pragmatically, we might say that the representational subject is constituted by an illocutionary convention, invoking a particular script which enables a ritual practice of reading and writing that we call philosophy (although this will have to be further developed later, in Chapter 5). This practice is one that depends on the belief in (or uptake of) the subject, the integrity of its discourse, and the potential mastery of its field. So long as

boundaries of philosophy. For this reason, philosophy is bound to mistake its ability to know its own range, limits, and value. What is taken to be the domain of absolute value and absolute truth has its meaning on the basis of that which it intends to exclude: that which is valueless and, properly speaking, false. Thus, on Derrida's view, there can be no pure origins, no genuinely native domains. Philosophy cannot define the limits of its proper region, or of any other region, if these boundaries are established by the force of an improper language. This has the paradoxical consequence of rendering metaphor, itself, unintelligible. For if there can be no definitive claims on what constitutes native domains, there can be no transfer from such a proper domain into another, less original, field. Philosophy is thus founded upon a concept that ultimately reveals that the central intention of philosophy—that of producing a proper, literal, language which can identify and maintain the boundaries of its own field—is impossible. That philosophy has its origins in the metaphor of metaphor renders the quest for univocity otiose.

Derrida writes:

...it is impossible to dominate philosophical metaphors as such, from the exterior, by using a concept of metaphor which remains a philosophical product...for the same reason philosophy is deprived of what it provides itself. Its instruments belonging to its field, philosophy is incapable of dominating its general tropology and metaphors. It could perceive its metaphors only around a blind spot or central deafness.<sup>65</sup>

Metaphor—and thus the metaphor of metaphor—reveals a necessary loss in the movement of meaning. This loss can be witnessed in the always incomplete character of the philosophical move to imprint the absolute value of meaning which it prepares for exchange in the form of the concept. The inevitable meaninglessness, the irretrievable yet undeniable loss, counter-acts any gains. Thus, metaphors can never quite become the rational concepts that philosophy seeks, they

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one is carrying out one's prescribed role as the objective surveyor of philosophy's field, the integrity of that field cannot be called into question without also calling into question the integrity of the subject and that of her vision. This, as we will see, is an uncomfortable line of questioning for many philosophers, hitting, as it must, a little bit too close to home.

<sup>65</sup> *MP* p. 228

can never quite yield a pure profit. He writes:

By virtue of what we might entitle, for economical reasons, tropic supplementarity, since the extra turn of speech becomes the missing turn of speech, the taxonomy or history of philosophical metaphors will never make a profit. The state or status of the complement will always be denied to the interminable dehiscence of the supplement (if we may be permitted to continue to garden this botanical metaphor). The field is never saturated.<sup>66</sup>

Language can never saturate its field because it can never properly demarcate the boundaries of its domain. This will always be the case so long as such demarcation, the nature of boundaries, and the very possibility of stating that it has its own domain, remain equivocal and metaphorical. Philosophy, then, can never quite get to the point. It is destined to wander. Even in its “purest” forms, its ability to make meaning present depends on the disavowal of an unshakable unknown. Rational concepts can never quite achieve the universal application that is meant to establish their absolute values. *They are thus investments which inevitably promise more than they can return.*

But this is not to say that they are without value.

On Derrida’s view, the work of philosophy and its value are predicated on the loss of the open boundlessness—the unknown—that it seeks yet disavows. In his reading of the role that metaphor has played in philosophy, the disavowed unknown remains, but in an altered, *oddly intelligible* sense. In this transaction, *philosophy’s value as meaningful is established in the production of the presence of falsity*. The unknown, the gaps in knowledge, the absences which may otherwise function as portents, become known to thought and subsequently emerge in its obverse as fabricated presences. Philosophy thus transforms the unknown, the unthought, into the explicitly absent and the intelligibly false. It is only with the help of metaphor that this trick can be pulled. It is only in this exchange, this sleight of hand which renders metaphor absent yet knowable, that philosophy accrues value.

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<sup>66</sup> *MP* p. 219

## Kill the Messenger

“If you speak the truth, have a foot in the stirrup.”  
—Turkish Proverb

“The concept of metaphor as primarily a vehicle for conveying ideas, even if unusual ones, seems to me as wrong as the parent idea that a metaphor has a special meaning.<sup>67</sup>”  
—Donald Davidson

Any form of thinking which is dedicated to the goal of assurance of the possibility of the proper communication of intended meaning, and the total clarity of the field of discourse has, first, to eliminate the gaps in meaning, the limits of knowledge. All must be visible, all must be expressible,<sup>68</sup> all must be knowable. The metaphysician, in her diligence, works tirelessly to eliminate any such gaps. This effort, however, comes at the expense of full disclosure. Derrida tells us that this work is ultimately revealed as a work in erasure. The gaps are overcome through effacement. They are posited as proper meanings and thus must demonstrate all of the clarity and precision that is appropriate to literal philosophical concepts. They are thus defined within, written into, an impossible context—a context beyond time and place. They are made into definitive absences, defined positively as lacks.<sup>69</sup> In this movement, these gaps in knowledge are *established* as absences, as paths foreclosed to the proper work of philosophy.

As absences, they are defined positively within the context of—although in paradoxical tension with—the literal. In becoming absences, the meaning of their space in philosophical discourse changes dramatically. What once called for the penetrating insight and creative inquiry from thinkers, comes to call for clear distinction and separation. Gaps, the unthought, the open spaces left for possibility, become present as falsities, become dead-ends which require no

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<sup>67</sup> *ITI* p. 246 “WMM”

<sup>68</sup> Here we might anticipate Searle's “Principle of Expressibility, the principle that whatever can be meant can be said.” “Literal Meaning” p. 221 See also *Speech Acts*, p. 19

<sup>69</sup> See *Dissemination*, “Outwork” p. 26: “The lack, the void, the break, etc., have been given the value of a signified or, which amounts to the same, of a transcendental signifier: the self-presentation of truth (veiled/unveiled) as *Logos*.”

crucial considerations. They are then subsumed under the specified range of all the things which are, in principle, there to be known. *Communicating* these knowable falsities as truth-bearing is a transaction that can only be achieved in the imagined purity of literal language. Articulating this purity can only be achieved in the blatant disavowal of the constitutive character of metaphor. In this movement, we find the strangest, and perhaps most productive, concept in the contemporary study of language: the *dead* metaphor.

The role which dead metaphor plays in the philosophical study of language is an exemplary case and a perfect demonstration of how, for the sake of univocity, the unknown and unthought must be made present as absences, must be improperly made into the proper, as the unrecognized metaphors must be made literal. As we will see, the function of the concept of dead metaphor depends on the claim that dead metaphors are not really metaphors. While they have gained literal meaning, they have presumably lost whatever as-yet-undefined property they once had that made them metaphorical in the first place. Here we can begin to identify a salient source of what Derrida characterizes as an inevitable surplus of which the philosopher typically loses account. The gap in meaning is effaced and disavowed, giving the philosopher's language the appearance of thorough and full disclosure. *Dead metaphors are no longer metaphors. They have become literal—present as absent, their literal meaning is defined by way of, even in virtue of, their meaninglessness.* As present absences, such metaphors recall the classic status of the merely apparent—dead metaphors simply *appear* to be meaningful. As such, such language is precisely what the philosopher *seeks to go beyond*—a task that, notably, can only be made intelligible metaphorically. Whether such a goal is based on metaphor, or is based on the merely apparent nature of the dead metaphors which comprise it, I will argue that it cannot be based on literal, or properly conceptual, principles—or better, foundations.

In this poetic interplay, the goal of univocity is shown to break down under the force of its own weight. The surplus always returns, revealing the hidden loss, the forgotten source of its value. In a certain way, this claim seems obvious because, among other things, calling a metaphor dead is yet one more metaphor for the supposedly literal. Such surpluses are the central target of “White Mythology.” Through an exploration of a range of thinkers, Derrida shows, quite convincingly, a pervasive trend at the heart of much of the Western philosophical tradition. In pursuit of the purest of languages, one that can express the true content of any idea, the philosopher leaves demonstrable evidence of this surplus. Derrida continually finds that at the precise point where the philosopher imagines herself to have found such a language, she demonstrates a significant lapse: the clear and precise language that affords the communicability of literal and conceptual truth is revealed to be deeply metaphorical, and deeply troubled by this fact.

The only rational response, then, is to eliminate metaphor’s influence in philosophy. This, as Derrida’s position contends, is an impossible task. This fact, however, has not stopped the goal of univocity from being central to the philosophical study of language. Evidence of the inevitable remainder of this effort is to be found *in the text*, in the very language of the written work philosophy. As such, no matter its goal or stated intentions, such language belies the claims to conceptual order and rigor that could presumably define truth in its absolute value. What’s more, as metaphorical, such language falls into the category of all those forms of speech which fall on the outside of what can be properly truth bearing and meaningful.

The thinkers I’ve so far reviewed are exemplary in this regard. Once one is alert to the conditions of the field, the consequences of these movements, these tremors, are difficult to ignore. Toward the end of “What Metaphors Mean,” faced with his analysis of the many failed

efforts to define and characterize metaphor, Davidson closes his essay with a brilliant suggestion. He writes: “There is a simple way out of the impasse. We must give up the idea that a metaphor carries a message, that it has content or meaning...” This, by itself, seems to me to be a step in the right direction, and would, on its own, be a straightforward renunciation of the metaphor of theory. However, he includes a crucial parenthetical caveat that reorients any such reading of his imperative. His full statement reads: “We must give up the idea that a metaphor carries a message, that it has content or meaning (except, of course, its literal meaning).<sup>70</sup>” In this, he perfectly exemplifies Derrida’s claim about the philosophical study of language. Not only is the disavowal of metaphorical meaning central to his treatment of metaphor, but his conception of the appropriate form of meaningful language—the literal—is characterized metaphorically (i.e., the literal *carries a message*, and has *content*). His conception of literality, in the most obvious and straightforward sense, is a textbook application of the metaphor of theory.

One might argue that in the differences between Davidson and Black, it becomes clear that this metaphor supports the analysis of two very different, even conflicting, models of meaning. This might be a reason to suggest that this metaphor is not particularly consequential. One might argue that it simply adorns an underlying range of phenomena, and that the fact that A) that these two positions are in conflict and B) that they use the same figurative language to describe competing positions proves that what is at issue here is not the metaphors at all. One might continue on this line that these metaphors, in this case, are perhaps a kind of theoretical place-holder, a convenient description that helps to order one’s thinking until, perhaps, a more detailed literal vocabulary can be devised.

It seems to me that this counterargument can work on two conditions. The first would be

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<sup>70</sup>*ITI* p. 222 “WMM”

the case in which such a detailed literal vocabulary was, in fact, devised. This is a problem that I will thoroughly treat in chapters 2 and 3. The second (which would probably be a necessary precondition for the first), would be if it could be shown that the *metaphorical character* of their central concepts (to be defined according to each thinker's own terms) was inessential to the structure of their arguments. If neither condition can be met, then some of the more seemingly dramatic claims about metaphor in philosophy will begin to seem far more credible. More modestly, such a failure should compel interest in the Derridean claim concerning the inevitable inability to frame the meaning or function of metaphor without depending on the meaning and function of metaphors. This should give us pause for a number of reasons which will be considered later. More immediately, it will be important to see what, if any, serious theoretical consequences hinge on the meaning of this apparently blind allegiance to metaphors in general, and to the metaphor of theory in particular.

For Davidson's part, the centrality of the effects of this metaphor appear to be fundamentally damaging to his argument. The first problem that his position would have to deal with is the apparent surreptitious persistence of this metaphor. It is not one of those consciously employed metaphors whose effects compel one to notice some likeness. It would be, according to his position, a *dead metaphor*. As such, his argument would be that content, in its use in his argument, is not functioning as a metaphor at all. Stating that "meaning is content" would then be a literal claim, and in it "content" is simply a word that is being used literally to convey the meaning "the literal meaning of a sentence." That the word has (or once had) a metaphorical use doesn't preclude the literal use which has long since been assigned outside of any particular context of use.



If, as Davidson claims, *any* word can be given *any* literal meaning, then why not assign a different word, say, “vortex,” or “ape” to the literal meaning of a sentence? What is with the seeming intuitive insistence on this metaphor: why *content*? If we take his position seriously, we would have to make the claim that “content” and its particular relationship to literal meanings is every bit as arbitrary as “vortex” or “ape” would be. This, to me, is demonstrably false, although in order to state my full case, there is much work to be done. For now, as a preliminary, it seems to me that Black’s account can begin to help us to understand why this is the case. The use of this metaphor, and others like it, is simply not like the use of a name. The metaphor of content brings with it an entire implication complex upon which other aspects of Davidson’s description relies.<sup>71</sup>

What’s more, his account never even attempts to give us reason to believe that meaning is best thought of in terms of content. In fact, his emphasis on content leaves one wondering just why a philosopher who is arguing that metaphors only mean what the words in their literal sense mean would anchor his whole position on an apparently meaningless metaphor.<sup>72</sup> As such,

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<sup>71</sup> A fuller account of how and why a metaphor like “content” is particularly apropos will be given when I explain my own theory of metaphor in Chapter 5. For now, I will take for granted that there is an intuitive sense that the metaphor of content is somehow apt as a description of the meaning of a word/sentence, and that ape, for example, is not.

<sup>72</sup> We might consider the difference between content as a dead metaphor and the examples of dead metaphor that Davidson gives in his essay. He chooses the *mouthing* of rivers and *mouthing* of bottles as exemplary cases where the obvious figurative component of mouth as an animal aperture is applied to bottles and river deltas is no longer relevant. He argues that bottles and rivers literally have mouths, and the evidence of this is that the full-blown conscious imaging that is required for the effects of these claims *as metaphors* is no longer necessary for their intelligibility as literal designations (*ITI* p. 252). My argument runs counter to this on the basis of a fairly simple observation: in the case of mouths of rivers and bottles, there are at least two obvious points of reference according to which said metaphors are meant to function as “live” metaphors. Mouth, and its function as a live metaphor is a vague but nevertheless objective comparison as it is applied to bottles and river deltas. This would lend itself to an analysis on the basis of the comparison theory of metaphor, which argues that metaphors are elliptical similes. On this view, in the case of mouths and rivers deltas/bottles, such a metaphor actually claims that mouths *are like* openings of rivers and bottles, but in some unspecified way. On such a view, coming to a determination of this unspecified similitude, (like that they are all openings in general) would be deciphering the metaphor’s meaning. On Davidson’s view, what constitutes the specificity of a metaphor would not be characterized as meaning but would be characterized as effect. He therefore rejects the comparison view. The effect of these metaphors, on his view, would be to “nudge us into noting” the similarity that the simile vaguely tells us (253). The key, here, is that in his examples there are two objects that can be characterized according to their similitude, irrespective of the specificity

whatever he is trying to preserve for the literal is based (presumably *upon* a literal *base*) on a metaphor that he takes to be literal. The question then becomes whether or not Davidson can maintain the indelible line between a word's meaning and its use without the help of the metaphor of content. Or, to be a bit more charitable, we might state this quandary in another way: we might ask how the literal meaning of content tells us anything about what words mean. Is Davidson telling us that there is something *literally contained* in these words? Or, to be fairer still, we might ask: what *exactly* is the *effect* that makes describing meaning in terms of content plausible? Does it "*nudge* us into noting<sup>73</sup>" the already present similarities between words and containers? Between meanings and that which is contained? How are words and containers similar? Are they similar in the trivial sense that everything is—in some sense—like every other thing? Or is this kind similitude more robust, more meaningful? Davidson ought to be able to answer all of these questions. If he intends to do so *meaningfully*, then, by his own standards, he should be able to do it literally. My position, coupled with Derrida's insight, is that he cannot.

Black's account is much stronger than Davidson's in this regard. By providing a robust

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(or even accuracy) of that similitude. From Davidson's perspective, what is lost in the death of such metaphors is the amount of imagistic work that is required for the recognition of some kind of similarity between two objects. My objection, in the case of the metaphor of content and other similarly positioned metaphors, is that there is first of all only one "object" which is, by itself, inherently vague (and, by the way, *not* an object). Beyond this, this vague object is not obviously being compared to anything, and certainly not some other object, even in some unspecified sense (except, of course, to meaning—the phenomenon it is meant to explain/model—a fact that yields further, intractable problems). And even if we took meaning to be, in some sense, an object, what similarity, on Davidson's account, could content ever have "nudged us into noting" concerning the nature of meaning? Is there even some vague and unspecified sense in which meanings are like objects in containers? Do meanings really *resemble* anything? By extension, was there ever some conscious, imagistic, experience that has since been lost in the literal application of content? If so, one wonders why it isn't so easy to recall such an image. In other words, when Davidson details the metaphor in "he was burned up" it takes virtually no effort to imagine what Davidson means here. Can the same be said for the claim that "literal meaning is content"? I think it is obvious that the answer must be no, if not, then why not just state what meaning really and literally *is*? See also Chapter Three of this paper, in the "Boundary Testing" section, for an importantly related discussion.

<sup>73</sup> "WMM" p. 253. italics mine. This is Davidson's description of what metaphors *do*. On his view, what makes metaphors interesting are the effects that they can have, and those effects are, importantly, *not* meanings. Metaphors affect us in the same way that a joke, a picture, or a bump on the head might affect us (p. 262). The question here—again—is why he characterizes how metaphors work by using yet another metaphor: can words *literally nudge* us? If not, what, on Davidson's view, could it possibly mean for something to *metaphorically nudge* us?

theoretical apparatus for metaphor's function, we can at least actively treat what he means by content on his own terms. In addition to this, the conceptual tools he offers prove to be very useful when employed in a slightly different context than the one he describes. Black's conception of content does less foundational work in his account than that in Davidson's. Nevertheless, its role is quite present. On Black's interaction view of metaphor, the content is what gives a metaphor its unique ability to reveal new insights. The content of a metaphor on this view is, again, not to be thought of as a thing or an object, but rather as a system. It is precisely the structure of the system that confers upon its user insights that could not be attained through literal language. Of this use, Black writes:

The maker of a metaphorical statement selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the primary subject by applying to it statements isomorphic with the members of the secondary subject's implicative complex.<sup>74</sup>

The use of a metaphor is a set of precise intellectual operations "demanding *simultaneous awareness* of both subjects...<sup>75</sup>" Here, we see that metaphor is comprised of a well-defined set of tools that the "maker" employs to construct parallel implication complexes between primary and secondary subjects. This view, like Davidson's, is clearly limited to the extent that it demands conscious deliberation and only gives treatment of "strong" metaphors. Pragmatically, however, the interaction view of metaphor does provide some theoretical resources which will help in accounting for, and making sense of the hidden and unconscious use of "dead metaphors." The meaning and prevalence of unconscious metaphors can only be considered if we can establish an alternative conception of the meaning and use of language in general. Part of the broader task of my project will be the attempt to rethink meaning such that the prevalence of the unconscious use of metaphor can be made intelligible, and to rethink meaning without recourse to the

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<sup>74</sup>"MAM" p. 28

<sup>75</sup>"MT" p. 293 Italics mine.

metaphor of theory, the need for cognitive or semantic content, and without the need for a concept like the “dead metaphor.” In spite of himself, Black is very helpful in this regard.

Unlike Searle or Davidson, Black does not place a high premium on the status of literal language. For him, the meaning of metaphor can be quite robust, and his work is meant to describe the unique creative and cognitive functions of metaphor. In “Metaphor,” he employs the term *catachresis* to define the creative dimension of metaphor’s use—the power metaphor has for creating new meanings that cannot be captured in literal language. In a more concerted and sustained way than Searle, Black is explicitly concerned with how metaphors can fill semantic needs. He writes:

Metaphor plugs the gaps in literal vocabulary...so viewed, metaphor is a species of catachresis, which I shall define as the use of a word in some new sense in order to remedy a gap in the vocabulary.<sup>76</sup>

Unfortunately, Black gives us no explicit account of what qualifies as a deficit or “*gap* in the vocabulary.” We can assume at the very least, given many of his later claims and basic intuition, that metaphor allows language users to speak and think about things in ways that would be impossible in the literal language. Gaps, then, may refer to meanings for which we have yet to find the words. Given Black’s view of meaning as cognitive content, it seems strange to think that any such content could not be matched to a word, sentence, or expression. Black’s view must contend with two importantly related questions which are, in a certain way, mirrors of one another: 1) On what basis might there be degrees of difficulty with respect to matching words and sentences to meanings? And 2) Why should some cognitive contents be harder to verbalize than others?<sup>77</sup> This is a question that must also be put to Searle. To the extent that Searle’s conception of meaning hinges on intentionality, it is presupposed that the integrity of speaker

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<sup>76</sup>“MT” p. 280

<sup>77</sup> This question is also posed to Black by Davidson. see *ITI* p. 260

meaning precedes one's articulation of any meaningful utterance.

Black's account gives no attempt to answer to these questions because he assumes both the meaning of *contents* and the meaning of *gaps*.<sup>78</sup> He can do this because he, and most of his readers, will also assume that it is clear what he means in both cases. This is only possible (on his view in "Metaphor") to the extent that he, and most of his readers, may share "a system of associated commonplaces." It is unclear, however, how any such commonplaces could be shared if their meaning were reducible to strictly *conscious* cognitive contents.<sup>79</sup> On this matter Black is not very precise, although he appears to notice this limitation. He writes that "There is, in general, no simple 'ground' for the necessary shifts of meaning—no blanket reason why some metaphors work and others fail."<sup>80</sup> What he does say, is that when metaphors successfully fill a semantic need, that they lose their metaphorical power and character. He tells us that "It is the fate of catachresis to disappear when it is successful."<sup>81</sup> This is the case on the basis of the fact that, as he writes, "if a catachresis serves a genuine need, the new sense introduced will quickly become part of the *literal* sense."<sup>82</sup> So while Black does not explicitly argue for the primacy of literal language, he does nevertheless call upon the sharp distinction between the literal and the metaphorical, a distinction that is nowhere more central than in his formulation of catachresis, in

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<sup>78</sup> To be fair, Black is alert to the degree to which his own assessment of metaphor is largely metaphorical—mainly when it comes the concept of the *projection* of the implication complex from the secondary subject to the primary subject (see "MAM" p. 28). Furthermore, he explicitly states that he has "no quarrel with the use of metaphors (if they are good ones) in talking about metaphor. But it may be as well to use several, *lest we are misled by the adventitious charms of our favourites.*" ("Metaphor," italics mine p. 286) It may be worth holding Black to this caveat, as it seems to be the case that the metaphor of content and its implication complex clearly has a wide and conflicting pattern of use, and appears to be a charming favorite among philosophers of language.

<sup>79</sup> Particularly if by "cognitive" we mean some kind of strictly conscious thought process which is best described in terms of representational subjectivity.

<sup>80</sup>"MT" p. 292. While I think that this is, in some sense, right, I think that it concedes too much. In part, I will be arguing that this notion of random metaphorical success has to be rethought. I will argue that it is only if you begin with something like representational subjectivity and its conscious cognitive content that one is left to consider the randomness of metaphorical success. In the position I will forward in chapters 4 and 5, I will argue for an embodied form of meaning in which proprioceptive response will stand as the measure of metaphorical success.

<sup>81</sup>"MT" p. 281

<sup>82</sup>"MT" p. 280

the motion where he converts the metaphorical into the literal. In this move, the centrality of the metaphor of content is reinforced, giving reason to further elaborate on the important connections to be found between Black and Davidson on the basis of this concept.

To the extent that the metaphor dies/disappears into literality, it presumably loses whatever property made it metaphorical in the first place. For Davidson the loss is of some nondescript effect or response, some kind of physiological event that, with respect to the effects of language, may be comparable to hilarity or confusion. For Black, what is lost is the particular form of systematic cognitive interaction that constitutes a metaphor's content. What is important for Davidson's view is that whatever is lost in the death of a metaphor, it is not meaning. As such, there are two ways one may read Davidson at this impasse. 1.) One may read Davidson as I suspect he hopes to be read on this matter: that whatever is lost in the death of a metaphor was never the under the purview of semantics in the first place, so the problem of dead metaphor is simply not a problem for semantics. Or 2.) How Black and many others read him (myself included): that Davidson has simply chosen not to try to explain metaphors, giving some hints at how one may proceed, but erroneously imagining that it is simply not an important topic for semantics.<sup>83</sup> It is my contention that the neutralizing force of the metaphor of *dead metaphor* is the only way that his position could be taken seriously, and that furthermore, it is the force of "dead," or unconsciously employed, metaphors in general that makes him and others for whom they function so effectively blind to the role that *the metaphor of dead metaphor* plays in the

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<sup>83</sup> This is actually a fairly involved point that I will detail more thoroughly in Chapter 3. See also Samuel Wheeler's "Metaphor According to Davidson and de Man," where he writes that "Davidson's prima facie problem in accounting for metaphor is that his *semantics* leaves metaphor untouched." In *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy*, p. 92 In her essay "Seeing Metaphor as Seeing-As: Remarks on Davidson's Positive View of Metaphor," Lynne Tirrell writes: "Davidson's attempt to reduce the linguistic aspect of metaphor to what can be said about the expression taken literally is an attempt to explain metaphor without accommodating his semantic theory to it. Taking metaphor as a particular kind of perlocutionary effect prompted by certain expressions is theoretically neat if your theory is a semantic theory." p. 151 n. 19

philosophy of language. The metaphor of dead metaphor is every bit as significant as, and is perhaps more consequential than, the metaphor of content. Because Davidson provides us with no explanation of metaphor, the difference between a live and a dead metaphor can be attributed to the presence or absence of an unpredictable and contingent event that is presumably not, strictly speaking, exclusively linked to meaningful utterances at all.

Because Black gives a broad conceptual apparatus, it is much easier to give an account of what is lost in the disappearance of a metaphor, but it is precisely on this basis, that I have to reject his conception of the fate of catachresis. It is my contention that Black significantly overstates his case on this basis. The “becoming literal,” of a metaphor—otherwise metaphorized as its *death*—is hardly disappearing. For Black, it is realistic to think of such a change as disappearance because he imagines that the central component of metaphor is the conscious cognitive process in which “The maker of a metaphorical statement selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the primary subject by applying to it statements isomorphic with the members of the secondary subject’s implicative complex.<sup>84</sup>” Once the focus of the sentence comes to fill a semantic need, the whole range of activities that “the metaphor maker” employs in order to make metaphorical meaning are no longer necessary.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the effort of production and recognition are presumably no longer explicitly conscious in this case, and thus there is no content to interact.

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<sup>84</sup> *MAM* p. 28

<sup>85</sup> It is important to note that none of these thinkers gives any explanation of how this transformation is supposed to take place. With such a complex set of factors contributing to the structure and function of metaphor, one would think that Black would at least begin to address this problem. Does a dead metaphor have a new set of associated commonplaces or implications? Even if that were the case, what would make the new set of commonplaces literal rather than metaphorical? Does it not have any such commonplaces or implications at all? However it works, it seems that there is some transformation of content—“non-interactive” literal content is apparently not systematic in the way that the interactive content associated with metaphor inevitably is. Is it because it functions on a *different kind* of system? How can we characterize the difference between systems? How would we be able to tell the character and nature of one system from another? Are there more than just metaphorical and literal systems? These questions lead us back to Davidson, particularly in his questions concerning the possibility of conceptual schemes.

Given Black's otherwise functional analysis of metaphor, it is surprising how narrowly he construes the notion of content, implying that what is negotiated in metaphorical content is coextensive with that of which we are conscious in meaningful utterances more generally. My argument is that the prevalence of ever productive "dead metaphors" is a standing counterargument to the general assumption that metaphorical meaning is best characterized either on the basis of literal meaning or on the primacy of conscious production and recognition. As such, I will be forwarding a theory of metaphor that can account for the function of metaphor—and meaning more generally—that does not hinge upon the exclusion of these kinds of expressions which I take to be among the most prevalent uses of language, and that are furthermore centrally featured in philosophy, under the guise of the concept. As I mentioned above, such a project will require a fairly significant shift in theoretical orientation, one that will make the prospect of defining a univocal theoretical vocabulary unnecessary, untenable, and hopefully unappealing.

It is certain that it is quite intuitive and common to think and talk about meaning as if it in some way inhered *in* words or was present *inside* one's mind. This is not something that is limited to the philosophical study of language (a fact to which we must return later) but its presence is interestingly central and prevalent in this tradition. To say that thinking in this way is somehow wrong or flawed is not my intention. What is important is to consider how far these metaphors go, and whether or not they can be dispensed with without losing some essential aspects of the traditional understanding of meaning. These metaphors are, of course, among a host of similarly pervasive, and yet often unrecognized, metaphors. Their unique importance for this work lies in the fact that their role is particularly prominent in the foregoing discussion and in philosophical language more generally. The role of such metaphors is further augmented by



the fact that while they have proven to be of central importance, they have, through a motivated exclusion, failed to come to the attention of these theorists of metaphor.

Wandering Toward the Meaning of Its Death

“This is an almost constant characteristic in the discourse on philosophical metaphor: there are said to be inactive metaphors, which have no interest at all since the author did not think of them, and since the metaphorical effect is to be studied in the field of consciousness. The traditional opposition between living and dead metaphors corresponds to the difference between effective and extinct metaphors.<sup>86</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

“And to avoid muddying the waters, let’s leave out half-conscious thoughts, peripheral consciousness, nagging but suppressed conscious states and other shadowy phenomena.<sup>87</sup>”

—John Searle

Once we begin to consider how frequently metaphors are used unconsciously, it simply becomes untenable that every meaningful metaphorical expression that a speaker utters has any relation, let alone a *correspondence*, to a fully, or even potentially, conscious representational state. This fact indicates a central tension in Searle’s conception of metaphor, and beyond this, a crucial problem in his overall theory of language and meaning. These two concerns are tightly related, and mark the center-point<sup>88</sup> upon which the two threads of my project will overlap. The first problem starts with the fact that Searle maintains that any meaningful intentions can, in principle, be fully expressed literally. In what he calls “the principle of expressibility,” he argues that “whatever can be meant can be said.<sup>89</sup>” Nevertheless, he still makes the surprising claim—along with Black—that metaphors may, at times, fill some semantic need. This is an odd

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<sup>86</sup> *MP* p. 225-6

<sup>87</sup> John R. Searle, “Consciousness, Unconsciousness and Intentionality.” *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 1, Consciousness (1991), pp. 45-66, p. 56 Hereafter, “CUI”

<sup>88</sup> I mean, seriously, what do I *literally* mean when I say center-point here? Do I mean focal point? Do I mean that this argument is equidistant from two other *central* things? *Threads*, perhaps? Or do I mean something else altogether? Generally, I’d like to say that I know for sure how I am using the term. However, I’m also certain that I am not, even now that I’m trying to, consciously representing anything in the use of this metaphor.

<sup>89</sup> “Literal Meaning” p. 221 See also *Speech Acts*, p. 19

coupling of beliefs. Put simply, one wonders how, or perhaps why, there would even be semantic needs if it were the case that a speaker's meaning can always be expressed, fully and literally.<sup>90</sup>

What would constitute a need in a situation where there are no deficits?

Searle's too convenient answer is, predictably, that to the extent that metaphors fill such needs, they are simply no longer metaphors.<sup>91</sup> He writes:

It is often said that in metaphorical utterances there is a change in meaning of at least one expression. I wish to say that on the contrary, strictly speaking, in metaphor there is never a change of meaning; diachronically speaking, metaphors do indeed initiate semantic changes, but to the extent that there has been a genuine change in meaning, so that a word or expression no longer means what it previously did, to precisely that extent *the locution is no longer metaphorical*.<sup>92</sup>

He has to make this move since, for him, meaning is inherently intentional in character. This leads us to the second problem: for Searle, language has meaning because it has *derived intentionality*. In other words, language can only be meaningful to the extent that it captures the intentional character of consciousness. Elsewhere, he writes:

The key to understanding meaning is this: meaning is a form of derived intentionality. The original or intrinsic intentionality of a speaker's thought *is transferred to words*, sentences, marks, symbols, and so on.<sup>93</sup>

With this position, it seems that Searle should be able to explain, at least preliminarily, why it should be more difficult to express some intentional states literally than it is to express others.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> One might imagine that given enough speakers, enough time, and enough *freedom*, that such problems would virtually disappear.

<sup>91</sup> And presumably, once such a deficit is filled, it is retroactively negated as ever having been present.

<sup>92</sup> *Metaphor and Thought* p. 90 Italics mine. This is a fairly odd formulation for other reasons as well; not least of all that it is inconsistent with his own claim, on literally the very same page, that sentences and expressions themselves are never metaphorical. If sentences and expressions were never metaphorical to begin with, then how is it that a change in sentence meaning seems to independently affect the metaphorical status of the locution? If metaphoricity is the result of a particular relationship between speaker meaning and sentence meaning, and its status hinges primarily on changes and deviations speaker meaning, then what is to stop a speaker from using *any* sentence metaphorically—whether its sentence meaning has changed or not?

<sup>93</sup> *Mind, Language, and Society* p. 141 italics mine. This formulation is doubly exemplary of Derrida's treatment of meaning and metaphor as it depends explicitly on the metaphor of theory and implicitly on the metaphor of metaphor. Put more directly, Searle's overall view of language and consciousness is a detailed and fairly elaborate application of the metaphor of theory, and his treatment of metaphor in general is exemplary of this fact.

<sup>94</sup> In *Speech Acts*, Searle elaborates on the principle of expressibility in the following way: "often I am unable to say exactly what I mean even if I want to because I do not know the language well enough to say what I mean (If I am speaking Spanish, say), or worse yet, because the language may not contain words or other devices for saying what I mean. But even in cases where it is in fact impossible to say exactly what I mean it is in principle possible to say

Furthermore, once such states are successfully expressed metaphorically, why are we to suddenly imagine that such expressions are no longer metaphors? The by now predictable solution, as anticipated by Derrida's analysis, is that Searle, along with many others in this tradition, assumes that once metaphors "become literal," they are, at best, *dead* metaphors—these are interestingly placed metaphors, to say the least.

Searle's own formulation of the character of dead metaphors and the role that they play in his theory displays the inherent tension in his position explicitly, implicitly, and, unsurprisingly, metaphorically. In two short sentences, Searle captures and demonstrates the problematic character of the concept of dead metaphor, although he seems to be only half-aware of the trouble:

Dead metaphors are especially interesting for our study, because, to speak oxymoronically, dead metaphors have lived on. They have become dead through continual use, but their continual use is a clue that they satisfy some semantic need.<sup>95</sup>

It is interesting to note that Searle is alert to the oxymoronic character of this apparently important concept, but fails to see that this is a problem that calls for a solution. The problem of his position begins with his paradoxical (paradoxical according to his own conception and standards of meaning) belief that there are, and even *could be*, dead metaphors. The contradiction should be evident, as it is basic and central to his overall theory of meaning. For Searle, in literal utterances speaker meaning coincides with sentence meaning. Literal sentences have derived intentionality because they mirror the "aboutness" of our conscious intentional states.

Metaphorical *sentences*, strictly speaking, do not exist. Metaphorical *utterances*, on the other

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exactly what I mean. I can in principle if not in fact increase my knowledge of the language, or more radically, if the existing language or existing languages are not adequate to the task, if they simply lack the resources for saying what I mean, I can in principle at least enrich the language by introducing new terms or other devices into it. Any language provides us with a finite set of words and syntactical forms for saying what we mean, but where there is a given language or in any language an upper bound on the expressible, where there are thoughts that cannot be expressed in a given language or in any language, it is a contingent fact and not a necessary truth." pp. 19-20

<sup>95</sup>*Metaphor and Thought* "Searle '79" p. 88

hand, depend on *speaker meanings which mirror normal intentional states*; it's just that in the utterances of metaphors, the meanings of the sentences do not correspond to the speaker's meaning. The sentences, thus, have no clear or necessary relationship to any intentional state.

The link between intentionality and the *possibility* of consciousness is inviolable in Searle's account. He writes:

The link, then, between intentionality and consciousness lies in the notion of an aspectual shape. To be intentional, a state or process must be thinkable or experienceable; and to be thinkable or experienceable, it must have an aspectual shape under which it is at least in principle, consciously thinkable or experienceable. It must be the sort of thing that could be the content of a conscious thought or experience.<sup>96</sup>

The trouble in how these factors are meant to work together can be identified with this fairly straightforward observation: literal language is defined by the fact that it matches/mirrors actual or possible conscious intentional states. Metaphorical language displays no such correspondence. Due to the principle of expressibility, a speaker who utters a metaphor could, at least in principle, utter a literal sentence which would match her intentional state; she does not do so for aesthetic effect, to fill a semantic need, or for some other reason. To the extent that metaphors can be called meaningful, it is precisely by virtue of the *divergence* between the relationship between speaker meaning and sentence meaning; more precisely, metaphors have their properties by virtue of speakers' *in principle conscious, intended, and expressible* meanings. If Searle says that

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<sup>96</sup> "CUI" p. 52 The aspectual shape to which he refers here will become important again in the second half of this project, once we shift our attention to speech act theory. The aspectual shape of an intentional state is the specific configuration of its conditions of satisfaction. It is essential to intentionality and is importantly connected to the details of representation. He writes that "The belief that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris *represents its conditions of satisfaction under certain aspects and not others*. It is, for example, distinct from the belief that 'the tallest iron structure build in France before 1900 is located in the French capital,' even assuming that the Eiffel Tower is identical with the tallest iron structure built in France before 1900, and Paris is identical with the French capital. We might say that every intentional state has a certain aspectual shape; and this aspectual shape is part of its identity, part of what makes it the state that it is" (p. 51). Likewise, he says in a similar example that "Thoughts and experiences and hence intrinsic intentional states generally, have a certain sort of aspectual shape. They represent their conditions of satisfaction under aspects. For example, the desire for water can be a different desire from the desire for H<sub>2</sub>O, even though there is no way to satisfy one without satisfying the other...In the case of conscious thoughts, the way that the aspectual shape matters is that it is constitutive of the way the agent thinks about the subject matter: I can think about my thirst for a drink of water without thinking at all about its chemical composition. I can think of it *as* water without thinking of it *as* H<sub>2</sub>O" (p. 53).

dead metaphors are not metaphorical at all, and at the same time that they have “become literal” he ought to be able to say something about the possible conscious intentional state, including the aspectual shape, to which a “dead” metaphor could possibly correspond.

In the essay from which the above quote was taken, “Consciousness, Unconsciousness and Intentionality,” Searle is explicitly writing in service to detailing the nature and structure of unconscious intentional states. In this essay, he explicitly argues that “The notion of an unconscious intentional state is the notion of a state which is a *possible* conscious thought or experience.<sup>97</sup>” With this in mind, Searle’s central problem comes to the fore. Since virtually all dead metaphors are *unconsciously* employed, we are left with what, on Searle’s view, should be an impossibility: literal language with no intentionality.<sup>98</sup> Dead metaphors, by his account, are literal language with no intentionality, with no speaker meaning, with no “aboutness.” This should be the inevitable conclusion, anyway. Since intentional states are representational and irreducibly subjective in character, and literal language must be so too, because of its derived intentionality, Searle must be able to give an account of one of two things: either some form of non-representational, non-subjective conception of literality, or of the kinds of *possible* conscious, representational, intentional states from which the literality and comprehension of dead metaphors would derive.

His other option would be, of course, to accept that “dead” metaphors are, in fact, every bit as metaphorical as “live” metaphors. These are the unexpressed features of the oxymoronic character of Searle’s conception of “dead metaphor.” What saves Searle from having to realize

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<sup>97</sup> “CUI” p. 57

<sup>98</sup> He writes “we understand the notion of an unconscious mental state only as a possible content of consciousness, only as the *sort of thing* which, though not conscious, and perhaps impossible to bring to consciousness for various reasons, is nonetheless the sort of thing that could be or could have been conscious.” A few lines down, he lists a few of the reasons he thinks that bringing such a state to consciousness might be impossible. He cites brain lesions and repressions of various sorts. “CUI” p. 51

and acknowledge this, is the very metaphor *of* “dead metaphor.” Since “dead” metaphors are not metaphors, he does not have to explain them. This proves to be a broad and effective strategy.

And as we will see, its effects linger.

Returning to Derrida’s assessment, these complications and contradictions are precisely what one should expect to find, and they are serving the precise theoretical functions that his view anticipates. In exactly the place where these theorists are seeking to establish the crucial boundary between the literal and the metaphorical, the only tools they have available to do the job are—blatantly—metaphors. It is the force of these metaphors—that meaning is contained in expressions and is transmitted through them (Black, Davidson, and Searle), and that on the basis of that which is contained and transmitted, that metaphors can live and die (Black and Searle)—that supports the otherwise untenable range of theories that are meant to designate and regulate not just the meaning of metaphor, but of the meaning of meaning in general and of the very *structure* of communication. This problem opens up on multiple levels as it is the case that defining metaphor plays a crucial role in defining the literal, and that furthermore, once defined, the best conceptions of the function of literality are metaphorical on all sides.

Further still, failing to recognize the unconscious use of metaphor impedes the recognition of the crucial occasions for which metaphors are uttered in the first place. One of the most important questions concerning metaphor is rarely, if ever, posed in this tradition: *why* do we speak metaphorically? Why do we even bother speaking in such *roundabout* ways if there are truly *direct* ways of communicating the same thought, idea, or intention? Many theorists, especially of the pragmatic sort, are concerned to demonstrate that metaphors are defined according to speaker meaning. Often, however, they do not concern themselves with the complex nature of such meanings and hence fail to consider the complex circumstances under which a

speaker's meaning can best, or perhaps only, be expressed in metaphor. Max Black is a notable exception, although he doesn't take this concern very far. Searle contends that speakers know just what they mean when they utter a metaphorical statement (despite their function of filling semantic needs). However, it seems fairly obvious that this cannot be the case. In fact, the use of metaphor often indicates just the opposite. For the most part, one uses metaphors when one is attempting to say something but doesn't quite know how *to put one's thoughts into words*.<sup>99</sup> Often metaphors are used to characterize what may be experienced as a vague sensibility, one for which one's vocabulary is ill equipped.

This aspect of metaphorical language is interesting in its own right. It is all the more interesting to see how it functions within the text of philosophy. If we take Derrida's reading seriously, it functions quite predictably. What philosophical discourse attempts to maintain as the integrity of the space and the content of the proper will, of necessity, also seek to define what falls outside of that space.<sup>100</sup> That which is claimed to fall out of the scope of the relevant field will nevertheless prove to be central to defining its very contours. In other words, the effort to

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<sup>99</sup> One wonders, how many ways can this thought be *expressed*? Does this expression have a literal correlate? Is there a better way of expressing the need to "put one's thoughts into words?" Is this expression already literal? If so (we might ask Searle) what, exactly, am I consciously representing when I utter such an expression? Or we might ask (of Davidson, for example) if this expression is literal does it function literally *because* it no longer has the jarring effect that is associated with metaphorical function? Or is there some other reason? For example, given his broader claims about meaning, is one to surmise that the effects of these no-longer-metaphorical-expressions, track the meanings and inference patterns associated with their more familiar literal uses?

My response to these questions is closer to Black's position than to either Davidson's or Searle's. It seems to me that this expression (which, of course, is a powerful example of the metaphor of theory—along with the opening question of this footnote) is a prime example of catachresis, the kind of metaphor whose intelligibility *creates* its object. Where I differ with Black is in his assessment that once such an expression becomes familiarly employed that it also becomes a literal expression. It seems to me—and this is also part of my response to Davidson—that this kind of metaphor still has all of the important effects that it would have had when one might have referred to it as a "live" metaphor. Thus, much of what I am contesting might be centralized as a rejection of Davidson's claim that "The figurative meaning of the living metaphor should be immortalized in the literal meaning of the dead. But although some philosophers have suggested this idea, it seems plainly wrong" (ITI p. 253). The key recognition that serves as the starting point for my response is that it is unnecessary that the figurative effects of metaphor have ever been explicitly conscious in the first place; such effects may very well be conscious, but this would be a contingent, and not a necessary, fact about metaphors.

<sup>100</sup> This first move, just by itself, already states the conditions of the metaphor of metaphor and how it is inextricably linked to philosophy.

define metaphor will always include an effort to define figurative language in general as secondary to, and derivative from, literal language. The form of these arguments will strive to preserve the primacy and integrity of the literal, even when the literal is centrally marked by the secondary and derivative character of the figurative. In this effort, what one sees in the text is a rhetorical game that seeks to invent and reify distinctions *that operate subconsciously* but that are *explicitly ruled out in the stated intentions* of the text. As such, *the stated intentions simply do not preside over the contours of the discourse* since, as a general phenomenon, its most central concepts are not of the sort which are defined as primary, as belonging to the relevant field. This is what we've seen in Black's work but even more centrally in Davidson's. This feature is no less present in Searle's texts, and, as we will see, has even further reaching consequences for his overall perspective. In any event, the nuance of metaphor's function in Searle's work demonstrates the depth and range of its function, and is an exemplary case of the potential scope of the impact that metaphor has on philosophy in general.

As we will see, the subtlety of the function of metaphor in Searle's texts is precisely the kind of thing to which his own position would inevitably be blind. In short, the central distinction which he takes to be crucial to his conception of metaphor depends on a complex but unconsciously employed set of figures. Furthermore, these are metaphors that do not have any obvious literal translations, even though, according to his account, they would already be literal, and thus need no translation, because they are dead. The metaphorical nature of his position becomes all the more salient when we simply pose a few questions that, on the face of it, might seem a bit unfair: in literal language, on what basis do speaker and word meaning stay together? What constitutes the bond? How far apart do the speaker and word meaning have to be in order for them to be considered metaphorical? Or perhaps it is not strictly a matter of distance, but of



some specific configuration. Once speaker and word meaning come apart, is there a way to put them back together? Would putting them back together restore literality? All of these questions are directed at another question: what, exactly, is *spatial* about meaning?<sup>101</sup> But of course Searle probably doesn't mean that speaker meaning and sentence meaning *literally* come apart. But then, of course, we have to ask how things come apart *metaphorically*? In short, why would anyone imagine that, *literally*, there should be a *locus* and *spatial relations* concerning the nature of meaning?<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>The set of diagrams at the end of his essay further reveal the spatial reasoning that is already present in his account ("Searle '79" p. 110). Generally speaking, this doesn't strike me as problematic at all. What would be problematic is if Searle told us that the literal meaning of his spatial claims regulate the possible interpretations that we may have of his conception of metaphor. This would be problematic because it would concede the point that his position is not literal but, in fact, metaphorical. On the other hand, if he argues that his position is based on literal language because these metaphors are dead, then he is faced with the prospect of telling us what—exactly—he is conscious of when he utters these sentences and, what constitutes the intentional content of the dead metaphors. In short, we might pose the problem in this way: what—exactly—are his diagrams, diagrams *of*? If meaning and intentionality are representational in character what is representing what here? Does a sentence stating the representational character of meaning consciously represent something? Searle's diagram, for example? Further, if a sentence that states the representational character of literal meaning is itself metaphorical, what kind of literal sentence can regulate its meaning? Further still, if we have a diagram (a representation) of a metaphorical sentence which is regulated by some literal sentence that is itself a representation of some conscious intentional state, again, what is representing what? What is regulating what?

This line of questioning becomes all the more important once we begin to consider how central spatial metaphors are to Searle's conception of consciousness. Without his internalist spatial metaphors, one wonders how and whether Searle can make *any* of his claims on the nature of consciousness. Beyond this, we might even ask—given Searle's own claims about how metaphors work—why, when it comes to something that is presumably worthy of objective reference (e.g., consciousness), other sentences are what should regulate the metaphorical sentences he uses to describe consciousness? I think Searle actually can supply a fairly straightforward response to this question since, on his view, the metaphors he uses to describe consciousness are not really metaphors; they are dead metaphors, and as such, they are actually literal. This response, however, will still fail Searle's own test of literality in the following way: there are no obvious objective states of affairs that these dead metaphors consciously represent (whether actually or possibly). Again, they are literal sentences without intentionality, and are therefore a unique violation of his conception of literality.

<sup>102</sup> If Searle and those who adhere to such spatial models of meaning want to argue that these metaphors can be replaced with literal meanings, then the burden of proof is on them to demonstrate the veracity of this claim (it is one thing to translate "Sally is a block of ice" into "Sally is a cold and unresponsive person," it is another thing altogether to translate "utterance meaning *is arrived at* by *going through* literal sentence meaning.") If, on the other hand, it turns out that such metaphors are necessary to this particular theoretical formation, then they will have to give up the notion of the primacy of literality—a proposition that, it seems to me, is coextensive with their conception of philosophy. If we take the role of metaphor in philosophy seriously, these questions actually have quite straightforward responses: 1) To the extent that meaning and metaphor are inextricably linked, everything about meaning is spatial. Just for starters, *metaphor* itself is a spatial metaphor. Its etymological origins are still quite active in what these thinkers might call the long "dead" metaphor of metaphor. Even if one wants to take the concept of dead metaphor seriously, there is no denying that the hidden etymology of metaphor (to carry away, to transfer or transport, from one field into another) is quite productive, *alive*, we might say, in the broad and developing implication complex of the metaphor of metaphor (which I will be significantly elaborating throughout the course of

What we see is that while the explicit metaphors which guide Searle's account are not limited to what is presented in Davidson's and Black's essays, they are, however, cut from the same cloth: they are all exemplary of the metaphor of theory. While the other thinkers' positions seem to be a bit more focused on the *word or sentence or mind as container*, Searle's dependence is far more robust. Not only is his conception of the mind metaphorized as an original, originating, space in which intentional content is created, his conception of the meaning of language depends on the *transference* of the intentional contents *from* the mind *to* sentences, and his conception of communication is centrally defined by the possibility of the *transportation* of that *content*, and what happens during transit. Beyond this, his conception of metaphor depends on the ways in which the content of literal sentences can regulate speaker meaning such that metaphors can still transmit their normal intentional content.<sup>103</sup> Unsurprisingly, the broad metaphorical character of Searle's own work is something that he seems not to notice. To be fair, one might argue that the metaphors which guide his treatment are, in some ways, less salient by virtue of their pervasiveness and their internal consistency.<sup>104</sup> This fact, however, does not exactly speak in his favor, given the central role that consciousness plays in his overall position.

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this project.). 2) The idea of a locus of meaning is an implication of *both* the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor; its persistence is, perhaps, owed to the pervasiveness of their joint functioning in philosophy. In other words, the notion of meaning within the scope of its appropriate field *appears* to precede the possibility of its transfer into a different, foreign, field. And of course it is the word/sentence that carries the message—whether it does so within its own field, or beyond. Both of these responses, of course, depend on the obvious metaphoricity of this chain of reasoning. Any response from Searle on this matter will depend on a literal interpretation of these “dead” spatial metaphors. On his model, however, if they are treated as literal, then they will have to be identified with some represented or representable state of affairs with some definitive aspectual shape in addition to objective conditions of satisfaction. My position, which will become clearer as proceed (see especially Chapter 4 “A Vehicle for Intentionality?”), is that there is simply nothing which is represented or representable in these metaphors. There is therefore no aspectual shape, nor are their objective conditions of satisfaction, and that even if there could be, Searle has not even attempted to provide them.

<sup>103</sup> Although he does endorse a view in which metaphors *indirectly* convey propositional content, which are always properties of literal sentences. It is interesting to note, though, that in his final definitions of metaphor, he characterizes this relationship metaphorically, and, again, according to spatial reasoning: “Speaker says S is P but means metaphorically that S is R. Utterance meaning is arrived at by *going through* literal sentence meaning.” (p. 110)

<sup>104</sup> This is a point that could be taken as an argument in favor of Black and against Davidson.

In other words, if the dead metaphors that guide his thought are literal, then salience should be the last thing that they lack.

Each of these theorists deliberately focuses on fairly straightforward metaphors that are obviously figurative. Such expressions are taken to be used with specific intentions,<sup>105</sup> to be interpreted with explicitly conscious results, or both. As I asserted above, this has the unwarranted consequence of excluding the most prevalent and interesting uses of metaphor, and demonstrates how little has actually been explained in their respective studies of the phenomenon. The breadth of the exclusion of these unconsciously employed, “dead,” metaphors from these studies is enormous, and makes up the lion’s share of the kinds of metaphors that are often employed in everyday discourse, poetry, literature, and, most importantly, in philosophy. With this in mind, it is illuminating to note the metaphorical sleight of hand by which this exclusion takes place. The justification according to which we are warranted in excluding the most common and prevalent kinds of metaphors is that these metaphors are dead and thus, presumably, demand no explanation.

Part of what is driving my interest in catachrestic and dead metaphors is the following observation: assuredly we speak in metaphor unconsciously and perhaps even *by accident* on a fairly regular basis. In light of this, how can it be taken seriously that a theory of metaphor would restrict itself to the description and analysis of only the *most deliberate* and *least common* uses? Or that by defining metaphor according to such acts, we will be best positioned to understand its function? For all of the thinkers so far reviewed, the prevailing theme is that metaphor is under

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<sup>105</sup>In Searle’s case, this use of intention should be read doubly. This is actually a fairly crucial problem for Searle. Under most circumstances, Searle contends that language has derived intentionality. A word or sentence’s meaning is intentional, but its intentionality is derived from basic conscious intentionality (which is a necessary aspect of consciousness). Interestingly, though, when it comes to speaker meaning and word/sentence meaning as it operates in his treatment of metaphor, there is a bit of a bait and switch as suddenly word/sentence meaning is basic and speaker meaning is secondary.

our conscious control and that, furthermore, its meaning/effects depend on some possible relationship to the clear, rational, literal language that constitutes “our” shared understanding and principles of interpretation. Interestingly enough, for these thinkers these dead metaphors are literal *because* we are unconscious of their use. *So while literality, in every other case, operates on the basis of the full clarity of semantic or cognitive content, an exception is to be found in those literal expressions that come from metaphors which have “died.”*

If we take Davidson’s conception of literality as our model, then dead metaphors should have clear, straightforward, first meanings. We might even take the previous sentence as an example. On Davidson’s view, the independent clause “*dead* metaphors should have *clear, straightforward, first meanings*” is perfectly literal. We might simply rewrite the sentence to mean something like “expressions that once had a familiar metaphorical effect but that are now used literally should have readily defined and understood, unambiguous, first meanings.” It seems to me that that we might interpret this easy substitution<sup>106</sup> in at least two different ways: 1) we might contend that the ease of substitution confirms that what we are dealing with are not metaphors at all, but literal expressions with an obvious metaphorical heritage. They no longer function metaphorically because they do not produce the kinds of conscious effects that are associated with live metaphors, but have come to be part of our familiar and readily defined vocabularies.<sup>107</sup> Alternatively, we might say that 2) that these are “live” metaphors that just also happen to have easily identifiable literal equivalents. On such an interpretation, the mere fact that there happens to be a literal alternative to a metaphorical expression does not negate the

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<sup>106</sup> Although, to be clear, Davidson rejects substitution theories of metaphor. His reading of the sentence in question would make the claim that “clear” “straightforward” function in these sentences perfectly literally, and hence have normal meanings. One doesn’t need to substitute the first sentence with the second in order to know what it means. Or, more to the point, any literal sentence used in substitution of *any* given metaphor, does not, strictly speaking, decipher the metaphor’s meaning.

<sup>107</sup>This is would be Davidson’s position.

figurative character of the metaphor. The sentences may be truth-functionally equivalent, but they are not equivalent in meaning.<sup>108</sup>

I endorse the latter view. I take this position largely because there are “dead” metaphors that function perfectly well as if they were literal, even when it is not possible to substitute them for anything that could reasonably be construed as literal, and even when no such alternative, non-metaphorical account can be given of them. Borrowing from Black, I will generally refer to these kinds of metaphors as catachrestic. Above all, what I want to convey in this term is the creative component of such metaphors. The catachrestic metaphor creates its object; it creates the conditions for meaningfulness in a way that literal language—if there is such a thing—could not. Central to my argument is the claim that meaning, as *content*, is a catachrestic metaphor, and one that has been wildly productive in the philosophy of language. It is, as we’ve seen and as we will further explore later in more detail, a central component of the implication complex of the metaphor of theory. As such I will argue that content, whether construed semantically or cognitively, functions as a theoretical place-holder that harbors no promise of a pure concept to come.<sup>109</sup> Without these metaphor(s), the meaning of literality becomes incoherent because literality, like metaphoricity, is the product of the unpredictable productivity of metaphor. In

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<sup>108</sup> This formulation marks a central distinction between my position and Davidson’s. For Davidson, truth-functional equivalence would equal equivalence in meaning. This, of course, puts the burden on me to come up with an alternative conception of meaning whose bases would not be in truth functions. I will begin to gesture toward how I will achieve this toward the end of chapter 2. I will further develop this overall response in part in chapter 4 but then more fully in chapter 5.

<sup>109</sup> We might think of this as explicitly contrary to Aristotle’s conception of metaphor. On his view, metaphors can function reasonably well as placeholders, so long as they facilitate understanding in service to the development of a rational concept that can take the place of the metaphor.

catachresis,<sup>110</sup> in the “death” of metaphor, meaning acquires a new kind of life, one that, I will argue, is inextricably linked to the life of the mind.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> “The trace’s “operation” (différance) is even, according to Derrida, better understood on the basis of the trope, catachresis, the forced extension of a term.” *Imagination and Chance* p. 17

<sup>111</sup> Note, here: the dual function of dead metaphor *as* catachresis. This duality is what constitutes Derrida’s employment of *usure* in “White Mythology” as both a wearing away and as an accumulation of worth through use, usury.

## Chapter II

### Of Death and Wellsprings: The Paradox of Dead Metaphor

#### ...But Merely as Metal...

“...that philosophy died *one day, within* history, or that it has always fed on its own agony, on the violent way it opens history by opposing itself to nonphilosophy, which is its past and concern, its death and wellspring; that beyond the death, or dying nature, of philosophy, perhaps even because of it, thought still has a future, or even, as is said today, is still entirely to come because of what philosophy has held in store; or, more strangely still, that the future itself has a future—all these are unanswerable questions. By right of birth, and for one time at least, these are problems put to philosophy as problems philosophy cannot resolve.<sup>112</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

The very moniker, dead metaphor, indicates a loss of something natural, essential, and most importantly, vital, from our forms of communication. It suggests a phenomenon which is doubly effacing: as metaphor, it indicates the loss of traditional, literal, meaning. More importantly, as *dead*, it marks the loss of the conscious intentions of the thinkers whose thoughts such tropes are supposed to convey (as, presumably, consciousness is inextricably linked to the *life* of language). This loss is perhaps best characterized in Nietzsche's famous essay, *On Truth and Lie in the Nonmoral Sense*. As is often the case with Nietzsche, in this essay he expresses a longing for philosophical attitudes and approaches to thinking that are better attuned to natural human sensibilities and that are more congruent with human drives and instincts.

He targets some characteristic trends in modern philosophy as antithetical to the function of these drives, with a particular interest in how philosophy has affected our general perceptions of the world. Among these trends are the penchant for, and interest in, developing eternal (ahistorical), rational, concepts (imaginatively decontextualized words). One of the key consequences of these trends, on Nietzsche's view, are their contributions to the belief in, and

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<sup>112</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*. “Violence and Metaphysics,” p. 79

propagation of, a world of illusory images. Over time, and through tradition, these images have become more readily available to thought than the natural world from which they have sprung. On his view, the birth, development, and finality of the philosophical concept is coextensive with the occlusion, forgetting, death, of the sensibilities from which they arise.

Each stage of this process is rooted in metaphorical movements for Nietzsche. In this, he is working from an expanded definition of metaphor that goes beyond more familiar accounts of its linguistic uses and roles. He tells us that metaphor operates as a primordial expressive capacity. Metaphor is a process of transformation and reinterpretation that exemplifies human perception in general; it is the basic mechanism through which we apprehend and experience the world. “First,” he writes, “to transfer a nerve stimulus into an image—first metaphor! The image again copied in a sound—second metaphor! And each time *a complete leap out of one sphere into an entirely new and different one.*”<sup>113</sup> This movement of translation and transposition is the product of the complex interplay among and between the many competing and conflicting drives which characterize the organization of the human animal.

These drives are general. They are the forces which compel and organize human activity, metabolism, and other life processes, including the sensory experiences by which humans familiarize themselves with the world and with themselves. For Nietzsche, there is a sense in which *speech is a subset of metaphor*—it is simply one among the many emergent expressions of the excess energy which is released in the exchanges and conflicts of our human drives. That said, speech is also an instinctive movement that opens up new spheres of human interaction, and it thereby offers new forms of creativity. Metaphor, then, is intimately tied up with—even to the

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<sup>113</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Untruth*, ed. Taylor Carman New York: 2010, Harper Perennial. p. 26. Italics mine. Hereafter, *OTU*. It is worth noting the metaphorical character of this definition of metaphor. In its dependence on the “complete leap out of one sphere into an entirely new and different one” it perfectly exemplifies what Derrida refers to as the metaphor of metaphor; Ricoeur also depends heavily on the very same metaphor.



point of being constitutive of—our most basic experiences and forms of understanding. In her book *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, Sara Koffman puts it in the following way:

Nietzsche speaks of an originary instinctive activity, an artistic force creating fictions. This allows man to remake the world in his image *so as to master it*: an anthropomorphic transposition which, in order to be effective, must necessarily be performed self-effacingly. Metaphorical activity is termed instinctive because it is unconscious, and because like all drives it seeks sole mastery of the world. It is not just a drive like any other; it could be called the general form of all drives.<sup>114</sup>

For Nietzsche, humans are poetic and artistic beings by nature. On one hand, language is simply one among the many creative transformations of the instinctive energy of human life. On the other hand, language is unique in that it is the primary creative mechanism by which we, as social beings, take hold of the world. It is through language that we are able to re-create the world in our own image. Fueled by the desire to master the multifarious and terribly complex world around us, we have found—serendipitously—that language affords us a unique form and degree of mastery.<sup>115</sup> In his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, he writes:

The right of lords to give names goes so far that we should allow ourselves to comprehend the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of those who rule: they say “this is such and such,” they seal each thing and happening with a sound and thus, as it were, take possession of it.<sup>116</sup>

Philosophical concepts, by most accounts, are meant to be the refined, clarified, and augmented revisions of such basic perceptions of the world. In the development of more and more precise vocabularies we can thus take greater and greater possession of the world around us.<sup>117</sup> The development of such vocabularies has classically been taken to be representative of our ever improving access to the world as it is.

Nietzsche's view runs in stark contrast to this classical, progressive, view. For him, the

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<sup>114</sup>Sarah Kofman. *Nietzsche and Metaphor*. trans. Duncan Large. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 25. Italics mine.

<sup>115</sup>In other words, *non-teleologically*—it is not to say that the *essence* or *purpose* of language is mastery, it has simply functioned largely, and consistently, in that capacity.

<sup>116</sup>*On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swenson p.11

<sup>117</sup>As the concept of the concept inevitably implies.

exemplary product of such “refined” vocabularies, the philosophical concept, implies an opposing path of development. Particularly in their formation, philosophical concepts demonstrably entail a limitation of our access to the world as it is. Above all else, they indicate the forgetting of the creative and artistic foundation of all human thought and perception. Beyond this, concept formation is not simply one more fabrication among others. It functions by eliding the individual uniqueness of objects, and with it, the particularity and originality of experience.

...every word becomes concept, not just when it is meant to serve as a kind of reminder of the single, absolutely individualized original experience to which it owes its emergence, but when it has to fit countless more or less similar—that is, strictly speaking, never equal, hence blatantly unequal—cases. Every concept arises by means of the equating of the unequal. Just as certain as it is that no one leaf is exactly the same as any other, so, too, it is certain that the concept *leaf* is formed by arbitrarily ignoring these individual differences, by forgetting what distinguishes one from the other, thus giving rise to the notion that there is in nature something other than leaves, something like “The Leaf” a kind of prototype according to which all leaves were woven, drawn, delineated, colored, crimped, painted, but by unskilled hands, so that no specimen turned out correctly or reliably as a true copy of the prototype.<sup>118</sup>

By extrapolation, one can readily see how the effort to generate and proliferate such concepts would radically change our experiences and uses of language. Furthermore, one can see that if such concepts were taken for the truth of the world in itself, our experience of the world would be radically altered. To the extent that philosophers are convinced that true knowledge is best characterized by the acquisition of a body of concepts which are *appropriate* to the world of objects, the “truth of the world” is multiply fabricated and finally explicitly *fictionalized*. This kind of broad transformation of worldview is precisely what Nietzsche has in mind when he gives his famous characterization of truth:

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations that have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, translated and embellished, and after long use, strike a people as fixed, canonical and binding: truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins that have lost their image and are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>OTU, p. 27-8

<sup>119</sup>OTU p. 29, translation altered.

Thus, what has often been taken for philosophical and conceptual rigor, is largely a consequence of a bad memory—which, for Nietzsche entails an active force in forgetting<sup>120</sup>—of the sensuous experiences which inevitably form the bases and components of our conscious thought. Among others, the concepts of “theory,” “idea,” and the concept of the “concept,” all call upon aspects of our visual and tactile experiences for their intelligibility, but this often goes unnoticed or unaddressed.<sup>121</sup> Thinking with and through such concepts, without being alert to the sensory experiences from which they are derived, leaves us with an impoverished form of thought, a form of thought bereft of the values which can only be established in particular transactions, and in our immediate, creative, exchanges.<sup>122</sup>

In the opening pages of “White Mythology,” Derrida presents his reader with a similar set of concerns by way of a review of an encounter between Aristos and Polyphilos, two characters in Anatole France’s *Garden of Epicurus*. Polyphilos, dissatisfied with the project of philosophy

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<sup>120</sup>*Genealogy*, Second Essay: “Forgetfulness is not mere *vis inertiae* as the superficial believe; rather it is an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of suppression, and is responsible for the fact that whatever we experience, learn, or take into ourselves enters just as little into our consciousness during the condition of digestion (one might call it “inanimation”) as does the entire thousand-fold process thought which the nourishing of our body, so-called “incorporation,” runs its course. To temporarily close the doors and windows of consciousness; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle with which our underworld of subservient organs works for and against each other; a little stillness, a little *tabula rasa* of consciousness so that there is again space for new things, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for ruling, foreseeing, predetermining (for our organism is set up oligarchically)—that is the use of this active forgetfulness, a doorkeeper as it were, an upholder of psychic order, of rest, of etiquette: from which one can immediately anticipate the degree to which there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present without forgetfulness.” *GM* p. 35

<sup>121</sup> See *MP* p. 224: “The difficulties we have just pointed out are accentuated with respect to the ‘archaic’ tropes which have given the determinations of a ‘natural’ language to the ‘founding’ concepts (*theoria, eidos, logos*, etc.). And the signs (words/concepts) from which this proposition is made, beginning with those of trope and *arkhe*, already have their own metaphorical charge. They are metaphorical, resisting every meta-metaphorics, the values of concept, foundation, and theory. And let us not insist upon the optic metaphor which opens up every theoretical point of view under the sun. *What is fundamental corresponds to the desire for a firm and ultimate ground, a terrain to build on, the earth as the support of an artificial structure.* (my italics)”

<sup>122</sup> According to Kofman, “As early as *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche judges the conceptual language of philosophy the most inappropriate to express the ‘truth of the world,’ since it is at three removes from it, simply a metaphor for a metaphor.” (p. 7) See also *Birth of Tragedy* section 4.

as he sees it, offers an interestingly similar description of the task of the metaphysician. He complains that:

...the Metaphysicians, when they make a language for themselves, are like knife grinders, who instead of knives and scissors, should put medals and coins to the grindstone to efface the exergue, the value and the head. When they have worked away till nothing is visible in their crown-pieces...they say...we have freed them from all limits of time and space; they are not worth five shillings anymore; they are of an inestimable value, and their exchange value is extended indefinitely.<sup>123</sup>

On this view, the metaphysician imagines that the effort she puts into analysis and clarification yields truths and concepts which exceed the limitations of time, space, and mere appearance. She thereby opens space for a universal language, a universal form of exchange that is appropriate to all circumstances, entering into all domains. Pursuing the meaning of the thing in itself, the metaphysician wants to see the coin in and of its own, proper, value. In its purity, the coin shines forth in its own metallic luster, its value is established by its own intrinsic properties; it is no longer of account as a coin, but *truly* and *purely* as metal.

While the metaphysician takes such a language as a triumph, Polyphilos' view, comparable to that of Nietzsche's, is that such a language exhibits a demonstrable loss. He continues: "It is obvious what they lose in the process; what they gain by it is not so immediately apparent."<sup>124</sup> The loss, Polyphilos says, is that of an original sensory encounter in nature, the immediate source of all human language, knowledge, and experience. It is only here, in the murkiness and contingency of human sensation and perception, that knowledge has its true, natural, value. It is only here that the transactional tools which fund experience—the thought and the word—have any currency. The metaphysician denies this value on the basis of the limited range of its use, opting instead for a discourse whose worth exceeds the confusions and contingencies associated with boundaries of time and space.

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<sup>123</sup> *MP* p. 210

<sup>124</sup> *MP* p. 210

Whether this actually constitutes a genuine gain is, again, not so immediately apparent. Polyphilos' metaphor suggests that it is precisely the contingent characteristics which mark the coin *as coin*. As an obvious example, one might consider that while the Dinar may be used in Algeria, its use is quite limited abroad. Weighted down with the limitations of history, politics, and geography, its exergue and image circumscribe not only the limit of its value as such, but also the limit of its purview. It is only on the basis of its appearance—its engraving and image—that it can be exchanged anywhere, even if its value is of limited range. Even if, as the metaphysician imagines, “inestimable value” means infinite value, it remains unclear how this could be established, and beyond this, how it could be *used*. Value is established *on the basis of use and exchange*. As such, there seems to be an inherent tension in the very idea of the *purity and ideality* of inherent value. If value is a function of the worth of an exchange, it is unclear how it could possibly be established outside of particular transactions.

Polyphilos, like Nietzsche, imagines and hopes for a kind of return to forms of thought and consciousness which can reactivate the role that the poetic and creative aspects of our thought and language can play in very particular circumstances. In both cases—although in different ways—the goal would be to restore an immediate appreciation for our relationship with our own forms of communication. In this, we might anticipate an effort to read philosophy backwards, in pursuit of a kind of “reverse metaphorization,” i.e., attempting to identify the original sensory and behavioral experiences according to which the metaphorical character of philosophical concepts were originally intelligible.<sup>125</sup> Such a project would open philosophy back up to its original sources and, presumably, to its original power and potentials. This is

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<sup>125</sup> I've taken this phrase from Giuseppe Stellardi's book, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought*. Amherst, New York: 2000. Humanity Books. p. 73. Hereafter, *HDPM*

Polyphilos' goal, and, in a qualified sense, Nietzsche's as well.<sup>126</sup> Derrida, however, rejects this strategy as fundamentally flawed. On his view, attempting to establish a foundation of philosophy *in metaphor*<sup>127</sup> is a "structural impossibility."<sup>128</sup> He writes that his project will be of a very different sort:

Here, instead of venturing into the prologomena to some future metaphoric, let us rather attempt to recognize in principle the condition for the impossibility of such a project. In its most impoverished, most abstract form, the limit would be the following: metaphor remains, in all its essential characteristics, a classical philosopheme, a metaphysical concept. It is therefore enveloped in the field that a general metaphorology of philosophy would seek to dominate.<sup>129</sup>

To take metaphor as a genuine starting point for rehabilitating the basic concepts of philosophy is to forget that "metaphor," itself, is a philosophical concept, and hence would be among that which presumably would be in need of rehabilitation. On this view, the very definition of metaphor only makes sense against the backdrop of the philosophical goal of univocity, and the nature of its formulation depends on the possibility of conceptual integrity in literal language, the classical—and perhaps *only*—basis upon which metaphor can be

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<sup>126</sup>The character Polyphilos seems to think that the return would be a straightforward return to something like the purity of our original forms of thought. Nietzsche, on the other hand, envisions a revivification of our natural *sensibilities* and *drives*. In other words, to the extent that we cannot disinherit our language nor the connotations which have permeated the various aspects of our heritage, we can only hope to re-direct our forms of thought to better serve the natural demands of human drives and instincts (which, have also been transformed by culture and history) ultimately in service to improving psychological health. For Nietzsche, the problem with metaphysics and the concepts upon which it rests is that it has altered Western thought to the point that philosophers would rather will the negation of all particularity and individuality than to relinquish the dream—the myth—of objectivity and univocity.

<sup>127</sup>In Rodolphe Gasché's *The Tain of The Mirror*, he writes the following: "rather than simply attempting to reverse the classical hierarchical opposition of the proper and the figural, the philosophical and the metaphoric, Derrida aims at something that is only very improperly called metaphoric without being proper in itself. Being no longer either metaphoric or literal, an allegorical illustration without a concept or a pure concept without a metaphoric scheme, the irreducible in question can no longer be referred to by the name of metaphor; indeed it is properly unnamable. As Derrida has argued in "The *Retrait* of Metaphor," the sort of metaphor in question is in withdrawal; it retires." p. 294

<sup>128</sup>See Leonard Lawlor, "A Little Daylight: A Reading of Derrida's 'White Mythology.'" *Man and World* 24, 1991 p.286. This is Lawlor's phrasing.

<sup>129</sup>*MP* p. 219 A philosopheme is a pre-critical determination, a dogmatic conceptual arrangement that organizes a starting point for philosophical analysis. We may characterize them as determinations that occasion the possibility of philosophical analysis. The key feature of a philosopheme is the possibility of making foundational distinctions by insisting on them and reinforcing them. On my model, a philosopheme functions like an amulet, or a stage setting which facilitates the ritual practice of philosophical analysis. As we will see, this is not unlike the role that the body plays in my system. This connection is not a coincidence.

distinguished.<sup>130</sup> For these reasons, attempting to reduce philosophical language to metaphor will call upon a whole range of other readily recognized philosophical concepts which are necessary for even identifying and defining what metaphors are. Further still, to make a final pronouncement on the status of meaning and the foundation of language would not only be to make of metaphor a foundational concept, it would be to state the essence of metaphor conceptually, and thus to raise a question concerning the primacy of its role *in metaphorical thought*. No matter how the problem is framed, it seems that we are left with a range of undecidable ambiguities when it comes to attempting to give a definitive account of the possible metaphorical origins of philosophy.

We are thus left in what appears to be an irresolvable problem. Are the origins of concepts inherently metaphorical, or are the foundations of any study of metaphor inevitably already conceptual? Could it be both? Read etymologically, it seems fairly clear that there is some sense in which many if not most philosophical concepts have metaphorical origins. For this reason, giving a fully theoretical and rigorous account of philosophy's conceptual foundations appears to be thwarted by philosophy's inevitable slide into metaphoricity. Alternatively, trying to give an account of philosophy on the basis of its metaphorical origins seems doomed from the

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<sup>130</sup> As we will see later, this definition plays a central role with the debate on metaphor between Derrida and Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur, wrongly, I think, reads Derrida to claim that the distinction between the metaphorical and the literal is *coextensive* with the classical, Platonic, distinction between the sensible and the intelligible. Ricoeur's reading goes on to suggest that it is only in exaggerating the centrality of this Platonic distinction that Derrida can even get his project off the ground. I will argue that Ricoeur misses the most important aspect of Derrida's assessment of metaphor's role in philosophy, *the metaphor of theory*. He focuses his responses to Derrida at too general a level by limiting his scope to the sensible/intelligible distinction. While I won't exactly argue that this strategy is generally problematic, it seems to me that with respect to the issue of metaphor's role in philosophy, failing to identify the kind of priority that Derrida attributes to philosophemes (of which, metaphor is central), skews his perspective. On my reading, metaphor is not coextensive (as others have suggested) with either the law of supplementarity nor with the kind of Platonism that Ricoeur attributes to Derrida. Metaphor is a more general phenomenon whose "intelligibility" and *conceptualization* may very well be an extant consequence of a kind of Platonism, but whose practical and historical employ precedes the effort of its own conceptualization. Likewise, the law of supplementarity is a general consequence of the many senses of equivocity whose articulations only make sense in opposition to the work of metaphysics.

start—from the very moment that one tries to define metaphor, one is already in pursuit of a conceptual definition. We are thus left hovering at this crucial impasse, one to which we have continually returned: because of the inevitable equivocality of metaphor, and the metaphorical character of all philosophical concepts, there can be no properly conceptual, philosophical, or univocal definition of metaphor. Nor can there be any talk of strictly metaphorical origins for philosophical concepts because the difficulty of this problem is exaggerated further once any such attempted definition is taken to encapsulate philosophy in general. As Derrida puts it:

Metaphor has been issued from a network of philosophemes which themselves correspond to tropes or to figures, and these philosophemes are contemporaneous to or in systematic solidarity with these tropes or figures. This stratum of “tutelary” tropes, the layer of “primary” philosophemes (assuming that the quotation marks will serve as a sufficient precaution here), cannot be dominated. It cannot dominate itself, cannot be dominated by what it itself has engendered, has made to grow on its own soil, supported on its own base. Therefore, it gets “carried away” each time that one of its products—here, the concept of metaphor—attempts in vain to include under its own law the totality of the field to which the product belongs.<sup>131</sup>

These inescapable conditions are regularly on display in various texts in which philosophically characterizing metaphor is at issue. These “foundational,” “primary” *philosophemes* are interlocked and yet they flow with and through one another. They call out to one another in ways that cannot be neatly ordered, regulated, or explained away, and any careful analysis of their movements will simply yield more movements, and more turns. Among the many reasons for this is the aforementioned fact that even the concept of metaphor is what some would call a “dead” metaphor. Its function implies transference, transposition, and the carrying of meanings into new contexts. Importantly, it is also a very productive catachrestic metaphor, and one whose active contribution is, in some cases, every bit as salient as the metaphor of theory. It is also worth noting that its use has yielded a significant return in spite of its presumed death.

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<sup>131</sup>*MP* p. 219-220



## The Rule of Watchmen

“Metaphors, tropes, and figural language in general have been a perennial problem and, at times, a recognized source of embarrassment for philosophical discourse and, by extension, for all discursive uses of language including historiography and literary analysis. It appears that philosophy either has to give up its own constitutive claim to rigor in order to come to terms with the figurality of its language or that it has to free itself from figuration altogether. And if the latter is considered impossible, philosophy could at least learn to control figuration by keeping it, so to speak, in its place, by delimiting the boundaries of its influence and thus restricting the epistemological damage that it may cause...thus, it is customary to assume that the common sense of empirical British philosophy owes much of its superiority over certain continental metaphysical excesses to its ability to circumscribe, as its own style and decorum demonstrate, the potentially disruptive power of rhetoric.”<sup>132</sup>

—Paul de Man

Given the positions we reviewed in the last chapter (particularly with Searle and Davidson), one might imagine that dead metaphors were rare, anomalous, or somehow extraneous. This, however, is simply not the case. In fact, including the metaphor of metaphor, such dead metaphors are central among the most common forms of communication, among the most common statements uttered, among the most common expressions written. Further still, it appears to be the case that such metaphors are inordinately represented in philosophical discourse, and this is the case in spite of the often concerted effort aimed at their excision. In this section, I will begin to explore the topic of why this should be the case. In the next section, I will attempt to answer a number of interrelated questions: 1). What claims on philosophy does the apparent prevalence of “dead” metaphor in its text entail? 2). In light of this prevalence, is it clear that there is an essential difference between philosophical and poetic discourse? 3). If so, how can this difference be established? 4). If not, how should we characterize the isolation and exclusion—the focused effort at obliteration—of such metaphors in philosophical discourse? If the distinction is not a theoretical necessity, what other origins might it have? What other purposes might it serve? What advantages might this tendency afford philosophical theory in general?

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<sup>132</sup>Paul de Man, “The Epistemology of Metaphor” in *On Metaphor* p. 11

The available responses to these questions tend to go hand and hand, as the basic definition of metaphor and, hence, dead metaphor will set the frame of reference through which we might begin to look for answers. What is centrally at issue is how to characterize what appears to be the *inescapably* metaphorical character of philosophical discourse. At one extreme, the seemingly inherent metaphoricity of philosophy might be seen generally to thwart the possibility of establishing the classical distinctions between philosophical/literal/conceptual discourse on one hand, and rhetorical/figurative/poetic discourse on the other. One may take philosophy to be intrinsically poetic, or metaphorical all the way down (as in the Nietzschean view, for example), representing a kind of forgotten, or in some cases, refined, form of poetry that, try as it might, can never break from its rhetorical origins. On such a view, the evidence for this position is to be found in the text of philosophy itself; as we've repeatedly seen, philosophical discourse is rife with metaphors, and it is often the case that the most central concepts which guide a text's organization are undeniably metaphorical, at least in their roots. Coupled with this is the further crucial twist that the conditions of stability that persistently anchor the possibility of univocity are illusions. They are illusions which are supported by the force of metaphors—and dead metaphors, at that.<sup>133</sup>

On the other hand, one might argue that the death of a metaphor indicates a profound shift in which the possibility of philosophy is announced in the emergence of a fully formed, rational, philosophical concept. On this view, the death, or dying nature, of metaphors can be viewed as a process of maturation from a purely subjective and figurative discourse to a more objective and precise kind of communication which is capable of stating the nature of the being

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<sup>133</sup> As I've already argued, the mechanism of reference and literal meaning is clearly dependent on the spatial-motor metaphors of containment and transport. Later, I will return to Searle's conception of mind and further identify the spatial metaphors which support his theory of self-present consciousness, and hence the derived intentionality that he claims for literal language.

of, and relations between, the real objects of a shared experience. Generally, these are viewed as aspects of the same process: what is lost in the aesthetic, sensuous, and subjective value of the poetic, is gained in the development of the rational, intelligible, objective, and cognitive. On balance, we gain enormously in the power of thought on the basis of the conceptual employ of metaphors whose poetic force no longer registers as relevant or meaningful; one might say that the murky sensory origins, which are a hindrance to thought, are lost in the exchange for the truth of the philosophical concept. Beyond this, in the production of new conceptual vocabularies, new forms of thought are made available, which is the essence of the unique practice of philosophy.

These two starting points, and the broad perspectives they entail, are nowhere more directly in conversation than in the exchange concerning the status of metaphor in philosophy between Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur. This encounter primarily unfolds over the course of three texts (“White Mythology,” *The Rule of Metaphor*, and “The Retrait of Metaphor”), and the stakes of this debate, so it seems, are nothing less than the status and purview of philosophy in general. At issue is the very general consideration of whether or not philosophy constitutes a unique kind of discourse with its own unique kinds of objects and inquiry. We’ve already seen that for Derrida this question must be answered in the negative; the metaphoricity, and hence equivocity, of philosophical language leaves it incapable of fully achieving the standards of stability and order that conceptual analysis demands. Thus, from Derrida’s perspective, philosophy cannot authorize its own discourse, nor can it adequately state the boundaries of its own field; or rather, it can only authorize its own discourse and set forth the range of its own scope on the basis of an application of a complex set of metaphors coupled with the denial of its own inevitable metaphorical drift. As we’ve seen above, this denial is futile and always

incomplete: the metaphorical character of philosophy always manages to escape its death sentence.

With regard to the centrality of metaphor in philosophy, Ricoeur and Derrida are in agreement. However, with respect to its roles and functions in philosophy, the two couldn't be further apart. In principle, Ricoeur is committed to the position that philosophical discourse is fully autonomous from other kinds of discourse and that it is inevitably marked by its discontinuity, by its fundamental break, from other forms of communication. The relationship between poetic truth and conceptual truth marks this break in both a practical and theoretical sense. The philosophical act, for Ricoeur, is characterized by its unique intention and its unique aim: articulating the conditions of the possibility of the conceptual, and thus the articulation of a set of categories over which such concepts preside.<sup>134</sup> It is on the basis of this discontinuity that, according to Ricoeur, philosophy can achieve its goal of univocity. What is noteworthy about his conception of univocity, is that it is not meant to operate in a manner that Derrida so vigorously opposes. For Ricoeur, univocity does not imply finality, nor does it imply absolute truth. In fact, his position is just the opposite.

Philosophy, and the autonomy it implies, operates in the transitional spaces of discourse. Contexts, frames of reference, or, as Ricoeur puts it, "spheres of discourse" mark out specific—but developing—ranges of objects, phenomena, and their interrelations. These spheres are limited, and are coherent with some correlative practice, form of life, culture, etc. As these discursive and practical domains collide and intersect through human exchange and interaction, new forms of communication emerge which can preside over the consequences of these collisions; for example, the interaction between spheres of discourse may reveal new ways of

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<sup>134</sup> Lawlor (1988) p. 184

schematizing beings, and thus reorganizing perspectives on their interrelations and the practical circumstances in which they can be understood. As such, the task of the philosopher may be linked to the need to rethink beings and relations whose existence or integrity may be challenged in the emergence of new forms of life and/or new theoretical frames of reference. In the interanimation of spheres of discourse, the being of readily understood objects and phenomena can be thrown into disarray and confusion. In these transitional spaces, questions arise concerning the nature, the very being, of that which can be predicated in such unfamiliar and novel circumstances. Coming to understand what can be predicated of the being of objects, phenomena, and their relations, especially in such circumstances, is the very essence of philosophy and speculative discourse.

Speculative discourse is founded on this very intention of posing, answering, and reposing the question of being. Such is the nature of philosophy according to Ricoeur. It is only because of the uncertainty that arises in the confrontation between competing discourses, and the need to rethink the being and range of some set of phenomena becomes necessary. It is only because of the incongruous and relatively autonomous spheres of discourse that the emergence of such confusions are inevitable. This is why philosophy exists in the first place: to question, to reorganize, and to reprioritize the ordered relations of being when spheres of discourse collide. When discourses are in a condition of well-ordered, relatively stable, categories and conceptual determinants of being, predication is, on Ricoeur's terms, univocal.

This process also mirrors the general functioning of metaphor for Ricoeur. With respect to the nature of metaphor, what occupies his attention is how deviant predication—in the form of the obvious falsity, and sometimes nonsensical character, of metaphor—can nevertheless become intelligible and stable. His treatment begins to open up a new territory of analysis by beginning

to raise what I take to be an essential question, and one that Black explicitly forecloses: why some metaphors work and others do not. We might just as easily ask why some metaphors become familiar and others do not; and by extension, why some metaphors “live” and “die,” others are stillborn, and others seem to procreate and consistently generate new life. In Ricoeur’s own words:

The decisive feature is the semantic innovation, thanks to which a new pertinence, a new congruence, is established in such a way that the utterance “makes sense” as a whole. The *maker* of metaphors is this craftsman with verbal skill *who*, from an inconsistent utterance for a literal interpretation, draws a significant utterance for a new interpretation which deserves to be called metaphorical because it generates the metaphor not only as deviant but as acceptable. In other words, metaphorical meaning does not merely consist of a semantic clash but of the *new* predicative meaning which emerges from the collapse of the literal meaning, that is, from the collapse of the meaning which obtains if we rely only on the common or usual lexical values of our words. *The metaphor is not the enigma but the solution of the enigma.*<sup>135</sup>

It is on the basis of this process that Ricoeur dismisses Derrida’s treatment of metaphor and its role in philosophy. Derrida’s position fails to characterize metaphor adequately, particularly in terms of the consequences of relexicalization, the emergence of a “new congruence” and new understanding according to which the metaphor becomes intelligible. Without understanding this, his position cannot account for the specificity of metaphor’s function. To a large degree, this specificity consists in metaphor’s event-hood. In much the same way that Black’s interaction theory supposes, metaphor, for Ricoeur, is an interpretive event. It is an occurrence, a happening, and an act. This act depends on the lived experience of the metaphor maker and that of the maker’s audience. Understanding the process itself—the movement from lexical deviance which produces uncertainty, enigma, and confusion, to a new predicative assimilation, a new congruence—is essential for understanding metaphor in general and, *a fortiori*, metaphor’s role in philosophy.

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<sup>135</sup>Ricoeur, *On Metaphor*, p. 144 final italics mine.

The key to the predicative assimilation and the emergence of new semantic congruencies with respect to metaphor's role in philosophy, is the question of being. It is this question, and the overt intention that it harbors, that marks philosophy's unique distinction on Ricoeur's view. It is in the shock and misunderstanding of predicative deviance that the question of being must be posed, and it is in the seeking of new meaning and the effort at relexicalization that an answer to the question can be established. This movement, for Ricoeur, is the movement of philosophy. It is on this basis that philosophy breaks with all poetic and figurative forms of language. Poetry, and other forms of figurative language, have no such form and harbor no such intention. Even when they are meant to provoke the question, poetic metaphors are not meant to designate or establish the character and order of being. The unique work of philosophy is the work of establishing the order of concepts after the order of being. Metaphor's function in such a project emerges in the spaces where the order of being is badly understood or the order of concepts is in need of extension and/or reorientation. In either case, the goal is still the same: to state the nature, essence, and order of being. For Ricoeur, philosophy's autonomy lies in this unique philosophical intention.

The majority of his direct treatment of Derrida's conception of the role of metaphor in philosophy is presented in the eighth Chapter of his work, *The Rule of Metaphor*. The broad goal of that chapter is to characterize the kind of philosophical orientation which is implied by metaphor's general function. Again, Ricoeur maintains the autonomy of philosophical discourse, while at the same time recognizing the prevalence and productive power of metaphor. As such, part of his effort is defined by describing the ways in which philosophy achieves its autonomy, despite its apparent metaphoricity. The autonomy of speculative discourse is made possible by the philosophical act and its unique intention, and this is the *basis upon* which metaphor's drift

can be stalled and regulated. The question of being, inextricably linked to the philosophical act, ensures that equivocity yields no chaotic cascade-effect in philosophy and thus indicates no limit in the possibility of its concepts' ability to bear propositions. Being, though it can be said in many ways, nevertheless has a unifying character and foundation. The work of philosophy, on this view, is to state the nature and being of this foundation. To the extent that one is attempting to state the nature of being, one is limited by the predicative function—limited by the fact that not just *anything* can be predicated of being. Thus, the equivocal, according to Ricoeur, indicates a well-regulated polysemy, a drift in meaning whose intelligibility emerges only when drawn in relief from the ordered foundation of being.

It is in this narrow space that the important differences in these two thinkers' treatment of metaphor and its role in philosophy are most salient. As Ricoeur sees it, the danger of Derrida's position is that it reduces all philosophical concepts to metaphors. He thus renders them unable to serve philosophy's unique function in any serious capacity by virtue of their inevitable equivocity. This is unacceptable for Ricoeur. Although he endorses the view that there is "a relative pluralism of forms and levels of discourse" on his view, philosophical discourse is not simply one form of discourse among others.<sup>136</sup> While in the case of many forms communication, the plurality of discursive forms does not constitute a radical heterogeneity, philosophy—speculative discourse—functions on the basis of a principle of discontinuity that assures its specific autonomy.<sup>137</sup> Philosophy serves a unique role among the many varying forms of discourse. The metaphors that serve its purposes are different in kind from those that define the poetic. He writes:

The ordered equivocalness of being and poetic equivocalness move on radically distinct levels.  
*Philosophical discourse sets itself as the vigilant watchman overseeing the ordered extensions of*

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<sup>136</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor* p. 304

<sup>137</sup> *TRM* p. 304



*meaning*; against this background, the unfettered extensions of meaning in poetic discourse spring free.<sup>138</sup>

Philosophy, according to Ricoeur, serves as a “watchman” which, by virtue of its intention to pose and respond to the question of being, can preside over the organizational structure of competing discursive formations. Furthermore, it is only on the basis of the well-ordered extensions of meaning, facilitated and strengthened by philosophical discourse, that poetic discourse can even emerge to begin with. In other words, philosophical metaphors do not “spring free.” They are called back to the proper order of things by virtue of the philosophical act.

For the reasons mentioned above, and for a few which I will further develop later, Derrida’s position explicitly rejects the dependence on an anchoring or grounding function which might be attributed to any kind of philosophical act or intention. The centrality of intention depends on the reification of a self-present subject, a phenomenon that is always under suspicion in Derrida’s work.<sup>139</sup> On his view, any position that relies on such a phenomenon is inevitably linked with the kind of metaphysics he seeks to avoid. Unsurprisingly, it is precisely in this space that Ricoeur centers his most direct assault on Derrida’s position. It is Derrida’s conception of metaphysics that, for Ricoeur, demonstrates the Derridean misunderstanding or

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<sup>138</sup> *TRM* p. 308 italics mine.

<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, given the rhetoric, organization, and function often associated with the characterization and conceptualization of the self-present subject, I will argue that its persistence is owed to the fact that it is, fairly straightforwardly, a construct of catachrestic phenomena—a wildly productive set of dead metaphors. For now, this claim will have to remain broad, although it will be further elaborated and explicitly detailed in Chapter 5. It may be good enough to simply hint at the wide disparity of thinkers to whom we might attribute such a charge. For this purpose, the spatiality of Searle’s intentional subject might be juxtaposed with Nietzsche’s emergent internalized subject. Both depend on metaphors for their articulation and, beyond this, depend on the “death or dying nature” of metaphor for their presumed stability. The central difference between the two is perhaps more instructive than the similarities. For Searle, the intentional subject is not thought historically or symbolically. In other words, Searle seeks to indicate the universal character of human consciousness and to detail the necessary components of any conscious subject. Nietzsche, on the other hand, is alert to the grammatical and symbolic character of the subject, and is interested in describing the conditions for its emergence, formation, development, and possible dissolution. His claims to define its metaphorical nature are meant to demystify our allegiance to its existence as a kind of absolute, permanent, inevitable, human reality. Searle is not alert to the metaphorical character of his own conception; this is perhaps owing to the fact that it seems fairly clear that he would be forced to characterize any metaphorical allegiance in this regard as irrelevant based on the fact that such metaphors are “dead.”

misrepresentation of philosophy. On his view, Derrida's position only seems plausible if one accepts the unacceptable caricature that Derrida makes of philosophy, which he achieves by exaggerating the certainty of oppositions only to undermine them. If one does not accept such oversimplifications to begin with, the broad consequences of his perspective simply never get off the ground. Thus, part of Ricoeur's critique of "White Mythology" seeks to identify the specific simplifications that give Derrida the space from which to forward his position plausibly.

The four central assumptions that Ricoeur charges to Derrida are 1) his dependence on an oversimplified Platonism, in which the separation between the sensible and nonsensible centrally defines the range and scope of metaphysics; 2) his allegiance to a misunderstanding of Heidegger's conception of metaphor, which is an outgrowth of this simplistic conception of metaphysics, and is based on Heidegger's claim from *Der Satz Vom Grund*, that "The metaphorical exists only within the borders of metaphysics;" 3) an obsolete referential model of meaning which treats language nominally, and thus limits the possible definition of metaphor to simplistic substitutive theories and reinscribes, in spite of itself, "a metaphysics of the proper;" and 4) his dependence on the treatment of philosophical concepts as worn out metaphors, exemplified in his focus on the term *usure* in "White Mythology." The first two assumptions, on Ricoeur's view, are tightly connected. As he writes:

In the introduction I mentioned Heidegger's celebrated saying: "The metaphorical exists only within the metaphysical." This saying suggests that the trans-gression of meta-phor and that of meta-physics are but one and the *same transfer*. Several things are implied here: first, that the ontology implicit in the entire rhetorical tradition is that of Western 'metaphysics' of the Platonic or neo-platonic type, where the soul is transported from the visible world into the invisible world; second that the metaphorical means transfer from the proper sense to the figurative sense; finally, that both transfers constitute one and the same *Über-tragung*.<sup>140</sup>

In response to the first assumption, Ricoeur is largely dismissive, arguing that Heidegger's claim simply does not rise to the status of a philosophical thesis. Rather, when read in its proper

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<sup>140</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor* p. 331 first italics mine.

context, it becomes clear that Heidegger's claim is part of an effort to avert certain tendentious misreadings of his texts, misreadings whose putative platonic and metaphysical registers are established specifically on the basis of the particular metaphors under review. In other words, Ricoeur claims that Heidegger's goal is not to generally characterize metaphor, but that this remark is meant to respond to "a manner of casting metaphors as particular philosophical statements."<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, the particular statements under review are sensory in nature, e.g., "We *see* much and we *grasp* little (85);" "Our thought must *grasp* with *insight* what has been *heard*...thinking is a *grasping by the ear that grasps by sight*;" "*thinking is a hearing and a seeing*;" according to Ricoeur, Such statements should alert us to the fact that Heidegger's claim is meant to identify the status of these particular metaphors. Thus, the Derridean exaggeration of the sensible/intelligible distinction is, in this regard, a failure to recognize the specificity of the context of Heidegger's claim.

Secondly, Ricoeur reasons that yet a second context prefigures the meaning of Heidegger's claim, namely that Heidegger appears to be heading off potential objectors to his use of language here. He is preemptively responding to those who would charge that his assertions are *merely* metaphorical, that their intelligibility must be secondary, depending as they do first on the proper meanings of these terms which are drawn from their sensory origins. Thus, on Ricoeur's reading, Heidegger is responding to the very formulation of the problem: it is only within the scope of metaphysics—a metaphysics of proper, original, sensible meanings—that the uses to which he puts these terms could be denigrated as merely metaphorical. On the view that Heidegger is trying to avert, to say that "thinking is a hearing and a seeing," is to take a concept which is proper to the intelligible, and to understand it on the basis of sensory experiences which

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<sup>141</sup> TRM p. 333

cannot be properly applied to this field. As such, whatever is conveyed by such a claim is, at best, an indirect hint which may serve as a gesture toward a true, and properly articulated, philosophical claim. At worst it is a simple nonsense claim, conveying nothing at all. In either case, the statement is, on its own, obviously false. One must either accept its secondary status as metaphorical, or accept that it is an unintelligible claim.

It is only on the basis of the untenable position that posits “that hearing and seeing in the *proper sense* are of the ear and the eye,<sup>142</sup>”—as if these domains had, and maintained, their own natural and proper integrity—that this claim to metaphoricity can be made intelligible. The Heideggerian response to such a position, and its hypothetical proponent, is that this view clearly misses the fact that even our sensory experiences are never a simple reception of raw, uninterpreted, sensory information; they are not devoid of the interpretive components that would, presumably, characterize “the intelligible.” Thus, whatever one may take to be the proper domain of the visible or the audible is always already partially constituted in and by interpretation and comprehension; “the sensible” is already under the purview of the proper domain of intelligibility. This is particularly salient if we view the dichotomy from the perspective of the sensible: the supposed intellectual factors which are proper to mediating our experience of the sensible are always already in play, thus blurring the integrity of the distinction.<sup>143</sup> In this, the central claim concerning the nature of (these particular?) philosophical metaphors—that they are characterized by some kind of transfer from the sensible to the intelligible—is belied by the fact that such a transfer appears to be unnecessary or, more directly,

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<sup>142</sup> *TRM* p. 332 italics mine.

<sup>143</sup> While it may be “particularly *salient*” from the perspective of the sensible, the mutual interanimation between the sensible and intelligible is thoroughgoing and goes both ways. One of the general claims that motivates the entirety of this project is that the prevalence of metaphors in philosophy, and particularly those that rely heavily on human sensory experiences, are the most readily available evidence for the undeniable centrality of embodiment for human cognition and meaning making.

that the sense of *transference* seems reasonable only to the extent that we take seriously that the sensible and the intelligible already independently organize distinctive, self-contained, autonomous, spheres. Given his stated intentions, and his effort to use language according to his novel formulation,<sup>144</sup> Heidegger can make the claim that his statements are not metaphorical at all, as they involve no such transfers of meaning.<sup>145</sup> It is only on representational models of meaning—which are admittedly quite prevalent (and hence, on Heidegger’s view, an obstacle to comprehending language in its Being)—that the logic of transfer remains inextricable from metaphor’s definition and function.

In any case, on Ricoeur’s view, Heidegger’s claim is not what Derrida makes it out to be. In short, it is not a general claim about metaphors so much as it is a claim about his own use of language. For Ricoeur, it is therefore far more interesting to inquire into what Heidegger has to say as he interprets poets than it is to try to glean any insight into the nature of metaphor from his very few and sparse passing comments.<sup>146</sup> Accordingly, there is no major theory to be derived from Heidegger’s statement, and Derrida wrongly appropriates this claim in the service of yet another untenable position: the coextensivity between the sensible/intelligible distinction and the meaning of metaphysics in general. Of Derrida’s second assumption, Ricoeur has this to say:

Let us now consider the remaining assertion, which holds that the separation of the sensible and non-sensible is itself “at the root of the meaning of the term metaphysics, and has become a determining norm for Western thought” I am afraid that only a reading forced beyond any justification can make Western philosophy lie on this Procrustean bed.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Broadly speaking, Heidegger sought to rethink the tendency to treat language representationally, relying on both the distinctions between the sensible and intelligible, and some kind of correspondence relationship between word and object. “Heidegger’s response to this dichotomy was an attempt to evoke a certain orientation that allows language, in his words, “to speak itself” (*Sagen*). For it is only by this speech that Being can disclose itself. See Morny Joy, “Derrida and Ricoeur: A Case of Mistaken Identity (And Difference).” *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Oct., 1988), pp. 508-526 p. 509. Hereafter, “MI”

<sup>145</sup> One might simply question the logic of such a transfer: What, exactly, is being transferred? From where to where?

<sup>146</sup> *TRM* p. 333

<sup>147</sup> *TRM* p. 334

As Ricoeur turns his attention more directly to “White Mythology,” he hones his focus specifically on the distinctions that he wants to make between his and Derrida’s approaches. His first priority is to counter the Derridean claims concerning the general efficacy of dead metaphor in philosophy, he then wants to reassess the “deep-seated unity of metaphorical and analogical transfer of visible being and intelligible being.<sup>148</sup>” He thus questions the general status of dead metaphor, and subsequently what Max Black would call the implication complex of what, on Derrida’s reading, appear to be philosophy’s dead metaphors *par excellence*, those of truth, light, and the sun, identified in “White Mythology” as the heliotrope. For Ricoeur, the analysis of living metaphor, its efficacy and its function, is central to his project. With that in mind, he claims that Derrida’s emphasis on the role of dead metaphor in philosophy “moves counter to our entire effort.<sup>149</sup>”

### *Of Rebirth in Death*

“The need for this new articulation has undoubtedly been called for by Nietzsche’s discourse. It will have to provoke a displacement and an entire reinscription of the values of science and of truth, that is, of several others too...Such a redistribution would have to permit the definition of the “figure” which necessarily continues to give its “sign” to a “concept” after rectification, after abandoning a given model “which perhaps, after all, was only a metaphor.”<sup>150</sup>  
—Jacques Derrida

Concerning the function of dead metaphor in Derrida’s thought, Ricoeur seizes on what he takes to be the problematic use and dependence on *usure*, the wearing away of metaphor, particularly in/as the process of concept formation. Taking Derrida’s treatment of Hegel’s *Aesthetics* as a guide, Ricoeur draws out what he takes to be the central move in “White

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<sup>148</sup>TRM p. 336

<sup>149</sup>TRM p. 336

<sup>150</sup>MP p. 263

Mythology.” He suggests that Derrida misidentifies the proper point of emphasis in the relationship between metaphor and concept formation in the Hegelian *Aufhebung* of metaphor.

Now, Hegel employs the term *Aufhebung* to describe this ‘raising’ of sensible and worn away meaning into the spiritual meaning, which has become the proper expression. Where Hegel saw an innovation of meaning, Derrida sees only the wearing away of metaphor and a drift toward idealization resulting from the dissimulation of this metaphorical origin...<sup>151</sup>

He then equates this view with something like Nietzsche’s, suggesting that Derrida’s effort is to define some specific distinctive function that metaphor plays in philosophy—the dissimulation of the concept’s sensory origin—and consequently a distinctive response to this function that his work is meant to counter—a rehabilitation of philosophy’s metaphorical character.

The efficacy of dead metaphor takes on its full meaning, however, only when one establishes the connection between the *wearing away* that affects metaphor and the ascending movement that constitutes the formation of the concept. The wearing away of metaphor is dissimulated in the ‘raising’ of the concept (*Relève*, raising, is Derrida’s very apt translation of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*) [sublation, a transformation that partially cancels, a reinterpretation to a higher level]. ) *Henceforth, to revive metaphor is to unmask a concept.*<sup>152</sup>

Ricoeur interprets “White Mythology” as Derrida reading the entirety of the history of metaphysics as a mistake, one whose founding is interestingly and perhaps centrally exemplified in the movement of metaphor. This movement, the wearing away and forgetting of metaphors as the truth of the production of philosophical concepts, compels the belief that such metaphors may function in a way that is radically independent from both the philosophical intentions from which they emerged and the philosophical concerns that they are meant to articulate. From such a perspective, *unmasking* such a concept as a metaphor yields at least two major consequences:

- 1) that philosophy, at its very foundation, has an importantly unconscious range of function, and
- 2) that philosophy continues to develop according to the dynamics of its own poetic register, and thus, at least in part, irrespective of whatever conscious intentions are meant to preside over its goals, its categories, and its purposes. Confirmation of such a view would be particularly

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<sup>151</sup>TRM p. 338

<sup>152</sup>TRM p. 337 Final italics mine.

damaging to a position like Ricoeur's, since, on his view, philosophical discourse has its status and its autonomy on the basis of its *intended* purpose. The prospect of maintaining such a position wanes precisely to the degree that the unintended consequences of unconsciously employed metaphors can be granted a productive role in the development and function of philosophy.

For Ricoeur's conception of metaphor, lived experiences and *acts* of cognition play a central role. To this end, it is important to note that Ricoeur explicitly draws from Max Black's work on metaphor, attempting to augment and further develop his interaction theory with a focus on the events in cognition in which the components of discourse interact.<sup>153</sup> Meaning, for Ricoeur, *happens*. It is not a phenomenon that is attributable or assignable to, or somehow *inhering in*, words.<sup>154</sup> It is an event which occurs between interlocutors in moments of expression and comprehension.<sup>155</sup> As such, any theory of its meaning, (and meaning in general) must account for such exchanges, their temporal character, and the cognitive, imaginative, and interpretive work from which understanding issues. Thus, in his broad definition, the dichotomy

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<sup>153</sup> Black, again, refers to this in terms of cognitive content. Ricoeur, on the other hand, is rightly alert to the fact that characterizing this event itself requires a recognition and treatment of its complexity and inevitable polyvalence. He is consequently driven to develop a conceptual vocabulary for identifying the various aspects of such events, all of which are focused in what he terms "iconicity." As he puts it, the iconic event is the "non-verbal kernel of imagination, that is, imagery understood in the quasi-visual, quasi-auditory, quasi-tactile, quasi-olfactory sense." (See "MI," p. 521) Part of my position hinges on the sense that the metaphor of content would be particularly *inept* in Ricoeur's system. This is in large part a function of his sense that meaning is never final and precise. The tensional truth that he attributes to metaphor and poetry is inevitably a surplus of meaning; characterizing such meaning in terms of its containment or confinement within secure boundaries provides a model for understanding and reasoning that cannot accommodate the dynamism of metaphor. I contend (along with Derrida) that the dependence on the model of meaning which hinges on the metaphor of theory makes it impossible for philosophy to adequately cope with metaphor. Through focusing on iconicity and the imagination, Ricoeur largely escapes strict dependency on the metaphor of theory. As it may already be obvious, however, Ricoeur's whole system of thought depends on the centrality of the metaphor of metaphor.

<sup>154</sup> Although, it is worth noting that much of the work of *The Rule of Metaphor* is dedicated to developing a theory in which metaphorical meaning can only be identified at the level of *sentences in context*, with reference to the tension between discursive spheres.

<sup>155</sup> We might note here that Ricoeur's position seems equipped to offer a response to Searle's incredulity with respect to the interaction theory. When Searle asks "What interacts with what?" Ricoeur is able to easily respond that people interact with people. Since the components of the interaction are not meanings as discrete contents, Searle's response to the interaction theory has less impact on Ricoeur's position than it does on Black's.



that marks his assessment of metaphor does not track the common literal/figurative distinction that we've seen to be so central to most other theories of meaning. When dealing with meaning more generally, Ricoeur contends that if there is something like the literal or proper meaning of a word, then it should be understood in terms of regular and familiar use rather than in terms of definite meaning. Generally, he emphasizes that the relevant distinction is between familiar and unfamiliar uses, pertinence and impertinence. In metaphorical meaning, what is of concern is the tension that emerges in the use of language whose comprehension depends on the double movement of deviant predication and re-lexicalization which is at the heart of all metaphorical discourse.

The primary advantage that Ricoeur's position affords is, at the very least, a different way of organizing the meaning of deviance in metaphorical language. Unlike the majority of thinkers who treat this problem, for Ricoeur, the opposition between the figurative and the literal is primarily a functional, and only secondarily a theoretical, distinction. In other words, the primacy and centrality that we've seen associated with the literal, in terms of temporal origins or theoretical foundations, is *almost* nowhere to be found in his work on metaphor. This would appear to prevent the need to establish a definite conceptual delimitation between "the literal" and "the metaphorical." What otherwise serves as a valuable proxy for this distinction, or perhaps even a link to the broader discourse on this topic would be the distinction between the pertinent and the impertinent, the familiar and the novel; ultimately, these distinctions give way to what is an even more interesting distinction in this conversation, the actual and the possible.

What is noteworthy is that in his general assessment of metaphor, he explicitly emphasizes the new congruence and the resumption of pertinence according to which metaphoricality functions. He even goes so far as to claim that a new figure of speech "*deserves to*

*be called metaphorical because* it generates the metaphor not only as deviant but as acceptable.<sup>156</sup> It is only when faced with the prospect of the efficacy of dead metaphor that Ricoeur sees fit to emphasize, not only the centrality of the distinction between the figurative and the literal, but of the suddenly *one-sided* deviance or impertinence that he otherwise takes pains to avert. In this, he takes the position on dead metaphor that is prevalent among the other theorists we've reviewed:

The hypothesis to the effect that worn-out metaphor possesses a specific fecundity is strongly contested by the semantic analysis developed in the preceding studies. This analysis leans towards the position that dead metaphors are no longer metaphors, but instead are associated with literal meaning, extending its polysemy. *The criterion of delimitation is clear: the metaphorical sense of a word presupposes contrast with a literal sense; as predicate, this contrasting sense transgresses semantic pertinence.*<sup>157</sup>

He thus straightforwardly endorses the centrality of the distinction between the literal and metaphorical senses of words, explicitly arguing that the integrity of this distinction eliminates the efficacy of “the false enigma of worn-out metaphor.”<sup>158</sup> This stance, though, is interestingly problematic. Much in the same way that Searle's treatment of dead metaphor entails a conceptual bait and switch, Ricoeur reverses his take on the relationship between the literal and the metaphorical specifically, and uniquely, in the treatment of dead metaphors.

What he also shares with Searle, is tendency to imagine that philosophical discourse is centrally defined by intentions. Essential to Ricoeur's view is that philosophy entails and the clear, conscious, application of concepts in service to posing and answering the question of being. This virtually ensures that Ricoeur must need to minimize the poetic aspects of metaphor in philosophy. But what he cannot erase are the unconscious effects of metaphor in philosophy, and this sleight of hand will not help him. The problem with this shift should be apparent. Not

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<sup>156</sup> *On Metaphor* p. 144 italics mine.

<sup>157</sup> *TRM* p. 342

<sup>158</sup> *TRM* p. 343

only does he create a special definition for how dead metaphors must work, he does so while ignoring the fact that dead metaphors perfectly exemplify re-lexicalization, and thus indicate the production of new semantic congruencies. His position falters, even on his own terms, when he makes claim that any such metaphors are no longer metaphors. Again, on his view, metaphors, generally speaking, function on the basis of *both* deviance *and* relexicalization. As such, if Ricoeur wants to argue that dead metaphors have achieved relexicalization by becoming literal then he also has to argue, that dead metaphors no longer predicate in a deviant manner.<sup>159</sup> I contest this view on the basis of certain features of how such metaphors function in philosophy and more generally.

One thing that is worth noting in the function of dead metaphors is that their range of implication hinges on the deviant aspects of their predicative functions. In other words, the implication complexes of dead metaphors always retain the register of whatever constitutes their “deviant” uses and interpretations. On the other hand, it is often the case that whatever may constitute a predicative assimilation or new congruence of a dead metaphor is vague, uncertain, and indeterminate. This is a condition which should raise some suspicion concerning the status of the *relexicalization* of dead metaphors—and hence on the possibility of claiming that they are literal, or even intelligible for that matter. At the same time, this condition does not affect their deviance in any way.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> We might think of this as comparable, in some ways, to Davidson’s position that dead metaphors no longer produce the shock which is often mistaken for “metaphorical meaning.” This position should only be taken so far, though, since for Davidson what is at issue with metaphorical effect is not at all like predication. The positions are similar, however, in the sense that *whatever initiates the metaphor’s effect* is no longer active in the death of a metaphor.

<sup>160</sup> This difference signals further distinctions to be made between my position and Ricoeur’s. The terms of Ricoeur’s formulations might be a productive place to begin to explore. It seems to me that emphasizing the differences between *new congruence* and *relexicalization* might help to highlight a difference that makes an important difference here. To put it simply, an analysis that depends on “relexicalization” and or predicative assimilation will inevitably be semantic in character. “New congruence,” however, does not limit the scope of possible reasons for the ways in which a metaphor can be said to become familiar. It seems to me that his requirement that metaphors must both be deviant and *relexicalized* cannot be correct. Poetic metaphors, for example,

One way of broaching this topic is to consider what kinds of questions we can pose concerning such philosophical metaphors. We might ask ourselves if we can intelligently inquire into the brightness or the color of the light of reason. Similarly, we might wonder whether the problem with the prospect of “metaphorical meaning” and its supposed lack of “metaphorical content” say, in Davidson’s position, could be attributable to lack of space: words can’t contain two kinds of meaning at once, can they? Or maybe only big words can... Are we sure that discourses are spherical? Why not cubical? These are, of course, somewhat silly questions, but the fact that they seem incoherent or *misplaced* already begins to demonstrate my point. The “deviant” aspects of these dead metaphors can be identified in the inappropriateness of these questions. All the while, the status of the beings which can be literally predicated in these metaphors remains unclear. We might ask, with this in mind, how many very specific things we can say about either the light of reason, meaning as content, or spheres of discourse. Further, it is worth considering how many of these things can we say in *uncontroversially literal* ways. On the other hand, we might try to attempt to figure out what kinds of readily answerable questions we can ask of the light of reason, or of the content of words or of spheres of discourse. I think that such metaphors are, by most accounts, taken to be “dead.” But the fact that 1) it isn’t even clear that there are straightforward, readily intelligible, questions that we can reasonably pose of them, and that 2) the questions that we can easily pose appear to be nonsensical, suggests that the deviance of their predicative functions is still quite active.

If we think about the kinds of questions we might pose to dead metaphors, we need only consider the reasons that certain questions “cannot” be asked of literal predications. For example, if I ask “What color is gravity?” or if I inquire about how bright it is, the reason that it is an

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are often never relexicalized within any familiar discourse. But they cannot, for that reason, be disqualified as metaphors.

unreasonable question isn't that I have taken the concept *in the wrong way*; it is because I have fundamentally misunderstood the concept. By contrast, the questions I've posed above, concerning philosophy's prevalent dead metaphors, are unreasonable precisely because I *am* taking the use of the terms and their predications *in the wrong way*. These questions do not fail as a consequence of a general misunderstanding of the predications being made. These questions fail *as a consequence of not recognizing the deviant uses which make these terms metaphorical to begin with*. On this basis, any claim that dead metaphors no longer deviantly predicate must be rejected.

What is not quite as obvious, is the character or status of their relexicalization. Have these metaphors really been relexicalized? Do they really admit of a recognizable congruence within the sphere of a familiar discourse? Focusing on the metaphor of meaning as content: does the implication complex of this metaphor mark out a clearly literal or even relatively univocal<sup>161</sup> space of discourse? As we've seen in the work of Black and Davidson, there isn't even agreement between them in their competing uses of the metaphor. Again, according to my argument, what this implies is that the value derived from the deviant character of these metaphors of containment is retained and relatively easy to identify while the supposed relexicalization of the term simply has no single, clear, delimitable, literal, range of application: it should be noted that in its familiar uses *content* can be cognitive, semantic, representational, emotional, spiritual, etc.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> This is unclear even in Ricoeur's less demanding conception of univocity.

<sup>162</sup> It is important to note that these various and competing uses of "content" or any of the other metaphors of this type cannot be considered simply to be homonyms. Presumably, such a claim would be in accord with Davidson's position. Against such a position I will argue that the fact that such metaphors generate analogous implication complexes, in spite of the fact that they intend to mark out a different range of beings, proves that it is far more than a name that such metaphors share.

The point of this argument, again, is to point out that, even on the basis of Ricoeur's own formulation, there is no coherent way to forestall the efficacy of dead metaphor. For Ricoeur, dead metaphors are no longer metaphors, they are literal. On his view, this should imply, at the very least, that they are simply no longer deviant, and that furthermore, to the extent that they are predicative, they predicate in a direct and literal way. This position simply cannot be accepted since it is a fairly simple exercise to show that A) dead metaphors are clearly still "deviant" and that B) whatever would constitute the literality of a dead metaphor is too vague and indeterminate to even qualify as literal in the first place. Ricoeur, though, has some recourse against this final assertion. In his attempt to respond to what he takes to be Derrida's misreading of Hegel's treatment of metaphor, he gives a reading of what Hegel's account achieves and what should be understood about the wearing away of the sensible in the formation of legitimate philosophical concepts. He writes:

What must be realized is precisely that giving up sensible meaning does not simply give us an improper expression *but rather a proper expression on the conceptual level*. The conversion of this process of wearing away into thought is not the wearing away itself. If these two operations were not distinct, we could not even speak of the concept of wearing away, nor of the concept of metaphor; in truth there could be no philosophical terms. *That there are philosophical terms is due to the fact that a concept can be active as thought in a metaphor which is itself dead*. What Hegel precisely conceived was this life of the concept in the death of the metaphor.<sup>163</sup>

On one level, this strikes me as correct. However, it still signals an irresolvable tension between Ricoeur's conception of dead metaphor and what is often fairly evident to its function. To put it directly: what remains active in a dead metaphor may very well be "thought," but it is not conscious thought, nor is it intention. Hence, such concepts are not properly speculative in the way that Ricoeur asserts that philosophical concepts must be.

This point is powerfully exemplified in considering the nature and development of the implication complexes of dead metaphors. Implication complexes call on the deviant aspects of

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<sup>163</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 346. Italics mine.

metaphoricity (what we might, for simplicity's sake, equate with the "figurative aspects of metaphoricity") for their production and comprehension. In other words, the extent to which metaphors can open new perspectives and generate broad, developing, meaning has nothing at all to do with the intention of the metaphor maker, nor referential fields that such tropes are meant to illuminate. It is on the basis of the connotations of deviant predications, and not on the basis of the being, range, or organization of objects/phenomena that metaphors are meant to articulate, that they generate their sets of implications. This can be seen in the generation of new philosophical terms that appear to develop on the basis of what we might call root metaphors (or, in Derrida's parlance, philosophemes). While it might not be entirely clear what relationship there may be between knowledge and light, it is fairly clear that the extension of this metaphor has managed to thoroughly pervade philosophical discourse and it is no less present in common sense vocabularies. In other words, we might argue that the relexicalization of the heliotrope has simply never been achieved, despite, and perhaps owing to, the fact of its many varied, competing, and perhaps conflicting, applications. Furthermore, this metaphor, and its associated implications and extensions, seems to have generated further associated metaphors: knowing is regularly thought in terms of seeing, arguments can be clear or murky, when judging the intellect, a person can be bright or dull, etc.

The crucial point of this argument is that these implications do not function on the basis of some conscious decision by "metaphor makers." Furthermore, they are rarely the product of some well-developed and deliberately employed skill. Rather, they are the consequence of patterns of reasoning that are organized on the basis of the figurative aspects of "dead" (read catachrestic) metaphors—metaphors that we are often at a loss to identify, that are called upon with little conscious intention, and that designate objects and phenomena that remain vague and

uncertain, and perhaps unreal. This last assertion, its possibility and likelihood, will remain a central concern for the rest of this project.<sup>164</sup> It is related to the phenomenon of catachresis and the role that it plays in the development and intelligibility of philosophical concepts. For now, it may be worth closely considering what Ricoeur thinks Hegel's insight actually identifies.

For Ricoeur, the crucial insight is that in their philosophical uses, as a sensory metaphor loses the meaning proper to its perceptual field, it acquires "a proper expression on the conceptual level." But this claim raises more questions than it provides answers. What, *exactly*, is the conceptual level? Why is it a *level*? Is it related to the *raising up* of the concept? Is it because the conceptual is *elevated*?<sup>165</sup> What does height have to do with anything? Provided that we can say something intelligible about the conceptual level, how do we know when predication is proper on this level? When it is improper? Is there a definite way to tell the difference between proper and improper predication at the conceptual level?<sup>166</sup> Is it possible to predicate properly on a sensory level and on the conceptual level at the same time, say, twice-proper predication? Without going into too much detail at the moment, I will allude to my general theory of metaphor by conjecturing that the answers to these questions have no relationship to any independent phenomena or field of reference at all. The possible responses to these questions will not, properly speaking, be answers at all. They will be extensions of a metaphorical implication complex, the development of a poetic response on the basis of the available figures under consideration. The conditions of inquiry and the conditions of response are all created by

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<sup>164</sup> Consider Davidson's lateral persistence in denouncing the claim that his conception of meaning implies some kind of "ghostly entities."

<sup>165</sup> Think *relève*, and beyond that, substance dualism.

<sup>166</sup> This question is especially relevant to consider with respect to Ricoeur's position, considering how important the interplay between deviance and congruence is for metaphors on the non-conceptual level.



the metaphors employed in their articulation. In short, these will be the movements of catachresis, of the straining metaphors.

I will close this section with a series of responses to the questions I introduced in the previous section: 1). What claims on philosophy does the apparent prevalence of “dead” metaphor in its text entail? 2). On the basis of this prevalence, is it clear that there is an essential difference between philosophical and poetic discourse? 3). If so, how can this difference be established? 4). If not, how should we characterize the isolation and seeming exclusion of such metaphors in philosophical discourse? If the distinction is not a theoretical necessity, what other purposes might it serve? What advantages might this tendency afford philosophical theory in general?

The answer to the first question is that the prevalence and placement of philosophy’s dead metaphors demonstrate that the importance and centrality of consciousness, intention, and deliberate use have got to be rethought at a fundamental level, and particularly so in the philosophy of language. Given that on one hand it isn’t entirely clear what one has “*in mind*” when one employs a dead metaphor, and on the other hand, dead metaphors are almost always used unconsciously to begin with, their prevalence in philosophy signals an important non-conscious register whose determined transformation and development appear to have more to do with the “containers” and the “vehicles” than they do with the “content.” In short, one of Derrida’s theses, that philosophical language “cannot dominate its own discourse,” is confirmed. Its metaphorical movements exceed the control of the deliberate efforts of philosophical thought, irrespective of intent.

The second question is a harder one to answer and it indicates one of the reasons that the course of this study must move away from semantic theories of meaning and more toward

pragmatic theories. The short answer is that there are important differences between philosophical metaphors and poetic metaphors, but this has more to do with how such metaphors function and what can be/has been achieved in them. It has less to do with *meaning* in some univocal sense (even if in Ricoeur's modest sense of the term), than it is a matter tracking our responses to discourse and the practical consequences of such responses. Hence, the answer to the third question is that the distinction between poetic and philosophical metaphors is not an issue which can be tracked in a metaphor's meaning, but rather in its use.<sup>167</sup> This shift in perspective is the basis for our shift in emphasis concerning what constitutes meaning in the first place. I will argue, broadly, that metaphor must be understood as exemplary of meaning, and that the role metaphor plays in philosophy, focuses and exaggerates the nature of its function. In short, if one sticks with the received nomenclature, it might be said that philosophical metaphors are "dead" metaphors or catachrestic metaphors, are those which have, as Black puts it, "plugged gaps in our vocabularies." This plugging, though, is not achieved exclusively *in the discourse* but also in the practical, and *embodied*, transformations that catachrestic metaphors initiate and facilitate.

It seems to me that Ricoeur is, at least in part, correct in his intuition about his distinction between deviance and congruence, even if he anchors it incorrectly by focusing on the lexical dimensions of congruence. With this in mind, I can at least provisionally agree that philosophical metaphors are concerned with the order of being in a way that poetic metaphors are not. But this

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<sup>167</sup> On the face of it, this may sound a bit like Davidson's position and, superficially, it is. The difference, though, is that on my view, all meaning—not just the metaphorical—is best thought of *exclusively* in terms of use, and more to the point, in terms of *human reaction and response*. The effect that Davidson identifies as the crucial property of metaphor demands further elaboration. On my view, it isn't enough to note the shocking and perhaps visceral aspect of metaphorical effect ("like a joke or a bump to the head"), one must make sense of how such a phenomenon comes to have lasting, relatively regular, effects (what Davidson is happy to call "meaning" so long as the effect registers "in the language"). This is why my view demands and explanation of bodily response to metaphors, and to language in general.

is best understood retrospectively, and in a way that does not depend on conscious intention.<sup>168</sup>

In short (and to be elaborated later), the difference between philosophical metaphors and poetic metaphors is the practical uptake that they acquire. To try to state my position in Ricoeur's terms, poetic metaphors do not achieve new congruencies. The shock of their deviance compels reflection, but these are reflections that do not ultimately lead to new theoretically relevant insights.<sup>169</sup> In other words, poetic metaphors are not taken up within narratively prescribed

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<sup>168</sup> This, even though metaphors are employed *prospectively*. Augmenting Ricoeur's formulation of metaphorical function, the key to understanding the difference between poetic and philosophical metaphors is not the intent of the speaker, rather, it is the function of the emerging new congruence, what we might call (to anticipate Austin) the *uptake*, of the metaphor. Poetic metaphors never achieve congruence, and hence, might be thought of as provocatively deviant, but not stable enough to become part of the familiar discourse, not stable enough to "die." Catachrestic metaphors, philosophical metaphors being an important subset of such metaphors, function because they produce stability in our practical and cognitive (cognitive is being used here with a wider application than something akin to "conscious thought" the brand of cognition I'm calling upon here must be an embodied cognition.) negotiation of unfamiliar phenomena and events by allowing us to respond to something with which we are already familiar *instead of* whatever said phenomena might actually be. This claim and position will be given a thorough exposition in chapters 4 & 5.

<sup>169</sup> As will become clearer as I proceed, theory must be thought of as one kind of linguistic practice among many. It doesn't track anything like "the conceptual," it doesn't harbor "thought" or "ideas." *It is simply meant to denote a relatively strict and well-regulated vocabulary*, its concomitant descriptions and explanations, and its associated forms of organized inquiry and practice. Philosophical discourse would be a specifically determined subset of theory. For our purposes, we might emphasize that philosophical theory has a unique starting point in its effort at organizing such a strict and well-regulated vocabulary. This is the starting point of metaphysics which entails, as Derrida puts it, "philosophy's unique thesis." This thesis, the metaphor of theory, includes a tacit description of the structure of its own discourse that compels the maintenance of the rigorous distinctions between the "thoughts" or "ideas," that which transmits them, the relevant fields or spheres in which they retain their pure efficacy, and the conscious intentional subject, the "watchman," whose vigilance can maintain the boundaries and integrity of philosophical discourse. The seeming ubiquity of the metaphor of content, of course, is among the central and lasting implications of the metaphor of theory.

As a matter of practical interpretation, I will argue that the metaphor of theory, by virtue of its implication complex, helps to compel a response to communicative acts as if they were univocal—as if they contained one, discrete, thing: a meaning, an essence, etc. Philosophical theories, then, would be those linguistic practices that take for granted that either this has been achieved or could be achieved in their discourse and practice. As such, the thinkers and speakers involved in such a practice (unconsciously?) take for granted that utterances are to be responded to according to their discrete contents (this is the nature of seriousness, the metaphysical attitude). With these considerations in mind, what I mean by implying that philosophical metaphors lead to "theoretically relevant insights" could be perhaps better characterized with theoretical communities in mind. We might say that philosophical metaphors are metaphors that, for any number of reasons, begin to be regularly employed by a community of speakers in order to facilitate an attempt to organize or maintain the organization of a relatively well-ordered and strictly disciplined form of discourse. A theoretically relevant insight would be any utterance which can be/has been taken up by a community of speakers that 1) extends, deepens, or increases discourse, 2) opens up new lines of inquiry which are taken to improve progress toward the goals of the community, 3) frames the discourse in such a way that problems can be resolved and lingering questions can be answered, or 4) transforms the overall make-up of the community by either expanding or contracting its membership based on the willingness of interlocutors to readily employ some set of "relevant" utterances within their inquiries, explanations, narrations, etc.

and/or theoretically regulated discursive practices, and do not become part of the regular, familiar, or authorized forms of discourse. Once poetic metaphors enter into and become centrally definitive to descriptive accounts of practical life (theoretically, or more broadly), they are no longer poetic, but this is not because they've become literal. It is because, as I will detail later, they have become instrumental in organizing practical inquiry and explanation.

To try to state my position in Davidson's terms, it seems to me that poetic metaphors may very well be like jokes or bumps to the head, and that they function by compelling a certain kind of reflection that depends on their visceral effects. However, a metaphor doesn't die because it loses such effects—quite the contrary. Metaphors “die” because the effects that they provoke prove to be consistently productive, and hence, they can enter into a readily recognized and practically interpretable discourse.<sup>170</sup> But, again, this does not mean that they have become literal. In fact what Davidson claims is lost in the death of a metaphor is actually intensified, developed, and elaborated in its practical uses.

So, the short answers, then are that 2) there is no *essential* difference between poetic and philosophical discourse, but there is a very important practical difference which, in response to 3), can be established on the basis of the practical fecundity and the *uptake* of certain metaphors within philosophical discourse. Poetic metaphors do not acquire uptake in the ways that philosophical metaphors do. From a perspective on meaning which focuses on words, sentences, and their combinations—a semantic approach—this difference is likely to appear to be simply a matter of chance and good luck.<sup>171</sup> On the other hand, it seems to me to be worth noting that in

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<sup>170</sup> On this basis I will hope to explain why, it seems to me, that once we rethink metaphoricity in general, that the metaphor of dead metaphor is particularly misleading.

<sup>171</sup> I will contrast my position with Black's, when in “Metaphor,” he writes that “There is, in general, no simple ‘ground’ for the necessary shifts of meaning—no blanket reason why some metaphors work and others fail” (p. 292). On my view, it is crucially important to recognize the sensory, *embodied*, “origins” of many, if not most (all?), philosophical metaphors. On this basis, I will argue that the “ground” for the efficacy of metaphor is bodily response. As we will see, this is also the ground of the efficacy of meaning in general, including that of the literal.

philosophy there is a distinct prevalence of embodied and sensory metaphors that appear to have “died off” into concepts. Minimally, I will argue that the preponderance of such metaphors suggests that their persistence goes beyond simple luck. We react and respond to them on the basis of their poetic effect,<sup>172</sup> and in some important cases *the locus of that response is designated by the metaphor itself*.<sup>173</sup> In all of the specific metaphors we’ve reviewed, and in a centrally important range of the metaphors that have had a lasting history in Western philosophy, the locus of metaphorical response is designated in practical, embodied, behaviors and in our sensory experience. In addition to words presumably *carrying a message*, *knowledge grasps* and *sees*, truth can be *revealed* or *hidden*, the intellectual is of a *higher* order than the sensible, and hence *concepts* can be *elevated*. For this reason, it seems to me that defining philosophical metaphors according to the practical sensory and embodied behaviors that the metaphors themselves designate will be essential to understanding metaphor’s role in philosophy.

The fourth and final question, I think, is perfectly exemplified in Ricoeur’s project. The advantage that can be gained in drawing the hard distinctions between the poetic and the philosophical is the possibility of thinking of philosophy’s discourse as being both autonomous and uniquely suited to the production of knowledge. He is thus able to convince himself that the indirect consequences of philosophical discourse—those that are not under the purview of conscious, deliberate, and intended thought—are not relevant to philosophy’s systems and to their development. This is the strategy that we’ve seen in the work of each of the thinkers who

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Although, as I will explain in further detail, the conditions of the organization of our responses to literal and figurative language do differ. In any event, the uptake of metaphor, on my view, does appear to be partially a matter of chance and good luck, just not *simply* so.

<sup>172</sup> To reiterate: on my position, this poetic effect is related to the shock of deviance that Ricoeur identifies in the recognition of metaphor and is, we might say, *strongly analogous* to the effect that Davidson attributes to metaphor.

<sup>173</sup> And now to answer a question that I put to Searle above: meaning is spatial only to the extent that meaning is about human responses in time and space. Meaning is located in the spaces where humans respond and react meaningfully. As it stands, this is obviously an incomplete definition, but it is one that I think can be fleshed out with the tools of speech act theory, so long as perlocution is taken seriously.

we are trying to put in conversation with Derrida's project. What signals the brilliance of Derrida's position is that its central terms, conditions, and stated consequences are demonstrably borne out in the arguments of some of the most prevalent theorists of language among his contemporaries. His argument presents a powerful diagnosis of this range of tendencies, the purposes that they serve, and the ironic efficacy of the dead metaphors whose metaphorical function each of these thinkers depends on and then either ignores, denies, or actively excludes.

Ricoeur's case is perhaps the most explicit: the very terminology, the basis upon which speculative discourse can demonstrate its autonomy, is importantly and clearly metaphorical. The "spheres of discourse" upon which Ricoeur's position so heavily relies is an obviously metaphorical formulation, and more centrally, it is the metaphorical formulation which is explicitly drawn upon in the metaphor of metaphor. They are bounded spaces: fields, domains, spheres, in which discourse is at home, in its proper place. It doesn't much matter that Ricoeur does not *intend* to articulate a discourse of the proper. The only sense in which one can make spheres of discourse intelligible is if the spheres can somehow maintain *their own* integrity and autonomy. The "clash" between said spheres can only be thought as the disruption of a presupposed unity and order.<sup>174</sup>

The Derridean point in response to this can be viewed in a few interrelated ways. On one hand, we might simply focus on the obvious sense that "spheres" and "fields" are irrevocably metaphorical and inevitably deviant *if one tries to delimit the contexts in which they should appear*. As such, we can make the plausible argument that these terms cannot be *properly* lexicalized: this is due to the fact that their metaphoricity guarantees that they can neither properly mark out their own domain, nor can they be isolated as belonging to an original or

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<sup>174</sup> Ricoeur says as much when he makes the claim that it is only on the basis of such collisions that philosophical language functions in the first place. (*RM* p. 304)

natural field. Another response could be that whatever is meant with these terms cannot be said literally and this is the reason that they are inevitably formulated metaphorically. The conclusion to be drawn on this point would be that it is only the metaphor, the figure and image evoked in this formulation that can compel the belief in the illusion of autonomy that Ricoeur calls for here.

Further still, we might assess this problem textually, by emphasizing the placement of these metaphors in Ricoeur's system. With this emphasis, it should be no surprise that this metaphor appears in precisely the point in the text where he seeks to identify the conditions of philosophy's mastery over discourse. On this view, we might highlight the claim in "White Mythology" that *philosophical metaphors inevitably promise more than they can deliver*. These metaphors, the metaphors of independent, autonomous, fields and spheres, are exemplary cases of the metaphor of metaphor that, according to Derrida, demonstrates that philosophy cannot exceed its metaphorical roots. It is precisely here—where Ricoeur makes his argument for "distanciation," for the autonomy of philosophical discourse—that these metaphors arise and are, furthermore, shown to be indispensable. These are the exact kinds of metaphors that Derrida anticipates in such cases. On this view, metaphor's silent and hidden presence appears to be the very condition for the possibility of philosophy.

Fundamentally, any such definition of metaphor would necessarily hinge on the sense that some terms have been *transported out of their own, natural, habitats* and subsequently *imported into* philosophy's proper domain. This is the metaphor of metaphor. With differing concerns and points of emphasis, both Derrida and Ricoeur suggest that this metaphor marks out the original domain of philosophy, establishing the narrative in which its mark of distinction—its ability to distinguish itself from all other domains, and on its insight concerning the appropriate boundaries of any other legitimate domain—becomes intelligible. This metaphor, and the

supposed boundaries it implies, functions plausibly as the basis for the self-understanding of theoretical discursive practices generally. Further, its associated implications—the self-contained integrity of spheres/domains/disciplines, and the proper spaces for specific forms of discourse—are crucial for defining the meaning of literality. This connection suggests, at the very least, a strong correlation between the demands and goals of philosophy in general and that of the pursuit/assumption of literality that we see as a pervasive focal point in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of language.

On Derrida's reading, the pursuit of the literal and its associated assumptions cannot survive the recognition that its foundations are demonstrably metaphorical. Furthermore, provided that the metaphor of theory is a general assumption, secretly modeling the structure of communication and discourse, its structure is continually put out of play, put out of question. It is, as it were, a lie in the non-moral sense. And thus we return to the sensibility that motivated Nietzsche and Polyphilos: that the literal and conceptual are simply the product of a metaphysical dream. There is only literal language because of the illusions by which we can imagine it to be so. We witness in this Derrida's broad claim that philosophy cannot dominate its own discourse, that philosophy cannot accommodate metaphor *philosophically*. To revisit the quote:

...it is impossible to dominate philosophical metaphors as such, *from the exterior*, by using a concept of metaphor which remains a philosophical product...for the same reason philosophy is deprived of what it provides itself. Its instruments belonging to its field, philosophy is incapable of dominating its general topology and metaphors. It could perceive its metaphors only around a blind spot or central deafness.<sup>175</sup>

Philosophy is deprived of what it provides itself. There can be no literality in concepts because once we ask what a concept is, we find only the desire for mastery that the metaphor of the

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<sup>175</sup>MP p. 228



concept inevitably denies. It is only by neutralizing the most common metaphors—by creating a blind spot and central deafness—that one can imagine treating metaphor as if it could be done from the outside, from some pure, non-metaphorical, language. If this position is right, then semantic theories of language are facing quite a fundamental problem. If the centrality of the concept of literality, which is so pervasively central to the goals and foundations of such theories are not—or worse, cannot be—distinguished from the inevitable poetic play of metaphor, then the project itself may be doomed to repeat its inevitable failures, ever conjuring new metaphors to support the dream of the literal. We will now turn to that dream to see if it can, within its own field, make its final stand.

## Chapter III

### Narrowing Our View: An Inquiry into the Meaning of “The Literal”

#### Narrowing Our View

“...the academic institution of philosophy has claimed its own autonomy, and practiced a disavowal with relation to its own language, what you call “literality” and writing in general; it thereby misrecognized the norms of its own discourse, the relations between speech and writing, the procedures of canonization of major or exemplary texts, and so forth. Those who protest against all these questions mean to protect a certain institutional authority of philosophy, in the form in which it was frozen at a given moment. By protecting themselves against these questions and against the transformations that the questions call for or suppose, *they are also protecting the institution against philosophy.*<sup>176</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

“I rely on *some* distinction between the metaphorical and the literal and I accept the truism (in a sense yet to be explicated) that the metaphorical depends on the literal. But I shall not defend either of these assumptions at this stage. For one thing, critics who baldly deny the distinction owe us, in my view, a clear statement of what they are denying; for another, I cannot yet clearly articulate the distinction I wish to draw without much more groundwork.<sup>177</sup>”

—Josef Stern

It is perhaps a bit overdue for me to mention that even beyond the thinkers we have reviewed, there is no single consistent, agreed upon, theoretical or conceptual accounts of the meaning of literality. This fact alone should be enough to warrant a reconsideration of what motivates the general impetus for maintaining its primacy. To this end, it is worth noting that in John Searle’s essay, “Metaphor,” he makes the bold assertion, perhaps confession, that “all” of the authors he has read on the subject of metaphor simply assume the meaning of the literal, and thus have no clear way of distinguishing the literal from the metaphorical.<sup>178</sup> Similarly, in his book *Metaphor in Context*, Josef Stern alerts us to the fact that “...the notion of the literal is in worse theoretical shape than the metaphorical.<sup>179</sup>” With these concerns in mind, I will argue from

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<sup>176</sup>Jacques Derrida, from “Is There a Philosophical Language?” in *Points...* p. 218. Italics mine.

<sup>177</sup>Josef Stern. *Metaphor in Context*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2000, p. 23 Hereafter, MIC

<sup>178</sup>*Metaphor and Thought* p. 85

<sup>179</sup>MIC p. 23

the general position that if semantic theory and philosophy of language cannot establish a consistent and *literal* conception of the literal, then we have no reason to believe that any theory of *anything* can be anchored in the primacy and centrality of the literal. The burden of proof is on those for whom the concept is central. Part of my reading of Derrida's treatment of metaphor is that it is meant to demonstrate why such proof will inevitably be lacking.

Nevertheless, the integrity of the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical functions prominently in virtually all of the literature on this phenomenon. After making what would seem to be a damning observation, one might expect that Searle would immediately forward his own position on the distinction. Instead, he merely gestures toward it, noting that such an endeavor would be "an extremely difficult, complex, and subtle problem."<sup>180</sup> And while, in another essay, "Literal Meaning," he puts forth some effort in rectifying this problem, even in his most direct treatment, the concept still does not receive the kind of attention that, in the context of defining the meaning of metaphor, it must *necessarily* receive. This necessity, again, stems from the notable fact that under every available definition of metaphor, its meaning or function somehow *depends on* one of the various conceptions of the meaning and function of often attributed to literal language. And while it seems to me that Searle sets the ball rolling in the right direction, his description ultimately falls short in that it fails to justify the need for any such distinction at all. In short, Searle's definition of the literal is not sufficiently distinct from his definition of the metaphorical. Like Searle, I am of the opinion that the character of this dependence must be explained rather than assumed. Unlike Searle, I am of the opinion that the distinction is, itself, problematic. Thus, I will be attempting to show that however one may characterize this distinction, evidence of the limitations of its application are pervasive.

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<sup>180</sup>*Metaphor and Thought* p. 85

While it is obvious that Searle is alert to the need to clearly define literal meaning, it is interesting to note, that he never actually does it. In “Literal Meaning,” he does more to demonstrate what literal meaning is not, than he even makes an effort to state clearly and concisely what literal meaning is. The crucial argument in this essay is that literal meaning cannot be construed in terms of context independence if only because the interpretation of any literal sentence always depends on a whole range of background assumptions which define any given sentence’s truth conditions and/or conditions of satisfaction. And while I generally concur with this position, it is not a definition of literality; it is an observation concerning the general conditions of language use and communication. Further, and more to the point, it is not an observation that applies to literal language in a way that it does not apply to metaphorical language, thus leaving his distinction undefined, and hence it fails to meet his own standards.

For my purposes, however, his contribution is nevertheless helpful for at least four reasons: 1) he offers a direct argument against semantic conceptions of meaning that depend on context independence, 2) the conditions of his analysis of the role of context and background assumptions for the stability of literality will give us occasion to take a second, more critical, look at his conception of metaphor, and 3) his argument gives us a bit of insight into some of the clear limitations of a semantic approach to thinking about language, by helping us to get clearer about what is appropriate to include and exclude in such an analysis of language. With these considerations in mind, I will provide an argument that I think can fill in some gaps between Searle’s and Davidson’s positions considering the meaning of meaning. In this, I will be able to offer a productive segue into both speech act theory, and the various near-misses in Searle’s “debate” with Derrida on the matter.

To recall, Searle is in agreement with Davidson's general rule of maintaining the distinction between speaker meaning and sentence meaning. Where he differs, is in the sense that whatever sentence meaning might be, it cannot be context independent. His strategy in this essay is to demonstrate, by way of a number of examples, how even the simplest sentences, those which seem to be uncontroversially literal, can still only be interpreted with respect to some set of assumptions or background conditions. The key, for Searle, is that no amount of specification or of making one's assumptions explicit would eliminate the need for further such assumptions. This is because the nature of this background is not and cannot be made to be properly part of the semantic structure of a sentence. He writes:

...I shall argue that for a large number of cases the notion of the literal meaning of a sentence only has application relative to a set of background assumptions, and furthermore these background assumptions are not all and could not all be realized in the semantic structure of the sentence in the way that presuppositions and indexically dependent elements of the sentence's truth conditions are realized in the semantic structure of the sentence.<sup>181</sup>

Thus, he argues, that any kind of absolute, context free, conception of literality will inevitably fail to register the factors which contribute to the determinations of a set of truth conditions. The key point here, for my purposes, is that on such a view there are nonsemantic sources for the stability of literality, and that thus, any complete study of literal language must have some way to account for the role which these factors must inevitably play in the function of literal language.

While I think that this has got to be right, it seems to me that this position also suggests that any model that primarily and/or exclusively attributes meanings to *words* or *sentences* will inevitably miss the mark, and inevitably exclude or ignore too much of what is integrally connected to communication in service to having a simplified system. Searle, nevertheless, surprisingly does want to retain the view that *literal meanings are properties of sentences*. This view strikes me as an oversimplification that doesn't match his overt claims. We might ask him if

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<sup>181</sup> "LM" p. 210

literal meanings are *affected by* background practices and assumptions, but such a question would seem to imply that literal meanings have some independent integrity that is subsequently altered by contexts, etc., a position he explicitly forecloses. It seems to me that on his model, literal meaning must be thought of as a product of an array of factors, from varying sources, and is therefore, at best, the product of a confluence of properties, most of which would not properties of sentences at all.

Beyond this, if we attribute meaning to sentences as some kind of property which can be affected, it would seem that various contexts would have various effects—even to the point where what counts as the literal meaning of a sentence in one context may come to mean something entirely different, and perhaps even the exact opposite, of what it may mean in another. In which case, the relationship between speaker meaning and sentence meaning, the intentional anchor of literal meaning, would be subject to modifications that would leave the possible integrity of intentionality constantly thwarted. These are claims that Searle wants to avoid, but, as I will argue, he cannot, so long as he retains his allegiance to the metaphor of theory, so long as he treats meaning as a property which inheres in, and is transported by, sentences.

Aside from this general problem, his position on this matter actually gives us yet another reason to trouble his claims regarding the relationship between the literal and the metaphorical. He writes:

The truth conditions of the sentence will vary with variations in these background assumptions; and given the absence or presence of some background assumptions the sentence does not have determinate truth conditions.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> “LM” p. 214

A sentence without determinate truth conditions, or even one with potentially fluctuating truth conditions, cannot serve as a *determinate* regulatory mechanism. If literal meaning only has its meaning relative to a set of background assumptions, then its presumed regulatory effect must be bound by such contextual concerns as well. As such, the literal would not function particularly well as a regulating force for the metaphorical. Specifically, we must consider that even if we agree with the claim that metaphorical sentences are somehow regulated by literal sentence meanings, that literal meaning cannot at all be viewed in terms of anything like a principle, an anchor, a stopping point, or a property. In fact, the case is exactly the opposite. Understanding literal meaning demands an analysis of some range<sup>183</sup> of the background assumptions and practices that comprise the contexts which can support the relative stability of literality. In which case, what we see in the possible meaning of literality would be better characterized in terms of an entryway or link to a broader, nonsemantic, analysis. In other words, the literal meaning that, for Searle, provides the regulatory support for the intelligibility of metaphor, cannot, again, be attributed to *sentences alone*. The range of assumptions and background practices in which a literal sentence's meaning can be understood, must always reach beyond the sentence, beyond any given speaker's intention, and, therefore, *by Searle's own specifications*, beyond anything that can be identified within the semantic structure of sentences. As we will see, the consequences of this position go far beyond what he intends to convey.

Davidson has gone at least one step beyond Searle in the sense that he does define what *he means* in using the term "literal." He has, I think, also given this definition the subtle and complex treatment that Searle rightly claims that it deserves, and is also alert to the complexity

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<sup>183</sup> This is a point to which we will return, and which is relevant for Derrida's reading of Austin's "total speech situation" as it will very quickly become evident that it is unclear how we could make sense of the scope of this range. It very quickly begins to look infinite.

and difficulty of the problem. In “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” He writes:

Here is a preliminary stab at characterizing what I have been calling literal meaning. The term is too incrustated with philosophical and other extras to do much work, so let me call what I am interested in first meaning. The concept applies to words and sentences as uttered by a particular speaker on a particular occasion. But if the occasion, the speaker, and the audience are ‘normal’ or ‘standard’ (in a sense not to be further explained here), then the first meaning of an utterance will be what should be found by consulting a dictionary based on actual usage (such as *Webster’s Third*). Roughly speaking, first meaning comes first in the order of interpretation.<sup>184</sup>

As Davidson does not see fit to further explain “standard” and “normal,” I will simply flag these terms for now as at least partially indicative of the obvious and inevitable non-semantic conditions of literal meaning.<sup>185</sup> This point aside, it is also worth noting the degree to which, with first meaning, he is trying to distance himself from much of the metaphysical baggage that, as I’ve been trying to argue, always accompanies attempts at defining literality. Elsewhere, he is careful to distance himself from any notion of meanings as “entities of some mysterious kind.”<sup>186</sup> Generally, concerning the purpose of a concept of meaning, he writes that “The point of the concept of linguistic meaning is to explain *what can be done with words*.”<sup>187</sup> When giving what is probably his most robust account regarding the nature of meaning, he offers an interesting and productive position. He writes:

It behoves us then to rephrase our demand on a satisfactory theory of meaning so as not to suggest that individual words must have meanings at all, in any sense that transcends the fact that they have a *systematic effect* on the meanings of the sentences in which they occur.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *TLH* p. 91 Although there are very important differences between the two approaches, the concept of first meaning is an interesting place to draw Derrida and Davidson closer together. In an effort to describe the concept of “doubling commentary,” which, for Derrida, seems to be an uncommon appeal to the integrity of traditional interpretations of texts (mentioned in *Of Grammatology* p. 158), Derrida writes “In short, what I sought to designate under the title of ‘doubling commentary’ is the ‘minimal’ deciphering of the ‘first’ pertinent or competent access to structures that are relatively stable (and hence destabilizable!), and from which the most venturesome questions and interpretations have to start: questions concerning conflicts, tensions, differences of force, hegemonies that have allowed such provisional installations to take place...On the other hand, if I have just prudently placed quotation marks around ‘minimal’ and ‘first,’ it is because I do not believe in the possibility of an absolute determination of the ‘minimal’ and of the ‘first.’” *LI* p. 145

<sup>185</sup> This is a point to which I will return in Chapter 4

<sup>186</sup> *ITI* p. 128

<sup>187</sup> *ITI* p. 255 “WMM”

<sup>188</sup> *ITI* p. 18, from “Truth and Meaning.” Elsewhere, in his essay “Radical Interpretation,” he is careful to characterize meaning such that no one would mistake him for claiming that “meaning” names or describes “*an entity* that is a meaning.” He wants to limit his definition to simply stating the conditions under which an utterance of a sentence is true.



In many ways, this position would seem to dispense with any allegiance to a model of meaning that would *depend* on the metaphor of theory. It also seems to be a straightforward repudiation of my preceding arguments regarding the implied efficacy of the metaphor of content for articulating his conception of meaning. If nothing else, it appears to qualify as a reasonably literal statement of the meaning of meaning.

Recall that his strategy in “What Metaphor Means” is to demonstrate that while metaphors have no special meaning beyond the literal, their effects are the product of the various uses to which literal language and its first meanings can be put. In the broadest sense, this aspect of his position is unsurprising. In fact, this position might be precisely what one would expect, given Davidson’s broad focus on the uses and effects of language. And yet, to the extent that this general conception of meaning is explicitly focused on the *uses* and *effects* of words, it should be quite evident that much of the import of the distinction between *meaning* and *effect* that is so central to the arguments in “What Metaphor Means” would seem to be put into question. In that essay he asserts that his account “depend(s) on the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do...metaphor belongs *exclusively to the domain of use*.<sup>189</sup>” While a metaphor may have an indeterminate number of uses and effects, none of these ought to be thought of as meanings. Interestingly enough, despite his general claims about meaning—that *meanings are the effects* that words have on a range of sentences and the inferential patterns associated with their *use*—when it comes to metaphors, meanings and effects have to be kept

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<sup>189</sup> *ITI* p. 247 italics mine. We might pose the simple—but I think damning—question here: What if words are *used* to produce *effects* on the *meanings* of sentences?

distinct so that metaphors can be characterized exclusively according to their effects and therefore *circumscribed exclusively within the domain of use*.<sup>190</sup>

What is centrally noteworthy, especially considering Derrida's position, is that this misdirection emerges precisely as he makes the effort to distinguish literal meaning from the metaphorical. For my purposes, Davidson's position presents a significant and productive tension. If we take him at his word, we are supposed to believe that those who seek to attribute meanings to metaphors, simply mistake the *effects* of metaphors for their *meanings*. This, I think, would be fair assertion, but only provided that we are certain that the effects of language in general are radically distinct from meanings; or that, at very least, there was a clear way to maintain this distinction given his general approach to communication and meaning. And in this regard, Davidson's position proves to be surprisingly ambivalent. It is not a trivial matter that this shift emerges precisely in his attempt to give an account of metaphor. If we accept his position, we are meant to agree that the virtue of a concept of meaning is that it tracks the effects that words have and the uses to which they can be put. At the same time, we must accept that there is something about the uses and effects of metaphor which is inherently unlike the uses and effects of literal language, and that therefore whatever kind of study may be available for inquiring into metaphor, it will not be a semantic theory.

Again, the uses and effects of metaphor have consequences for their speaker's/author's and interpreter's attention, but these consequences cannot, in any reasonable sense, be considered to be the *meanings* of said events, as he writes of the many failed theories of metaphors that he reviews that they mistake their goal:

Where they think they provide a method for deciphering an encoded content, they actually tell us (or try to tell us) something about the effects metaphors have on us. The common error is to fasten

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<sup>190</sup> Here, I offer a mini interpretation of the components of this phrasing. We might start by looking for a more literal way of phrasing this, say, "proscribed, exclusively, outside of the field of semantics."

on the contents of the thoughts a metaphor provokes and to read these contents into the metaphor itself.<sup>191</sup>

The mistake, again, is the belief that metaphors “have content” in the way that literal language does, and that that content can be attributed to, read into, or fastened onto the metaphor itself in the way that it can with literal language.<sup>192</sup> Here, the suspicion that Davidson’s conception of literality ultimately depends on metaphor reemerges, even if only negatively: what metaphors lack, is *content*, and it is a mistake to read such content into them. It is this absence which makes them unsuitable targets for the work of semantic theory. Here we see, rehearsed once again, the setting of philosophical boundaries with the use of a metaphor whose efficacy has been claimed to be irrelevant to the matters at hand. Davidson’s way of making this move is exceptionally subtle, and for that reason all the more effective: it is the *absence* of an otherwise *possibly present* phenomenon, *which is taken to be irrelevant anyway* and whose integrity depends on a “dead” metaphor for its articulation that sets the boundary. What we see here is precisely the trend that Derrida anticipates, although perhaps in an intensified form. In the face of the problems associated with characterizing metaphor, Davidson has to turn back on his generally minimalist attempts to characterize meaning.

What we see here, oddly enough, is that Davidson is in some sense right with the thesis of his essay. Metaphors do not have any special meaning beyond the literal. This is in large part, according to my hypothesis (as well as his own explicitly stated commitments), because language does not *have* literal meaning; it does, I will argue, operate according to literal *uses* to which it is frequently put. These uses, however, do not fix or assign meaning in any way that is

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<sup>191</sup> *ITI* p. 261 “WMM”

<sup>192</sup> We thus find ourselves in precisely the position that Davidson attributed to the problems of theories of metaphor. We can thus turn one of his own insights concerning “metaphorical meaning” against him, suggesting that he is explaining literality by simply “lodging its meaning” in the literal sentence. Wouldn’t this be like explaining why a pill puts you to sleep by saying it has dormative power?

distinct from the ways in which meaning can be fixed or assigned in metaphorical use.<sup>193</sup> Herein lurks the crux and ironic twist of the problem. In Davidson's treatment, metaphorical "meaning" is a function of a misunderstanding of its *uses* and its *effects*. On the other hand, literal meaning appears to come from some other, mysterious, source. Literal meaning also has its function in its *uses* and *effects*, it is just that its effects are *presumably not the product of a cause in any straightforward sense*.<sup>194</sup> In spite of himself, in the face of the prospect of metaphorical meaning, he treats literal meaning as if it were a property which can be lodged within a word, fully equipped with its own peculiar form of causality. It must be some other, *literal*, kind of cause which produces these effects. In this, it appears that while Davidson imagines that he disrupts the notion that there are different kinds of meanings, he simply reverses and resituates the locus of the mystery by relying upon different kinds of causality.

Meaning *is* content. *It is a message which is carried by a sentence*, it is just that metaphors do not have it. Here, the metaphor of theory returns, masked and with subtlety, but still performing its unique task. And in this particular case, most of our primary concerns converge: 1) the demand for the centrality, autonomy, and integrity of literal language, 2) the designation of the appropriate domain and purview of philosophy (of language, that it is semantics and semantics only), 3) the exclusion of metaphor from that domain, 4) the recourse to metaphor—that some expressions contain meaning and that others do not—in order to make the crucial and excluding distinction, and 5) the particular metaphors—the metaphor of theory, the metaphor of metaphor, and the metaphor of dead metaphor—all functioning in service to denying the meaning of metaphor.

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<sup>193</sup> This manner of meaning will be elaborated in chapter 5.

<sup>194</sup> It seems to me that if we are to take him at his word, then we must suspect that that he would detail the specific causal mechanism which produces this effect. Otherwise, as I will argue, the *effect* of literal meaning begins to sound metaphorical.

My general argument is that all of these odd twists and turns are a product of imagining that meanings can be attributed to words and sentences as if they are specific properties that have their own integrity that can be finally disambiguated, and that guarantees the possibility of univocal communication—this is all attributable to the joint functioning of the implication complexes of the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor. It is that property, the content, which is rigorously distinct from its mode of transport and that survives the sometimes murky complexity of communication. It is that very content, functioning properly within its own field, which ensures the possibility of literality, and it is that which persists through the translation of meaningful utterances. It is in this possibility that the philosophical dream of univocity lives on, but, as I will argue, only as a dream.

### Boundary Testing

“What we need, it seems to me, is some idea of the considerations that set the limits to conceptual contrast.<sup>195</sup>”  
—Donald Davidson

“With this problem of translation we will thus be dealing with nothing less than the problem of the *very passage into philosophy*.<sup>196</sup>”  
—Jacques Derrida

If, as Davidson claims, metaphor is the dreamwork of language, how does it stand with respect to our waking cognitive lives? One way to read his assertion is to assume that the strong intuitive distinction between the character of dream-states and waking-states also tracks our persistent theoretical distinction, that between the figurative, poetic, and metaphorical on one hand, and the conceptual, philosophical, and literal on the other. Dream-states are characterized by their inconsistent, unique, and perhaps anomalous contributions to human experience: the

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<sup>195</sup> *ITI* p. 184

<sup>196</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981. p. 72 italics mine.

breakdowns and transformation of the familiar order, physics, and arrangements of the recognizable world, the ever-present potential for discontinuous space and temporal non-linearity, the rapid-fire emergence and disappearances of threats and abilities, of limitations and of possibilities. Perhaps most important of all is the apparent incongruity between what one experiences as subjective states, and what is “actually occurring” in the real, objective, world. We might glean from this that dream-states are fundamentally figurative in character. At worst we may interpret them simply to give us a false experience that fleetingly and deceptively masquerades as reality; or perhaps they can be characterized as the jumbled misapplication of our perceptual and cognitive mechanisms as they struggle to interpret the minimal, though perhaps pervasive, sensory input of the dark pressure of sleep; at best they can be seen to be composed of images and symbols whose effective interpretation may yield some true insights into aspects of our waking experiences.

Waking states, on the other hand, can then be primarily characterized by their conscious cognitive character. They are typically thought to exemplify what is normal in human perception and cognition. Such states are, with good reason, thought to represent our most direct access to the world in which we live, and hence to the truth of our condition. Thus, whatever limitations and difficulties we may have in interpreting events and relations in our familiar macroscopic world, one assumes that any interpretation of one’s own experience at least has its origin in the one shared world of Davidson’s formulation. Any interpretation of any other kind of experience, will first depend on conscious, waking, cognition. Presumably, if we follow the implicit analogies which are imbedded in Davidson’s metaphor, we would characterize the literal as the waking life of language. By extension, we can easily draw the commonsense conclusion that

literal language, too, represents our most direct access to the world in which we live, and hence to the truth (or even various truths) of our condition.

If this interpretation is correct, and literal language provides our most direct access to the world as it is, the opening line of Davidson's famous essay on metaphor stands out as quite conspicuous: if metaphor is a dreamwork, providing indirect, tangential, or worse, *misdirected* perceptions of the one world, then why have recourse to metaphor to begin with? Why not just say something literal, something which enables consistent expression of things as they are? Is Davidson's claim true? Is it true to say that metaphor is the dreamwork of language? According to his own view, the claim is in fact plainly false, just like most other metaphors. What can be achieved, then, by opening an essay which seeks to set the record straight on the matters of the meaning, truth, and falsity of metaphor with a claim about the topic in discussion that is patently false?

His likely reply to such a question is worth noting not only because I think it is partially right in an important sense, but because I think that it is right *despite* his overall position. His answer is that while metaphors are usually false, they do, nevertheless, provoke a response in a listener that "nudge(s) us into noting" similarities.<sup>197</sup> Thus, on his view, this metaphor presumably compels us to notice the similarities between metaphors and dreamwork, by extension literality and the negotiation of normal waking consciousness, and, further, language and consciousness more generally.<sup>198</sup> This consequence of his metaphor, on his view, is simply

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<sup>197</sup>"WMM" in *ITI* p. 253

<sup>198</sup>This third pair, consciousness and language, may make for a synecdochical relationship as well. To the extent that language contributes to the character and structure of consciousness (especially to the extent that it provides a range of metaphors that allow initiates to think of consciousness in metaphorical ways: particularly metaphors of the *interiority* and the *singular central location* of consciousness [an exploration of which will occupy my attention in chapter 5, in connection with both Searle and Nietzsche]) it may be reasonably said that language is a part—and perhaps an integral part—of consciousness. Such a consideration makes the interpretation of this metaphor all the more difficult because the relationship between consciousness and language would be A) at best, established as part of the metaphor's implication complex. Such an interpretation would call upon Black's model, not Davidson's. B)

not its meaning. Recall that Davidson stands by the position that “metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more.<sup>199</sup>” This is as strong a case as could possibly be made for the centrality of literality and is precisely what makes Davidson’s work indispensable for my project. What is compelling here is what his position on metaphor implies about his overall treatment of meaning, both in terms of its specific claims and in terms of its stated range of application. His treatment of the impossibility of metaphorical meaning signals the appropriate range and value of semantic theory in general. In part, his purpose is to identify, at a very fundamental level, why the analysis of metaphors cannot fall under the purview of semantic theories.<sup>200</sup> This, accordingly, compels us to seek a broader understanding of his conception of literal meaning, which, according to his view, is the single basis upon which any use of language, including metaphor, rests.

While Davidson’s theory of language is, in his deliberate and explicit statements, pervasively marked by its emphasis on the uses and effects of language in an ongoing process of interpretation and negotiation between speakers and interpreters, the centrally defining component of any possible use, effect, or interpretation—literal meaning—surprisingly has no essential connection to the particular contexts in which such negotiations and interpretations take place. He argues that “literal meaning and literal truth conditions can be assigned to words and

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Furthermore, as this relationship is not an explicitly stated aspect of this metaphor, it seems plausible that it would not to even qualify as a metaphor according to Davidson’s use. Beyond this, if it did qualify on Davidson’s view, C) it becomes harder and harder to see what such a comparison would nudge us into noticing—in other words, it isn’t obvious that consciousness and language have some preexisting *similarity* that is not more aptly described as an *identity*. In other words, we may be forced extrapolate from Black’s and Ricoeur’s position in noting that this metaphorical connection may very well *have been created by the metaphor itself*.

<sup>199</sup> *ITI* p. 245

<sup>200</sup> To clarify: Davidson is denying *meaning* and the possibility of *truth conditions*, in his technical usage of the terms, to metaphors. He writes: “This is not to deny that there is such a thing as metaphorical truth, *only to deny it of sentences*. Metaphor does lead us to notice what might not otherwise be noticed, and there is no reason, I suppose, not to say these visions, thoughts, and feelings inspired by the metaphor are true or false.” *ITI* p. 257 “WMM” italics mine.



sentences apart from particular contexts of use.<sup>201</sup>” This claim and what it implies strike me as problematic for a number of reasons, but within the context of its own use, it is exceptionally revelatory. The full quote follows:

Once we understand a metaphor we can call what we grasp the ‘metaphorical truth’ and (up to a point) say what the ‘metaphorical meaning’ is. But simply to lodge this meaning in the metaphor is like explaining why a pill puts you to sleep by saying it has dormative power. Literal meaning and literal truth conditions can be assigned to words and sentences apart from particular contexts of use. *This is why adverting to them has genuine explanatory power.*<sup>202</sup>

It is context independence which marks the explanatory power of literal meaning. It is precisely because literal language exceeds particular contexts that it can be used as a reference point, a centering and grounding principle, for establishing meaning. Put in the above way, a range of other unanswered questions emerge. Under what circumstances can literal meaning and truth conditions be assigned to words and sentences? How are we to schematize such circumstances such that they do not qualify as “particular contexts of use?” How does one go about *actually doing this*, actually assigning such meanings apart from particular contexts of use? And when has such a thing ever happened? While I think all of these questions pose major problems for Davidson’s position, it seems to me that the last two are fundamentally damaging. Before elaborating on the nature of these problems, I will briefly turn to the work of Josef Stern, who provides a helpful exposition and able defense of Davidson’s conception of context independence.

In his book *Metaphor in Context*, Josef Stern characterizes Davidson’s definition of literality as “post-semantic context independence.<sup>203</sup>” His position is that while all language is pre-semantically context dependent, literal language is also post-semantically context *independent*, while metaphor is not. The distinction that Stern makes here plays an important role

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<sup>201</sup> *ITI* p. 247 “WMM”

<sup>202</sup> *ITI* p. 247 “WMM” italics mine.

<sup>203</sup> *MIC* P. 43

in my own treatment of Davidson, although where Stern thinks that this distinction justifies Davidson's position on literal meaning, it seems to me that this distinction does significant damage to Davidson's position and also signals a significant shortcoming for semantic theory in general. I will argue that this distinction only further indicates that, even if there were such a phenomenon as "post-semantic context independence," it would not entail a description of meanings that are ever established outside of contexts of use. In fact, I will argue, the circumstances in which "post-semantic context independence" are intelligible comprise very distinctive contexts, contexts which are all the more distinctive because of their general rarity. Thus, whatever "post-semantic context independence" might intend to characterize, it does so within the scope of a particular context, and is therefore, straightforwardly, a misnomer. This position will be further fleshed out below.

For now, the distinction: pre-semantic context dependence covers a broad array of factors, including social and psychological phenomena. Every task of interpretation draws on a whole range of cues, from the recognition that one has encountered an attempt to communicate, to "typing" the phoneme which characterizes this attempt (did she say "I", "eye", "aye" or "hi"?), to the development of a passing theory based on the speaker with whom we are dealing (Is this a judge or a priest who has pronounced that I am guilty? Is she serious?). Assessing a speaker's meaning may depend on a whole range of factors including the social setting, the speaker's mood, occupation, race, gender, sexuality, social status, etc. Broad social settings and a shared range of background assumptions and practices all factor into the use and comprehension of language on this level of meaning. All of these factors fall under Davidson's general interpretive model in which an interpreter is always in the process of developing and revising passing theories in service to understanding a speaker in any given context.

Post-semantic context independence concerns literal language only. The general claim is that sentences, by virtue of the individual words that comprise them, have *secured* first meanings that are primarily and foundationally relevant to any possible interpretation of words/sentences irrespective of particular utterances or the contexts in which such particular utterances occur. Thus, no matter what other intentions might be attributed to a speaker (although, according to Davidson, metaphor harbors no such secondary intentions, or primary intentions, for that matter), the first meaning of a sentence remains the first means to whatever ends for which the sentence is used. The first meaning is the *irrevocable means* to any possible goal of a sentence's use. The stability of this meaning is what, for Davidson, defines the literal.

First meaning establishes the common reference points through which any possible secondary use of language can be interpreted. On his view, it is only on the basis of such a common coordinate system that language can be interpreted at all. This fact also militates against a strong conception of the centrality of context dependence on the meaning of literal sentences, a problem that he tries to dissolve in his essay "On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." In that essay he tries to demonstrate the specious character of a common kind of conceptual relativism which, in his estimation, unnecessarily complicates theories that seek to analyze human language, its uses, and the conditions of communicative success. His strategy is grounded in the attempt to show that "nothing...could count as evidence that some form of activity could not be interpreted in our language that was not at the same time evidence that that form of activity was not speech behavior."<sup>204</sup> This is because on his view any meaningful behavior which can be called communication can be translated into a common idiom. In short, any sentence or utterance that cannot be identified with literal meaning cannot be identified as meaningful at all.

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<sup>204</sup> *ITI* p. 185

The view he is attacking in this essay suggests that human experience is organized on the basis of conceptual schemes that help us to interpret and establish a sense of order and contextual relations in the face of the raw, uninterpreted, and otherwise disorganized contents of perceptions. To the extent to which one is allied to such a scheme, one inhabits a world that is unique to that scheme; on its basis, the world is fundamentally shaped and formed. This view supposes that it could be possible that conceptual schemes may be so radically different that it may be impossible to understand the world—and thus, what one hopes to say of that world—of those who approach a dramatically different world on the basis of their dramatically different schemes. He characterizes it as follows:

There may be no translating from one scheme to another, in which case the beliefs, desires, hopes, and bits of knowledge that characterize one person have no true counterparts for the subscriber to another scheme. Reality itself is relative to the scheme: what counts as real in one system may not in another.<sup>205</sup>

For Davidson, this position is flawed for a number of reasons. Central among these reasons is his claim that the world is a unity. To speak intelligibly about the world, is to speak, in a direct way, about this unity. The role that multiple perspectives play on the shape of the world is, at best, illusory. He writes, “Since there is at most one world, these pluralities are metaphorical or merely imagined.<sup>206</sup>” Different language practices, different modes of speech, do not yield different worlds. Language must be made to fit reality, for reality will not simply bend to any descriptive whims. As such, the idea that contexts, or more directly, the tools by which experience can be organized such that they recognize distinctive contexts—“conceptual schemes”—could be so definitive that it could be impossible to communicate *between* schemes, between *points of view*, between *worlds*, is simply an incoherent position; furthermore it is a position whose proponents are, accordingly, at pains to clarify. As a consequence, those who

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<sup>205</sup> *ITI* p. 183

<sup>206</sup> *ITI* p. 187

endorse the scheme/content conception of language rarely have well-developed cases for the incommensurability of perspectives associated with the idea of the conceptual scheme. Davidson thinks that there is no amount of clarification that could better pinpoint the nature of the objects under review, and spends the bulk of the essay trying out and rejecting possible accounts of conceptual schemes.

He muses that those who forward this stance frequently cite specific occasions in which one could pinpoint the fact of incommensurability. In response, he simply notes that thinkers who hold this view, to the extent that they are reporting, citing, and describing incommensurability, belie their own stance: any such description, by noting the limitations and differing character of the contents of a distinctive and disparate scheme, demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the component elements of such schemes, and hence, of the prospect of its commensurability. Of examples like this, he writes:

...examples like these, impressive as they occasionally are, are not so extreme but that the changes and contrasts can be explained and described using the equipment of a single language. Whorf, wanting to demonstrate that Hopi incorporates a metaphysics so alien to ours that Hopi and English cannot, as he puts it, 'be calibrated', uses English to convey the contents of sample Hopi sentences. Kuhn is brilliant at saying what things were like before the revolution using—what else?—our post-revolutionary idiom.<sup>207</sup>

That this can be done is indicative of his position that context independence can be established in the supervenient functioning of a metalanguage into which any possible form of language behavior can be translated. The possibility of such a metalanguage, he thinks, renders the possibility of radically incommensurable conceptual schemes unintelligible. It is on the basis of this concern that he will consider the question of what criteria we would use to qualify the distinctions that putatively obtain between alternative conceptual schemes. Of course, he claims that no such criteria can be discovered.

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<sup>207</sup>*ITI* p. 184

His position is that what some would call theory-change, or a shift in the application of a conceptual scheme, or a total transformation of context and perspective, would better be characterized in terms of a shift in the overall set of sentences that some group of interlocutors, or some speech community, takes to be true. The shift in the assessment of some set of sentences, so as to include new ones as true and to exclude old ones as false, is not a change in the world. It is not fundamentally transformative, and it does not mysteriously block the possibility of comprehending someone who endorses a, perhaps, totally different set of sentences.<sup>208</sup>

Part of the trouble with Davidson's position here is that his conception of context consists only of other meanings, only of other sentences. This position, though consistent with his general impetus to focus on the meaning of words and their effects on the meaning of sentences, is entirely out of place in with respect to this matter. Noting this highlights the range of factors which must be excluded for Davidson's position to work at all. For one thing, his position proceeds as if it were possible to isolate meaning from the many and varied aspects which contribute to the efficacy of language use. If it is the case, as he says, that the point of the concept of meaning is to "explain what can be done with words," then limiting his analysis to the relationships between the sets of sentences that speech communities take to be true and false, hardly gets to the point, as there are many other things that can be done with words whose efficacy has little to nothing to do with whether one holds them to be true or false, and often many of these factors will be in play at any given time. Beyond this, and with Searle's position in mind, it is worth noting that not only is it the case that utterances always happen in particular circumstances, but that they are conditioned by background assumptions and the practices whose

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<sup>208</sup> Although for Davidson, it would be impossible that people would have no overlap at all. Since all language is about the shared world, attempts to communicate have—at the very least—the central application to, and derivation from, that world with its "ordinary macroscopic ontology."

uses and negotiations are often coextensive with particular uses of language and particular purposes. This fact is, in part, signaled in the functioning of “normal” and “standard” in his definition of first meaning.

With such considerations in mind, it seems implausible to claim that diachronic changes in meaning might be exhausted in enumerating the shifts in sentences taken to be true over time. This is because along with the shift in the range of sentences taken to be true, comes a shift in the range of practices purposes, goals, and problems—the background assumptions—which always contribute to the meaning of sentences. From this point of view, Davidson’s response to those who endorse the importance of the transformative consequences of shifts in perspective seems facile and inadequate. If we simply recognize that such shifts are not merely shifts in concepts, words, and sentences, but also shifts in the practices, purposes, etc. through which claims are intelligible, it becomes clear that Davidson’s position is untenable. It is of little consequence that these differences in perspective might be describable using a single language. What one encounters in the world, what one is enabled to recognize, what kinds of phenomena become intelligible, what kinds of questions, lines of inquiry and patterns of reasoning become available, all hinge on the broad array of theoretical resources, institutions, and practices that characterize an ‘idiom.’

Certain points of view, conditions of practical action and negotiation, and experimental practices are enabled in post-revolutionary idioms that are/were unavailable in a pre-revolutionary idiom. That one is able to describe a change in one’s description of the world is not sufficient for *understanding*, or more importantly, *living according to the relevant considerations of*, the world as it is described under different terms. In every possible case, understanding the

world requires considerably more than just having an adequate description of the world.<sup>209</sup> The broad contexts that define these idioms include the goals, purposes, interests (sometimes forms of technology<sup>210</sup>) and, perhaps most importantly, the *blind-spots* that define the relevant questions, the lines of inquiry and, crucially, the spaces of transformation that guide the transition into new frames of reference.

What is at issue is whether or not the world described under one aspect is always commensurable with the world described under another aspect. This difference is marked by the consequences of such descriptions. A shift in descriptive perspective can yield dramatic changes in how one approaches the world, how one recognizes and responds to its objects, and how and why some features are prioritized over others. Such a change entails a reorientation of one's attitudes towards one's practical negotiations of the familiar features of their world, and such a change may make unfamiliar features of the world, or of one's own experiences newly familiar—or vice versa. Such a shift changes what one is habitually compelled to notice and, perhaps as a consequence, what one is likely to register as relevant evidence for the veracity of claims. That such a shift can be described has little bearing on whether or not effective translation may take place between *perspectives* or *points of view*. This is for the simple reason that there is more than meanings and sentences that are at issue in intelligibility and thus, *a fortiori*, in translation. The possibility of translating a set of sentences into another, supposedly distinct, set of different sentences assuredly tells us *something* about what can be communicated,

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<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, it isn't even obvious what connection we might make between understanding the world and being able to adequately describe it. Crucially, the "considerably more" that is required for understanding the world is not meant to be stated as if it is "in addition to the minimally adequate descriptive account that one can give." It seems clear to me that there are myriad cases when understanding can be demonstrated even if not explained or described.

<sup>210</sup> As an example, I cite the "existence" of quarks, leptons, gauge bosons, and any of the "literal" discourse surrounding them, and their inextricable relationship to particle accelerators.



but it is hardly exhaustive. Davidson himself would have to concede that if any important range of either sets of sentences were metaphorical, then there would be “nothing there” to translate.<sup>211</sup>

The depth and consequences of this connection between metaphor and a strong conception of context dependence begins to emerge, in part, as he justifies his stance by citing an oddity which is central to conceptual relativists’ positions. He writes:

The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability.<sup>212</sup>

Thus, it is implied, that even on the relativists’ position, all linguistic behavior depends on common reference points and can therefore, in principle, be translated into any other language *by virtue of their relationships to said reference points*. These reference points will be, by definition, about the common world, and the translations themselves will be about literal meaning in its post-semantic context independence.

As a preliminary, it is interesting to take stock of the language which is employed in this passage. We might simply ask why, on Davidson’s view, “differing points of view” should be thought of metaphorically. What similarity does such a metaphor nudge us into noticing? What does said similarity relate? Similarity between *what* and *what*? By what standard is he assessing this metaphor? It seems to me that he is, at the very least, partially stating the truth conditions of this metaphor by indicating that one of its implications negates the general argument of its proponents. In other words, he is treating this metaphor as a claim whose implications have significance for the structure of an argument—that is to say, he’s treating the metaphor as if it is meaningful. No matter how we read it, Davidson’s treatment of this expression *as a metaphor* runs contrary to his own claims about the possibility of metaphorical meaning. This is because

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<sup>211</sup> See *ITI* p. 246 “WMM”

<sup>212</sup> *ITI* p. 184

on his view, there is no way to know what is specified in a metaphor's function, or better yet, *there is nothing specified* in a metaphor's function. As such, knowing the implications to which one should attend can never be stated definitively. Therefore, knowing which implications may or may not yield paradoxes goes beyond the scope of what he claims can be knowable about a metaphor. Incidentally, we might claim that the fact that Davidson feels confident to read implications into the structure of an argument on the basis of the centrality of a metaphor suggests a model of metaphor which is more consistent with Black's view, a view which he explicitly disagrees with, than with his own.

If, however, we read this description charitably, we *may* reasonably say that "points of view" *could* be read metonymically, that it is simply *naming* a philosophical "position" after a practically embodied position. In which case, perhaps Davidson is still being consistent, given that we might classify metonymy as a particular subset of metaphor. But even this would be problematic on Davidson's view. We might use his example of the Earth described as a "floor" when seen from outer space to explain this point. His argument is that if you explained to a Saturnian that "floor" could be used to describe earth from outer space, that it would make no difference to the Saturnian whether this application of the word "floor" was metaphorical or not. He claims that one would be perfectly satisfied to come to know that the object had another name or that the word had another application with which the Saturnian had hitherto been unfamiliar, without imagining that there is something uniquely metaphorical that you've conveyed. Metonyms simply extend the range of a term's application, and in a non-interesting way. At best, such a reading would depend on the substitutive view of metaphor, among the many that Davidson roundly rejects.

We might take a different stance and say that the first meanings of “differing points of view” are perfectly adequate to the task of carrying a message, and hence that Davidson was careless in his use of the term metaphor here; perhaps he should have specified that this was a dead metaphor. We would then have to interpret this expression according to its first meanings, as dead metaphors are, on his view, literal. As such, for a thorough exposition we might first want to specify whatever image “differing points of view” may have conjured up when it was a “live” metaphor, whatever similarity it compelled one to note. This, presumably, would have been something concerning the physical orientation of a person’s body, and specifically their eyes with respect to something that they are attempting to see from different spatial position. Now that the metaphor has died, we might argue that now “differing points of view” is simply a literal description of something else, say, a conceptual scheme. Of course, this reading would be problematic because Davidson is specifically claiming that “differing points of view” is illusory or “merely imagined,” that thus that it refers to nothing, and that furthermore, it supports a specious argument.

The problems with these readings reveal more problems for Davidson, both for his claim here, and for his overall treatment of metaphor. The problem might be stated in this way: if we call “differing points of view” a dead metaphor, we should be able to say something objective about the similarity that the live metaphor compelled us to notice. But is it clear that there ever was such a similarity? Furthermore, in this case it is not obvious what the metaphor, now that it is claimed to be literal, is describing or naming at all. I raise this problem in order to begin to point out an important point about a range of “dead” philosophical metaphors, and to elaborate on a point raised in the first chapter. It is important to note the crucial differences that mark the structure of these two examples. In the “floor” example, there is one object (the Earth) which can

be described in different ways according to the perspective of the interlocutors involved, one such description, as a “floor”, simply shares a name with another object with which we are all already familiar. We are to understand from this example that there is no mystery in the different names or words that can be used to describe an object. The case of “points of view” is importantly very different. On one hand, we might say that we have the physical point of view, describing a person’s physical and practical positioning, and on the other hand we have *what?* The question of similitude—explicit, implicit, or compelled—does not even have two objects the similarity of which we may come to notice. This is also a problem for the metonymic reading. What, exactly, is being named after what? In other words, what is a philosophical “position” or “point of view” *without the name, without the metaphor?*

We might attempt to read even more charitably and just forget, for a moment, that Davidson is derisively referring to “differing points of view” as a metaphor, and simply try to consider that a point of view could “literally” be about the practical positioning of a thinker, speaker, interpreter, inquirer; if we think in terms of their embodied position, “points of view” would be about what a person can actually *physically*<sup>213</sup> see, *vis à vis* some set of concerns, circumstances, obstacles, etc. Such an interpretation might, at worst, render “points of view” synecdochically (by taking vision as a proxy for a total range of perceptual and practical factors which contribute to some broad perspective). This reading actually strikes me as worth considering, although it still will not clear up the problematic character of Davidson’s argument and description here. What it will do, surprisingly enough, is help us to make explicit the range of factors that contribute to the possibility of literality, in other words, it will help us to more thoroughly reject the possibility of context independence—of any sort.

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<sup>213</sup> Note the superfluity of this qualifier, physical, here. What *other* way might someone *see* in a world where metaphors mean only what the literal words from which they are comprised mean.

Aside from his, perhaps, idiosyncratic use of the term metaphor here, and without feeling the need to endorse or justify the idea of conceptual schemes<sup>214</sup> in opposition to Davidson, it is still worth considering how theories and language are generally related, how theory change works, and how its explanation bears on our overall problem. In this, I will assess his claims about “common coordinate systems” and their possible context independence. Much of what concerns us here is 1) whether or not there can even be such a system<sup>215</sup> and, more importantly, 2) even *if* there could be such a system, whether it would be reasonable to consider its meanings to exceed any particular contexts of use.<sup>216</sup> This is an important point to consider especially in light of the claim that it is thanks to post-semantic context independence that literal meaning has genuine explanatory power. I will argue by way of example that this claim about the conditions of explanatory power is unjustifiable and is furthermore inconsistent with other models of explanation that may, at first glance, appear to depend on context independence for their force. On this basis I will be arguing that not only is it the case that there are no meanings that can be abstracted from all contexts of use, but that it is wrongheaded to imagine that genuine explanatory power could come from such context independence.

In this example I will draw on a theoretical vocabulary that is often taken to be objective and whose terms’ stability is also often taken to depend on their context independence. I will

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<sup>214</sup> Because, on the whole, I think he is right about *conceptual schemes* as an independent concept, even though I think he’s wrong about translation and commensurability.

<sup>215</sup> It is important to note that Davidson himself is somewhat skeptical of this first concern, as evidenced in “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs.” He doesn’t exactly deny systematicity in general, but rather something like a closed system of meaning, a totality with clear borders. This concern with clear boundaries is importantly related to his concerns with the nature and theoretical viability of the idea of conceptual schemes. This is another consideration that makes putting Davidson and Derrida in conversation interesting and productive. On one hand we might consider Davidson’s position on this matter as explicitly denying the implication complex of the metaphor of metaphor; we might read him along with Derrida, suggesting that contexts, fields, etc. are not so secure that their integrity can be maintained.

<sup>216</sup> This is a point to which we will return as it acts as a natural bridge between aspects of Derrida’s thought and Davidson’s. Both thinkers depend on treatments context independence as a central aspect of their respective positions, but they use it in very different ways and with very different consequences.

consider the conceptual language and tools commonly employed by chemists and physicists. In the language of contemporary chemistry we may say that, foundationally, our world is made up of atoms, molecules, forces, etc. Using the once standard Rutherford planetary model of the atom that is commonly taught in high school chemistry classes would then be a perfectly good vocabulary for defining a common set of reference points detailing the foundational building blocks of all of reality. Using this model we can predict and explain the otherwise odd consequences of chemical interactions; we can describe, with amazing detail, the inner-workings of the human body, and can describe the ways in which medicines can be employed to change such inner-workings, for better and for worse; in addition, we can describe fire, and the source of energy upon which it draws, the molecular structure of water, along with many other interesting things.

What I hope to establish, is that any and all of such descriptions have to emerge from a distinct perspective, that is, with respect to certain kinds of questions, purposes, interests, perceptual capacities, and experimental practices. In short, they function within the scope of particular contexts and from very particular points of view. While the language that supports and is concomitant with the Rutherford model could very well, in many cases, stand as *a* common coordinate system, *a* common point of reference, to imagine that it could be *the* common coordinate system is short-sighted and simply doesn't square with the facts. If one simply begins to ask different questions and seek different goals, the value of the Rutherford model of the atom wanes and is no longer a suitable point of reference. This model is inadequate to the task of describing radioactivity, the complex valence-relationships between electrons, or any of the many different kinds of particles that have come to make up the disciplines, vocabularies, and experimental practices which are associated with quantum mechanics.

These facts have a range of implications that, if taken seriously, put a good amount of pressure on any explanatory strategy that depends on context independence for its basis and justification. My position is that it is demonstrably the case that putatively context-independent concepts only make sense *within the scope of carefully delineated contexts*. With this in mind, we may push the above example a bit further and note that it doesn't even appear to be intelligible that one may try to describe iambic pentameter, Indonesian politics, or how to get to my mother's house—all real things, and all things that presumably depend on the “building blocks of all reality”—using the Rutherford model. Giving an account of any of these requires vocabularies, concepts, and perspectives which are appropriate to the context of the description. Although there is likely to be some overlap in what may be said in any of these descriptions, it seems relatively clear that the vocabularies employed in service to these ends would have little to no applicability in giving workable accounts of quantum entanglement, the structure of boron, or photosynthesis.<sup>217</sup> These particular examples may seem silly or unfair, but it is important to keep

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<sup>217</sup> And, importantly, the overlap here will not be defined by, or *presided over* by intertranslation. Davidson wrongly surmises that the difference in meaning that emerges between perspectives in the process of theory change would be better characterized in terms of something like the difference between some set of sentences that some group of thinkers may hold to be true at any given time. Some significant, although not explicitly *definable*, change in that range of sentences held to be true, he thinks, is often mistaken for a fundamental transformation of worldview, the acquisition of a new world. I will argue that the best starting place for the analysis of the possibility of theories, along with that of metaphor, *is simply not sentences*, their properties, their meanings, or their truth and falsity. Language use and its intelligibility are radically context dependent, and even the most precise and widely accepted theoretical vocabularies attest to this. They are devised, discovered, and developed in context, and they are, furthermore, revised only within the scope of the particular contexts in which they can be effectively applied.

The prospect of intertranslation only makes sense within the scope of shared practical contexts. In other words, there will be no translation of the meaning of Higgs Boson that can adequately characterize it for the purposes of this paper (The Derridean, of course, will retort that I have just now used it as an example [think “green is or”], and that the Higgs boson has thereby acquired a meaning in this context, even if only negatively. While, in some broad sense, I accept this view in *potential*, the view I'm developing depends on *the actual consequences* of the use of language. In other words, a single use of the term does not inaugurate a new meaning, and neither does iterability—if taken by itself. Meanings are *in fact* regulated, even if that regulation is always incomplete. As such, the efficacy, meaning, use, function of the Higgs boson here, is only as stable as the regulating forces are able to make it. In this particular parenthesis, for now at least, it is only me who can serve as the regulator. If I rescind this task, it will be up to others to take it up. Until that happens, the Higgs will have no meaning in this context. I'll wait...). Unless this paper can call upon the technological resources and experimental practices of a massive particle accelerator (which, I assure you, it cannot), the concept of the Higgs Boson will have absolutely no meaning in the sense that Davidson calls upon. It has meaning only within the scope of high energy particle physics, and the modes of perception and detection that it enables. The world of the particle physicist is one whose intelligibility depends on

in mind that what I am intending to show with these examples is that even a widely accepted common coordinate system is clearly context dependent, we might even say *context constitutive*. More fundamentally, my goal here is to demonstrate that Davidson's position on the literal—that explanatory power comes from context independence—is a tenuous at best, and doesn't find parallels in other, more secure, theoretical vocabularies.

I will give this position a more thorough articulation. I will stick with the concept of the atom, as it strikes me as among the most stable and widely applicable concepts available to contemporary thought.<sup>218</sup> At the same time, and perhaps equally important for my position, the conditions of its transformations can illuminate our discussion of meaning in many important ways. What is crucial to consider is the following: on Davidson's view, again, it is context independence that gives literal meaning its explanatory power. The atom, on the other hand, has its explanatory power precisely *because of its context dependence*. The strengths and weaknesses of the various models of the atom are determined on the basis of the experimental practices, i.e.,

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the technology of particle accelerators and the *massive control of resources* that such technology can marshal. Nothing about the normal macroscopic ontology that Davidson calls upon as the potential basis of a common coordinate system will make translation available *sentence to sentence*. Without the experimental practices, the technical knowledge, the machinery, and the control, there would be nothing to translate into anything else. Sentences, simply are not primary, even in matters of translation.

One might imagine Davidson responding here that the sheer ability I have for referring to the Higgs Boson in this very passage is an indication that I can, in fact, say something intelligible about it, and hence that there is some degree of translation that has already begun. I will counter that such a claim only reinforces my argument for the vacuity of intertranslation. Without reference to the experimental practices in which the concept can be "literally" employed in sentences, there would be no way to establish any of the truth conditions of any of the sentences in which it can be said to have a meaning. Furthermore, it is a matter of contingent theoretical fact that virtually everything about the behavior of quantum particles is at odds with the familiar aspects of our "normal, macroscopic, ontology."

<sup>218</sup> In other words, you can begin with the atom as a foundational principle and build consistent theoretical vocabularies and constitutive practices that can develop productive descriptions and lines of inquiry into widely varied and seemingly unrelated topics, from the nature of color and its properties, to the life cycle and social organization of the Portuguese man o' war. Some might argue that this wide range of applicability in unrelated contexts implies context independence. I will argue, however, that it is still pretty clear that such vocabularies have their contextual limitations—for example, trying to define *meaning* according to atomic theory is likely to be a very difficult, although perhaps not impossible, task. The conditions of this difficulty (or possible ease) signal the contextual constraints and determinants of the concept's application. Such constraints and determinants will never be limited to other sentences. This is not to say that sentences are irrelevant, they simply aren't primary.



the contexts, in which they function. Abstracted from all experimental practices, the concept of the atom is virtually meaningless. More to the point, abstracted from all contexts, the various nuances that make the Bohr model of the atom more suitable than the Rutherford model for explaining the photoelectric effect, quantified electromagnetic emissions, and the existence and structure of hadrons would all be meaningless. It is only in consideration of the contexts in which these concepts can be effectively applied that the difference in their explanatory power can be made intelligible.

The point of these examples is two-fold: the first is to attempt to assess the very possibility of context independence, the second is to assert the position that any theory whose foundational terms cannot be interrogated for their explanatory strengths and weaknesses, is not a well-developed theory, and that furthermore, it is only on the basis of the application of theories in various contexts that any such interrogation can proceed. In the case of literal meaning, I am arguing that it is simply not a well-developed concept, and it is nowhere near well-developed enough to stand as foundational term for all of semantics. The extent to which any theory demands context independence is the extent to which it will simply lack the crucial nuances which make explanation possible. Further, without the important and necessary links to specific contexts, it is not clear that we could distinguish a good explanation from a bad explanation, a helpful one, from a useless one. It isn't enough that literal meaning serves as a *possible* explanation; the important question is whether it a *good* one. The virtues of atomic theory and its different models is that it is on the basis of the contexts in which they can be applied that one can begin to identify the scope of their purview and their various ranges and limitations. It is on these bases that one can say when they offer good explanations and when they do not. It is only the bases of such circumstances that one can begin to identify whether

such explanations are adequate to their tasks and whether they may be in need of revision or replacement.<sup>219</sup>

In short, I remain skeptical of any concept whose application is purported to have the same consequences irrespective of context. For very different reasons, I am further suspicious of any theory whose bases explicitly foreclose specific lines of reasoning—a tendency which seems almost universal in philosophy's treatment of metaphor *vis à vis* the literal. What I mean by this is the following: Davidson's conception of literality has built into it the fact that there could never be a general theory of metaphorical meaning. Being charitable, we might more reasonably read his treatment of metaphor as indicative of the fact that the concept of meaning that guides his discourse has reached its explanatory limit. As with the use of any good theory, such limitations ought not to foreclose inquiry, in fact, the exact opposite is the case. Every theory will inevitably leave evidence of its incompleteness. It is in these spaces of incompleteness that a theory begins to develop and clarify its own value and identify prospects for its development and revision. In order to strengthen the theory, the appropriate response in such a case would be to detail these limitations and to note the possible lines of inquiry that may help to indicate potential directions for further analysis, not to exclude the possibility of further explanation on the basis of the nature of some presumably inexplicable phenomenon. That his theory, with respect to metaphor, requires a declaration of finality which is inevitably beyond the scope of practical application is yet another indication that his theory of meaning is in need of revision.

The recourse to context independence as the basis for explanatory power functions as a veil of sorts: everything can be explained except for the stability, veracity, and applicability of

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<sup>219</sup> And any theory whose bases and concepts were not tested in this way, and that persistently and deliberately excluded central aspects of the phenomena that they set out to explain, would, as Derrida puts it in *SEC* “*appear as noncritical, ill-formed concepts, or rather as concepts destined to ensure the authority and force of a certain discourse.*” *MP* p. 315; *LI* p. 7

our central explanatory concept—in this case, literal meaning. We might wonder whether there might be surprising, unforeseeable, consequences in the workings of literality. If so, how would we know? How would we know whether the concept needed more nuance in order to cover wider range of cases? Without context and the necessary conditions of application that it specifies, there would be no way to pose these questions, and hence literal meaning, without further interrogation, can masquerade as a final answer. This, however, cannot be sustained.

On my view, Davidson's stance renders both conceptual schemes and metaphor unintelligible by rendering language, as a practice, unintelligible. Thus, when he describes the unsolved problem facing those who endorse conceptual schemes, he fails to see why a solution is not to be had. He writes:

The idea is then that something is a language, and associated with a conceptual scheme, whether we can translate it or not, if it stands in a certain relation to experience. The only problem is to say what the relation is, and to be clearer about the entities related.<sup>220</sup>

This problem turns out to be more of a pseudo-problem. There simply is no one relation with which a language stands with respect to experience. Language, by itself, stands in no relationship to anything. It has no special connection to experience, the world, reality, or to other languages. It should be noted that in terms of his *overt* claims, Davidson is quite aware of each of these points, as he explicitly holds them. This is especially noteworthy in the last claim, or at least some variation on it, as he argues that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as *a* language.

Despite these considerations, stating the nature of the relation and the entities involved requires no dramatic feat of recognition. Languages are used by people. And this use is not, in any way, tangential. The conditions of this use cannot, in any reasonable way, be excised or excluded from its analysis without deforming and misrepresenting both its meanings and its

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<sup>220</sup> *ITI* p. 191 parenthetical remarks omitted.

effects. Words can only stand in relationship to the world on the basis of the practices they enable and facilitate. Some such practices are quite simple, like identifying or naming. Other practices are exceptionally complex, like describing in detail how to build a nuclear reactor. In either case, the relationship that language has to the world is one which is defined by human behaviors and practices. Human practices and behaviors, are relative to the forms of communication which enable them, thus, the world is relative to such forms of communication. *To the extent that it is granted that language speakers, their behavior, and their practices, are part of the world,* it becomes pretty clear how the world exists in a way that is relative to language use. It is for the non-miraculous reason that human beings transform their behavior, and consequently transform the world, and thus their experience of it, on the basis of the sentences that we utter, the stories we tell.

### *A Narrow Path, An Unthought Destination*

“There can be no rigorous analogy between a scientific theory, no matter which, and a theory of language, for several reasons...I do not exclude the possibility of this leading to extreme consequences, but in my eyes this is neither obscurantist nor antiscientific; on the contrary, it is not certain that what we call language or speech acts can ever be exhaustively determined by an entirely objective science or theory. It is more “scientific” to take this limit, if it is one, into account and to treat it as a point of departure for rethinking this or that received concept of “science” and of “objectivity.”<sup>221</sup>

—Jacques Derrida

“To interpret an utterance as literal is to make a choice about whether a sentence is true, from a Davidsonian perspective. The tropes cannot be separated from the straight arrows in any other way than by noting what we are tempted to call “literal.” “Literal,” then, is like “analytic”—a term without a principled basis.<sup>222</sup>”

—Samuel C. Wheeler

On the view I am developing, the uses to which language is put are centrally definitive; an important consequence of my position is that words and sentences do not, in any cases,

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<sup>221</sup>Jacques Derrida, “Toward an Ethic of Discussion” *LI* p. 118

<sup>222</sup> Samuel C. Wheeler, *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy* p. 50

exchange their use values for literal meanings. To return to the example of the potential explanatory power of the atom, the only general reason that the Bohr model will not help one to analyze iambic pentameter is that the meaning of the Bohr model is mutually constitutive with specific experimental practices that are, *apparently*, unrelated to the practices of writing or analyzing poetry. It is important to note that this is a contingent fact. However unlikely, scientists or poets may come to find that the Bohr model affords an unexpected perspective, one which is surprisingly suitable for analyzing verse.<sup>223</sup> This, however, would inaugurate a new set of practices which would be unlikely to be the same as the familiar practices involved in either experimental chemistry or creative writing. In such a situation one might initially find the use of the Bohr model odd—deviant, we might say. Many might question the validity of using this model in the analysis of poetry, suggesting, ironically, that such a use would be merely metaphorical. To this, I'd say, "perhaps." However, if this model became a centrally defining, indispensable, feature of a new and sustained form of poetics, many would claim that in this context the Bohr model would no longer be metaphorical; it would be claimed that it had "died off" into literality. On my view, this interpretation could not be correct. Rather, I would argue that this would be the working of catachresis. This would be the other side of *usure*, the accrued interest of a well-worn figure. This would be the "rebirth" which is always coextensive with the "death" of a metaphor.

Of course, on my view, there would be no sense in calling the Bohr model either "literal" or "dead" in such a case. Strictly speaking, it wouldn't be "literal" for a number of reasons, not least of all being that there appears to be no clear and consistent definition of literality according

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<sup>223</sup>Notably, James S. Shapiro, Columbia University Shakespeare Scholar, thinks of Shakespeare's writing process and style as one that is comparable to alchemy—as a kind of trial and error combinatorial process in which new words and sensibilities are produced through odd and surprising juxtapositions of elements. Beyond this, such cross pollination is, when successful, exemplary of the development and efficacy of catachrestic metaphors.

to which we would classify it to begin with. For now, though, I will focus on what it would mean to call it “dead,” hoping to demonstrate, preliminarily, the particular ineptitude of this metaphor for the literal. It would not be “dead” because, given the thinkers we’ve reviewed so far (those for whom the concept of “dead metaphor” term functions so effectively), no matter which conception of metaphor we call upon—deviance and new congruence (Ricoeur), the emphatically productive interaction between focus and frame (Black), the specific disparity between speaker meanings and sentence meanings as regulated by ancillary literal sentence meanings (Searle), or the effect of nudging us into noticing similarities (Davidson)—the metaphor will not have lost whatever definitive effect/property it was supposed to have while it was “alive.”

If we think about this example in Ricoeur’s terms, we might start by noting that it would be pretty clear that the Bohr model could be used for some things and not for other things (just as it is in chemistry); its new congruence in our hypothetical poetics would mark out a new sphere of discourse and help to rearrange our perception of the beings under consideration. To the extent that this new sphere of discourse would be established by the intention of effectively stating the being of the world under review, it would constitute a philosophical, or properly speculative, discourse. Given my response to his position, I would argue that the use of the Bohr model would have certain limitations that would become obvious if specific kinds of questions were posed to its use; questions about the meter and rhyme scheme of lithium, for example, would reveal the deviant aspects of its predication (that is, that the interrogative reveals that the predication remains deviant, as it has taken the use of the term *in the wrong way*), and hence would reveal that the conditions of its “death” in its literality were neither final nor definitive. To the extent that the predication remains deviant within the scope of its new congruence is what,

for Ricoeur, defines the metaphor *as* metaphor, and the dead metaphor still clearly exhibits these features.

If we think about this example with respect to Black, we might, as with Ricoeur, recognize the efficacy of the Bohr model's capacity for facilitating the juxtaposition of otherwise incongruent terms, fields, and frames of reference in such a way as to produce new possibilities for thought. My argument is that it simply does not lose this capacity as it becomes better integrated into our more familiar discourse. In fact, this is precisely my reason for holding onto and employing some of the central aspects of Black's conception of metaphor. It seems to me that the nature and persistent efficacy of implication complexes is formidable evidence that the power of catachrestic metaphors *depend on the staying power* of their capacity for maintaining odd and productive tensions between frames of reference. It is on this basis that an even stronger case can be made, as it is clear that in some instances, the catachrestic metaphor can generate repetitive chains of implication, creating new frames out of old foci, and new foci out of old frames. The key to all of this is that in such circumstances the literality of frames will always be suspect. In such a case, one could never really be sure what constitutes a focus and what constitutes a frame. One could not, for example, rely on the simple lack of the shock of dissonance associated with the focus of a metaphor as a justification for claiming that it has "become literal;" this lack can be just as easily described in terms of familiarity as it might be with literality, and this without the crucial added baggage of having to also define literality. Finally, recourse to the centrality of cognitive contents will be no help for reasons similar to what we've seen with Searle, as the product of becoming literal yields no conscious correlates that could be made explicit. Thus, if Black claims that what is lost in the becoming literal of a

metaphor is its particular kind of cognitive content, then it becomes unclear how he can justify calling such a content-less locution literal.

If we think about this on Searle's model, the problem gets jumbled pretty quickly. First of all, even in its own field, in the context of chemistry, the intentionality of the concept of the atom would be up for debate. What, exactly, does it represent? How would we characterize its aspectual shape? And what, exactly, could be represented about the atom *in human consciousness*? It certainly isn't clear that it would be something that is directly *experienceable*. By extension, even if we try to take him at his word, the question of what is, or could be, consciously represented in the application of the Bohr model within our supposed "new poetics" is only further complicated by the questionable character of the relationship between the Bohr model, actual atoms, and our possible consciousness of atoms even in what could be taken to be their "original," "literal," contexts. I'll leave these questions aside (although they are quite a serious challenge), as they go well beyond the scope of this paper, but I note them if only to countenance the level of complexity that is glossed over in Searle's intentional model.

All questions concerning the *debatable nature* of the representational capacity of the intentional model aside for now, we will still be faced with the fact that, for Searle, literal language must mirror possible intentional states, and that therefore his definition of literality excludes the possibility of literal language which is, in principle, unconscious. "Dead" metaphors, of course, are often just of this sort. As such, thinking about "dead" metaphors from Searle's perspective is fairly devastating to his overall position as they should not even be possible. Furthermore, since Searle does not give us a positive account of literal language, it is unclear how the literal is supposed to regulate the metaphorical to begin with<sup>224</sup>, it is therefore

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<sup>224</sup> Furthermore, since he offers so many "principles" of regulation and admits that his list isn't exhaustive, it isn't clear that he has explained anything at all.



unclear what change we are supposed to identify once such a metaphor “becomes literal.” In other words, it isn’t clear that Searle has even established what properties metaphors *have* that they would presumably *lose* in “death.”

Beyond this, what he does say about literality further diminishes the already tenuous and vague regulation that the literal is supposed to provide for the metaphorical. In other words, given his claim that the truth conditions of literal sentences will vary according to context and background assumptions,<sup>225</sup> in order to know what a metaphor means, one would not only have to know the context of the metaphor’s application, but also the context and background assumptions for the meaning of the literal sentences that are presumably doing the regulating. In “Literal Meaning,” Searle countenances this fact, in a thought which is nothing less than Derridean,<sup>226</sup> when, in demonstrating the degree to which context and background assumptions can transform the meaning of literal sentences, he writes that “there does not seem to be any upper limit on our ability to generate such deviant contexts.<sup>227</sup>” This claim, taken even to its minimal consequences, very quickly begins to draw a parallel to Derrida’s own conception of the conditions of deconstruction. For example, in “Towards an Ethic of Discussion” he writes the following of deconstruction and its most popular “slogan”:

What is called ‘objectivity,’ scientific for instance (in which I firmly believe, in a given situation), imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, powerfully established, stabilized, or rooted in a network of conventions (for instance, those of language) and yet which still remains a context. And the emergence of the value of objectivity (and hence of so many others) also belongs to a context. We can call “context” the entire ‘real-history-of-the-world,’ if you like, in which this value of objectivity and, even more broadly, that of truth (etc.) have taken on meaning and imposed themselves. That does not in the slightest discredit them. In the name of what, of which other “truth,” moreover, would it? One of the definitions of what is called deconstruction would be the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest

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<sup>225</sup> “LM” p. 214

<sup>226</sup> An allusion to Derrida’s claim in “Signature, Event, Context,” that Austin’s use of force in substitution of meaning was “Nothing Less Than Nietzschean.” This, as we will see, is not simply a stylistic parallel. The claim that there is no upper limit to the possibility of generating “deviant contexts” is tantamount to the claim that no particular configuration of circumstances (conditions of satisfaction/aspectual shapes) can preside over the meaning of literal sentences. This is a consequence *of his own thought* that, as we will see, he cannot accept.

<sup>227</sup> Searle, “LM” p. 217

and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualization. The phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction (“there is nothing outside the text” [*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context. In this form, which says exactly the same thing, the formula would doubtless have been less shocking. I am not certain it would have provided more to think about.<sup>228</sup>

The crucial pertinence of this quote should be obvious with respect to much that has gone on in this chapter. It raises a number of points to which we will doubtlessly return. For now, it is simply worth noting the fact that there appears to be no upper limit to contexts, and that, on Derrida’s vision part of the goal is to pay the sharpest and broadest attention to contexts in their limitlessness.

To return to the Bohr model as a metaphor, if we think about this example in Davidson’s terms, I would argue that whatever the Bohr model nudged us into noticing in the first place would be the very condition for its persistent efficacy. In other words, whatever effect metaphors are supposed to have on our perception, whatever perspectives<sup>229</sup> they compel us to appreciate, are only *intensified* in the metaphor’s “death;” they are not lost. We might say that this new way of relating to the world of poetry has proven productive enough to sustain some form of theoretical practice, some form of intelligible behavior. One key difference that my position entails is that such effects, whatever they may be, need not have ever been essentially conscious (and even less *representational*) states to begin with.

Putting it in these terms brings up a number of other interesting and serious problems for Davidson’s position. It seems to me that if we accepted his model it wouldn’t be a general mistake, *on his own terms*, to refer to such a metaphor as now “having” literal meaning, provided

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<sup>228</sup> *LI* p. 136

<sup>229</sup> A perspective that *may* be a matter of similitude, but, as we’ve seen and will continue to see, when it comes to catachrestic metaphors, particularly philosophical ones, there are often not two objects which are being related in the first place. This suggests to me, as in Black’s position, it is often the case that the catachrestic metaphor *creates* its object.

that by literal we *only* mean the minimal “systematic effect that words have on the sentences in which they occur.” But, of course, given that my argument would be something to the effect of “such metaphors acquire ‘literal meaning’ *because* of the ability to sustain their metaphorical *effect*,” many of the distinctions that guide Davidson’s conception of meaning would have to be significantly rethought, a project that would have to lead with the important inquiry into whatever might be “the cause” of the “systematic effects” of literal meaning. This is a consideration that, I think, is generally a major problem for Davidson’s position irrespective of my particular critique. For example, it isn’t obvious that it is reasonable, even on Davidson’s own terms, to take meaning and effect as separate things. Making this distinction, though, is of course essential to his treatment of metaphor. In this, I will be arguing that Davidson’s position deforms the conditions of language use, in service to the possibility of defining meaning, and his analysis of metaphor is exemplary in this regard.

Taking into consideration my broader analysis, what is most important to consider here is the nature of the “effects” of literal meaning. If Davidson makes the argument that any theory of “metaphorical meaning” will be a *causal* one and that it *therefore* will fall beyond the scope of semantic theory, then what happens to literal meaning, whose bases are the “effects” that words have on sentences, etc. What is the nature of the effect of literal meaning? What is the causal mechanism? What kinds of “effects” come without causes? I imagine that a defender of Davidson might claim that these are the wrong kinds of questions to pose to Davidson here; although it is precisely for this reason that it seems to me that the best way to read the kinds of effects that literal meanings are supposed to have metaphorically, *cataphorically*. As such, on Davidson’s own terms, we have to say that he either means nothing by these claims, or that he is using effect here only as a dead metaphor, and that it is therefore, in fact, literal. But then, of

course, the objection to this line of questioning would be warrantless. This is because on Davidson's view the questions concerning the causal mechanism of literal effects should be perfectly reasonable questions as we would presumably be dealing with some form of causality whose function would still, *presumably*, be a feature of our *one world* based in a familiar macroscopic ontology. In which case, two important questions would remain: 1) What similarity were we ever nudged into noting with respect to sentences, words, and normal macroscopic causation?<sup>230</sup> And 2) What is the *literal causal mechanism* according to which Davidson can claim that literality is the effect that words have on sentences and by extension the inferential patterns associated with their use. This is the status of what appears to be his most literal definition of meaning: two aporetic questions characterized by the metaphors according to which the definition of literality functions.

Raising this question draws out some very important aspects of Davidson's overall view, as he claims that *any* theory of language will be a *semantic* theory. For example, he rejects the prospect of a pragmatic theory of language as a possible alternative to semantic theory, claiming that in any cases where we can identify regularities across our communicative and interpretive practices, semantic theories are, or can be made to be, sufficient for modeling them. In the case of metaphor, his position is that because metaphor displays no general regularity, it cannot be modeled. As such, metaphor cannot be dealt with semantically, and it therefore cannot be submitted to any other kind of theory of language. Any explanation of metaphor will, on

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<sup>230</sup> Granted, this is perhaps an impossibly difficult question. It might seem unfair to suggest that Davidson should be able to access some long forgotten past to identify what *one would have noticed*. But the sheer difficulty of this problem demonstrates the inefficacy of the kinds of examples that Davidson uses for his explanations of dead metaphors. Again, "he was burned up" for anger, and "mouths" for river deltas and bottle openings strike me as particularly weak examples, as their simplicity allows for a masking of virtually all of the kinds of concerns that make the questions concerning metaphor in philosophy an important one.

Davidson's view, be—at best—a causal explanation (perhaps a physiological or psychological one), and beyond the purview of theories of meaning and language.<sup>231</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, it is in this space that I find that there are parts of Davidson's sensibilities on this matter that resonate importantly with my own. The general claim that any theory of metaphor would be causal, moves in a similar direction to my view. However, I reject the claims about the possibility of discovering regularity in the use and efficacy of metaphors, and consequently the general claims about the possibility of submitting metaphor to a theory of meaning. It seems to me that it is an importantly related matter that for Davidson, a causal account of metaphor—one that presumably tracks its effects in the human body (like a joke or a bump to the head)—would preclude the possibility of being included in a theory of meaning. This view ensures, from the outset, that certain of the inevitable conditions of communication—those that involve the robust and *indispensable central factor* of living, embodied, interlocutors—could not be relevant or central considerations in *any* theory of language.

In some measure, my task in the proceeding sections will be to demonstrate precisely the ways in which metaphors do exhibit regularity. In part, I will work to show how an analysis of meaning based in speech-act theory, with a particular focus on the function of perlocution, can help to identify the nature of this regularity and, beyond this, how a causal theory of meaning will be more adequate to the task of characterizing communication, and the conditions of its efficacy. Through this exploration I will further develop the reasons for which it would impossible to sustain Davidson's claims about literality, particularly in terms of its context

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<sup>231</sup> But, of course, his theory of literality appears to also be a "causal" theory, although such causality must be of some different, secondary, sort. Although it goes beyond the scope of this paper, there is an important correlation here between what I am identifying as competing forms of causality, and Davison's theory of actions in which he surmises that reasons "cause" actions. This insight becomes more fully manifest in his conception of the human psyche, what he refers to as anomalous monism. On that view, he suggests that mental events must be physical and hence must have some normal causal relations. He makes the important caveat, that although psychological events are physical and causal, their causal relations are not of the sort that we see in the other sciences.

independence and its explanatory power. Beyond this, it will force us to rethink the meaning of the systematicity and the nature of the effects of meaning. And in this, I will be able to characterize literality in a pragmatic sense, and in a way that does not call upon the “ghostly” aspects of meaning that Davidson explicitly rejects, but are nevertheless heavily featured in his project.

And these are the tasks which remain.

To this point, what I hope to have shown is that the literality and the integrity of the “conceptual” can simply no longer be taken seriously as foundations of meaning. Moving forward, I hope to show, in a way that both depends on and departs from Derrida, that the integrity of meaning can be grounded in a different way. In this, I will attempt to rethink metaphoricity, again, in terms of speech act theory with special attention given to the efficacy of perlocutionary force. In connection with an assessment of catachrestic metaphors, I intend to explore a conception of meaning that has its focus in the indirect consequences of performatives. Such consequences are numerous and are often formative of ways of life that, without the constitutive power of language, could not be maintained, transmitted, rehearsed, enacted, and re-enacted in lineages of conventions, contexts, and frames of reference. Meaning, I will contend, is a bodily phenomenon which arises in an organism’s<sup>232</sup> response to its environment. Humans, through language, amplify meaning by extending, augmenting, and creating a discursive

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<sup>232</sup> I use “organism” here because I want to emphasize that embodied meaning is not exclusively or centrally a matter of human embodiment. I have no plans, in this work, to give any serious consideration to other forms of embodiment, but I do think of the theory of meaning that I am developing as a general one that finds specific, and perhaps unique, expression in human embodiment. More to the point, though, is the conjecture that different forms of human embodiment are likely to yield different forms of intelligibility and different forms of metaphorical competence and reception. The question of how and why metaphors “die”, is importantly tied up with this problem. In connection with both concerns—with the death/rebirth of metaphors and with embodied metaphorical competence—is the conjecture that it is not only the case that forms of embodiment condition the possibility of comprehending metaphors, but that the compulsion associated with coming to comprehend *dominant* metaphors can compel the adoption of forms of embodiment: the attitudes, postures, and perceptual attentions according to which metaphors can be made intelligible. In this, questions of power and authority become indispensable.

environment which has its bases in a set of founding metaphors which allow/compel us to respond to a largely shared, common, physical world, in addition to a set of conventional narratives with the very same range of bodily responses. The key to this position is the claim that this conjecture is supported by the range of bodily, or we might say, sensory,<sup>233</sup> metaphors which help to constitute our narrations, whether in our theoretical or in our common sense descriptions of the world we inhabit.

Generally speaking, my goal is to describe the conditions for the emergence and formative power of metaphor. These conditions and their products, I will argue, constitute critical—but occluded—components in all forms of communication. I will forward the claim that the use of metaphor indicates both the emergence of new practices, and thus an extension of the possibilities of any language, and at the same time a break with the very practices and language from which it emerges. What marks this emergence/break is the fundamental misrecognition which both sustains and, at times, upsets and transforms, the narrative effects of social conventions.<sup>234</sup> I will argue that dead/reborn metaphors, as *usure*, as *catachresis*, functions in precisely this way. By understanding metaphor, particularly in terms of perlocutionary force, the practice<sup>235</sup> becomes readily intelligible, and can provide a clear response to the philosophy's persistent inability to adequately countenance its often surreptitious philosophical functions and consequences.

This position is conveniently opened up in *Margins of Philosophy*, where Derrida gives a direct treatment of J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things With Words*. On the face of it, Derrida sees

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<sup>233</sup> I will be linking these bodily metaphors to what Derrida refers to as philosophemes, and what thinkers like George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Stephen Pepper, will refer to as “root metaphors.”

<sup>234</sup> In this, I will be developing the kinds of absence of the “graphematic predicates” of linguistic efficacy as Derrida details them in “Signature, Event, Context,” and drawing important connections between iterability as Derrida uses it and the function of language as described in Pierre Bourdieu's, *Language and Symbolic Power*; “Authorized Language” pp. 106-16; “Description and Prescription” pp. 127-136

<sup>235</sup> i.e., metaphor as a practice.

potential in the tenor and goal of Austin's project: in its most basic thrust, it seeks to analyze the *function* of language without getting bogged down in the traditional problems of *meaning*. I will argue that such a shift enables the analysis of language to operate according a different model than is inevitably found in semantic theories. This is not a unique argument, of course, as this was the stated goal of Austin's work, and also marks the basis of Derrida's interest in Austin to begin with. What is, perhaps, original in my position is the recognition of what consequences such a shift in modeling might mean for the analysis of metaphor, and furthermore, what an analysis of metaphor might mean for the consequences of reading Derrida's encounter with Austin.

The central upshot of this shift would be a basis for analyzing language according to its effects, consequences, and hence its *forces*, although we might even say *powers*. This is precisely what Austin's theory is meant to do. Specifically, though, with respect my overall project, there are four crucial considerations that analyzing metaphor on the basis of speech-act theory enables:

- 1) it offers the prospect of a model of meaning that does not depend on the metaphor of theory for its articulation. In this, it offers, at very least, a model of language that may not fall prey to Derrida's insight regarding the inevitable exhaustion that philosophy encounters in the face of characterizing metaphor. This is the case, in part, because
- 2) since the literal and figurative distinction is not at all at issue with speech act theory, characterizing metaphor will also not require the metaphor of metaphor for its articulation; in other words, the seemingly ubiquitous component of *transfer of meaning*, has no place in a theory for which neither literality nor univocity of meaning has an important role.
- 3) Since it is primarily concerned with the effects rather than the meanings of language, the nature of the unconscious use of metaphors, particularly of catachrestic metaphors, already has an obvious point of resonance in Austin's



presentation of a locution's force, which, on his view should not at all be associated with acts of will, consciousness, or cognitive contents. Finally, and this is the most important point, 4) the function of perlocutionary force implies the human body as the point of the application of a highly localized, and potentially idiosyncratic, encounter with language use, one whose consequences cannot, in principle, be anticipated, and *a fortiori*, cannot be characterized according to a well-regulated, predetermined, lexical, semantic, or conceptual order.

With a focus on perlocutionary force, I will attempt to identify meaning as emergent from specific bodies. This position has two immediate effects. First, the meaning of context is further expanded to include unconscious and unrecognizable<sup>236</sup> states and motions of bodies in action. The systematicity of meaning, in this regard, could be characterized in terms of an *anthropophysics*, one comparable to the mimetic model offered up in Aristotle's *Poetics*, and that Derrida details, without fully exploring, in "White Mythology." Second, any conception of meaning that would depend on a sense of literality as foundational is belied by the contingent conditions of the emergence of meaning in its immediacy.<sup>237</sup> In other words, if meaning *is*

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<sup>236</sup> We might say "pre-intelligible."

<sup>237</sup> I realize how much everyone is going to hate this. But I offer this series of questions and considerations as a preliminary preemptive response: 1) I will argue that the inordinate allegiance to claims of mediation in conversations concerning meaning and interpretation is an obvious example of the function of the metaphor of theory. Notably, the concept of mediation cannot be articulated without this metaphor. If we abandon our dependence on this metaphor, we might ask ourselves "What is mediation a metaphor *for*?" is there a literal way to describe mediation? What, exactly, is *doing* the mediating? *What*, exactly, mediates *what between what*? If we can characterize the process of mediation without recourse to these metaphors, then why don't we do it? If we cannot characterize the process without recourse to these metaphors then is it obvious that we are doing more than just rehearsing the metaphors? Is there some other meaning *behind* the metaphors? I will argue that without the persistence of the unconscious function of this metaphor, the concept, itself, dissolves. 2) The fact that immediacy is a negation of mediacy (which, apparently, is not even a word), suggests that mediation is somehow primary, somehow preceding immediacy. My position is focused on the emergence of new forms of communication and new forms of recognition, and hence on the initiation and/or inauguration of novel forms of meaning. While some may argue that any such novelty can only be understood within the scope of existing discourse and practices, and therefore could not be pure origins or initiations, I will counter that while this is assuredly the case, there are still specific moments, places, and contexts in which such events arise. And in such spaces, it is still people—either specific individuals, or groups of individuals—for whom such events are either intelligible or not. It is the specifics of the circumstances, down to the bodies in which interpretive events occur, that form the bases of the possibility of the recognition and comprehension of novelty. In other words, bodies constitute essential components of general contexts which, by virtue of their differences, yield differential possibilities of interpretation. In such conditions, the

activity, its emergence is coextensive with its function. With this as a starting point, I will claim that the body is the source domain of all metaphor, and furthermore, of all meaning in general. Animal bodies, as the loci of meaning, are habituated into regular response patterns to their environments, yielding familiar, repeatable, activities that signal, anticipate, and integrate their practical negotiations and interactions. Likewise, human bodies, to the extent that they are linguistic bodies, are *inscribed* with patterns of response, recognition, and forms of motility which are, on the face of it, coextensive with concomitant forms of discourse, descriptions, practices and associated narrations of experience.

Metaphors are an interesting example of what is unique to linguistic bodies, and the kinds of response patterns that are made available or compelled by our uniquely adorned environments.<sup>238</sup> There are circumstances in which an individual or a group may inherit a

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intelligibility of novel productive metaphors—catachresis—can be unpredictable. It is in this space that questions concerning *why* metaphors live, die, and are mostly “stillborn” becomes an important issue (an issue which Max Black explicitly forecloses, and one which Richard Rorty thinks of as “uninteresting.” Both are wrong). Part of my position is that both the intelligibility and the *production* of novel metaphors is the product of a confluence of factors which happen in space and time and, most importantly, can initiate new forms of life and new forms of recognition. Such shifts, I will argue, are as immediate as any other bodily function or response.

Further, on my view, this is a spatio-temporal immediacy that we might associate with cognitive events. Importantly, though, “cognitive” in my usage is not at all meant to identify something pertaining primarily to subjective experience and/or consciousness. I am attempting to articulate an embodied form of cognition that, again, should be seen as every bit as immediate as raising my arm or sneezing. On my view, we might say that mediation comes only after emergent meaning is “taken up” and recognized as a feature of a shared vocabulary. We might evaluate this on the basis of what Ricoeur refers to as the “new congruence” which can be achieved by an apt metaphor.

<sup>238</sup> In fact, this point might be more readily explained by taking the environment, itself, as primary. “Linguistic bodies” then, would indicate the kinds of bodies for whom a language has become part of the environmental conditions that such a body must negotiate to survive. We might think of this in terms of what Richard Dawkins has referred to as an “extended phenotype.” In a similar way that a spider extends its body and develops specialized responses to its augmented environment on the basis of its life on the web that it secretes, human beings extend their bodies and develop specialized responses to their augmented environments on the bases of the linguistic webs we weave. The key to this would be that the relationship that bodies can have with the linguistic components of our environment creates new forms of *embodied response*, through the development of new ways of organizing and reorganizing such responses, which would otherwise be fluid, dynamic, and perhaps without regularity (see Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* II). This way of framing things might serve as an alternative to the failed prospect of the conceptual scheme.

Metaphor, I will argue, is the most salient and efficacious method for transforming patterns of response. It operates by calling on a familiar embodied response patterns and compelling its projective re-application in unfamiliar circumstances. Metaphor, therefore, is about reorganizing response patterns, and ultimately has less to do with words and sentences than it does with the forms of behavior that can be compelled through responding to

language or vocabulary, but not the forms of life and motility that such a vocabulary informs.<sup>239</sup> Alternatively, as practices change and develop, there are often shifts in emphasis, shifts in what counts as centrally relevant to any practice. In such circumstances, the vocabulary may lag behind certain dimensions of any practice. This may happen as a result of negligence, overconfidence, and/or the practical efficacy of assuming certainty. Such lags, in either direction, are exemplary sources of metaphor. What I think is crucial in this approach to the definition of metaphor is that the common tendency to think metaphoricity in opposition to literality disappears. In its place, we can begin to articulate meaning with respect to metaphor as a non-oppositional difference in service to the larger goal of recognizing the locus and social realities of the speakers for whom metaphors become a way of life.

What Derrida's project offers is the possibility of undoing the systematic hierarchies which have characterized the history of knowledge, opening discourse in such a way that the excluded is recognized to be the conditioning possibility of that which is otherwise constrained, codified, and valorized as worthy of inclusion among appropriate discourse and discursive forms. Such a conception signals the potential of undoing the hierarchies which support and form the stasis and integrity of meaning. Given my position on context and the centrality of embodiment in characterizing meaning, this could mean undoing any form of stasis in the lives of those for whom meaning matters. In this way, the social dimension of speech is opened up for alternative

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unfamiliar circumstances on the basis of already familiar and otherwise readily applied forms of recognition and response.

<sup>239</sup> As with the central hypothesis of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. MacIntyre hypothesizes that the contentious and irresolvable nature of contemporary ethical debate in western academic philosophy is the consequence of inheriting a fragmented moral vocabulary, but not the relevant forms of life that would enable such moral vocabularies to be intelligible. I would contend that such occurrences are likely to be very common, and would be very difficult to identify. On MacIntyre's view, theoretical fictions must be constructed in order to make such vocabularies workable, but without the constitutive forms of life and practices, such fictions serve to obscure more than to illuminate.

forms of speech, for the alternative forms of life through which such speech is intelligible, and for which they may be needed.

On the other hand, and as one would expect, Derrida's is an incomplete picture. While he contends that there are no boundaries of contexts, and that every mark, insofar as it is a mark must be, in principle, excessive to any context in which it appears, it seems that he has perhaps overstated his case. In this way, he shares in some of the problems that I've identified, in very different ways, in my assessment of Davidson. I will argue that it is only if we are talking about language *as if it could be* fully distinct from the reality of speakers' lives, that is, in terms of something akin to a simplistic semantic theory of correspondence,<sup>240</sup> that it might seem right, or at least plausible, to say that contexts are potentially infinite. After all, to the extent that any context can always be re-described to include more or less detail, one can surmise that it could only be sharply defined on the basis of artificial exclusions. My response is that it is important to note that not all exclusions are created equally, and that furthermore, the "artificiality" of such exclusions does not track an obvious or important distinction.<sup>241</sup> In other words, what matters are the consequences of such exclusions, not the integrity or authenticity (or lack thereof) of their source(s). Similar in many crucially important ways to my conception of metaphor, such exclusions are only relevant to the extent that they have effects on the bodies of those for whom they are intelligible.<sup>242</sup>

Thus, if we were looking for units of meaning on my model, we might try to detail the specifics of particular forms of embodied response insofar as they can be enacted, recognized,

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<sup>240</sup>But we might respond here—with Ricoeur and Searle, for example—that there is no reason to employ such a simplistic semantic theory to begin with.

<sup>241</sup>I'd ask artificial compared to what? What would be an "authentic" exclusion, for example?

<sup>242</sup>This connection is crucially exemplified in the metaphor of metaphor and in its effect of compelling the belief that contexts, fields, spheres, and frames of reference have or *can have* specifically defined boundaries.

repeated, and reenacted—we might say, insofar as they are iterable. In this way my position can be drawn in sharp distinction from Derrida’s, suggesting that his treatment of discursive efficacy as writing is too narrowly focused and is thus, perhaps, subject to his own criticism. On my view, we may reasonably ask why linguistic efficacy depends on the iterability of *marks*. Why not *gestures*? Why not *motions*? Why not *bodies*? Opening this line of questioning puts the brakes on Derrida’s claims to the seemingly infinite, open wandering of the possibilities of iterability. On the other hand, my position retains some of the inevitable and essential consequences of iterability, although in an importantly altered form. With this in mind, I hope to forge a narrow path between Derrida and Austin, suggesting that their mutual interests, taken together, can provide space for a dramatic transformation in how one might think about the use of language generally, and in philosophy more specifically. Derrida’s approach to the treatment of language implies a set of radically different effects, and also employs a fundamentally different strategy from Austin’s. Nevertheless, in an interesting sense, they have importantly shared goals. Making sense of their similarities and differences will help me lay the foundations for forwarding my position.

As a preliminary: I agree with Derrida’s interpretation that Austin is, in spite of himself, seeking to *master a meaningful* code—however, I deny that it is a code whose function would *necessarily* depend on an extension of the classical model of communication, on the joint functioning metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor.<sup>243</sup> I will argue that even given

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<sup>243</sup> Because of some fairly persistent misreadings of Derrida’s reading of Austin, in the next chapter I will have to establish A) that this is, in fact, Derrida’s thesis with respect to Austin in “Signature, Event, Context,” and that B) his position is incorrect because it doesn’t read Austin thoroughly enough, which is a common charge against Derrida in this debate. I will argue, however, that Derrida’s misreading of Austin, has little to do with the concerns around which the analysis of this debate has developed. The problem with Derrida’s reading of Austin has nothing to do with “seriousness” (or at least not in the way that this concern has been taken to be so central to his purposes which is “serious” as opposed to the theatrical or artistic and figurative). On my view, the problem with Derrida’s reading of Austin, is also *almost everyone else’s* problem with reading Austin (perhaps even Austin’s own reading of Austin)—not according enough attention to the perlocutionary.

Austin's dependence on seriousness as a possible anchor for his "total speech situation," linguistic function on his model does not have to depend on a kind meaning which is best characterized as a distinct property, or as a determined, semantic, or cognitive content. It seems to me that Derrida can only reach his conclusion on Austin by focusing on the nature of illocution without adequately treating the function of perlocution. As such, I will try to draw Derrida and Austin together on the basis of a conception of seriousness that does not depend on the conscious subject, meaning, and the "inward spiritual acts" that Austin is explicitly trying to avoid. I will argue that in order for such a joint position to work, we must explore the consequences of not only illocutionary acts and forces but also, and primarily, of perlocutionary acts and forces. In so doing, we will open our conversation more generally to the role of the body, the meaning and mechanisms of its inscription, and the exemplary case of such inscription, metaphor.

I will then attempt to forward a theory of meaning and metaphor on the basis of forms of recognition and the contingent character of perlocutionary force and embodied *response*. In order to do this, I will attempt to characterize individual bodies in the variety of social, practical, and *biological*<sup>244</sup> circumstances from which communicative events occur. I will give a broad argument for the possibility of private, unconscious, meaning by localizing meaning in specifiable, but *pre-intelligible* communicative events. Such events are not meaningful in any readily recognizable sense, but are nevertheless productive of new forms of meaning and

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<sup>244</sup> This probably will only be adumbrated in this project. Generally, though, much like my above footnote concerning the use of "organism" rather than "human," I want to open conceptions of embodiment to include differences of all kinds that can be characterized as differences in embodiment. With this in mind, I may want to leave open the possibility of talking about speech and perceptual differences like prosopagnosia, Capgras syndrome and synesthesia. Autism and Schizophrenia also strike me as important psychological/biological differences which would be likely to yield different forms of metaphorical competence. Additionally, some focus on social difference, psychological difference, and the interplay of forces which produce and are produced by such difference seem to me to be natural outgrowths of this line of inquiry.

recognition. The evidence for these meaningful yet pre-intelligible events is the range of unconsciously employed but presumably essential metaphors (I will refer to them as embodied and/or catachrestic metaphors and I will link them to what Derrida calls philosophemes) that exemplify the language of philosophy and the philosophy of language and that we've already shown to be forcefully exemplified in the metaphor of theory.

That these events are often unintelligible is simply a focused aspect of the fact that such metaphors typically go unnoticed but are nevertheless the basis for the bodily responses that subtend philosophical thought. Noticing such a metaphor's metaphoricity potentially undoes its assumed efficacy thereby altering the forms of recognition and practices which depend on its unconscious functioning. In other words, recognizing such metaphoricity opens up another space of interpretation, another space of critique. Once such metaphors are recognized to be constitutive of many aspects of what is, in some circles, taken to be the details of literal and conceptual truths, one gains a critical vantage point from which to assess the role and consequences of the use of such language in the construction of human thought, human consciousness, and human life.

To reinforce these points, and to embark on the presentation of my own definition of metaphor, I will draw on the work of Shoshana Felman, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Stanley Cavell, John Searle, Paul Ricoeur, J.L. Austin, and Jacques Derrida. I will begin with a presentation and analysis of Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, primarily working through it on the basis of Derrida's reading of this text in his "Signature, Event, Context." I will look to reorient the direction of the debates surrounding this essay, by pointing out that it's focus is not, as is often assumed, Austin; rather, it is about the nature of communication, and, importantly, about the functioning of the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor in the assumption

of the integrity of its meaning. I will, as does Derrida, focus on “seriousness” and the difference between what can count as a serious speech act and what cannot. I will forward the position that in much of the debate concerning “seriousness” interpreters have lost scope of Derrida’s central goal. As such I will be looking to rescue Derrida from a certain misreading that takes his concern with Austin as a concern over the *meaning* of seriousness. I will counter that Derrida is questioning Austin over the *effect* that seriousness could have in his theory.



## Chapter IV

# Of a Possible Encounter in the Field: Derrida, Austin, and Speech Act Theory

### An Unheard of Graphics

“Surely the words must be spoken “*seriously*” and so as to be taken “*seriously*?” This, though vague, true enough in general—it is an important commonplace in discussing the purport of any utterance whatsoever. I must not be joking, for example, *nor writing a poem*.<sup>245</sup>”

—J.L. Austin

“The silence of prehistoric arcana and buried civilizations, the entombment of lost intentions and guarded secrets, and the illegibility of the lapidary inscription disclose the transcendental sense of death as what unites these things to the absolute privilege of intentionality in the very instance of its essential juridical failure.<sup>246</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

“Derrida has a distressing penchant for saying things that are obviously false.<sup>247</sup>”

—John Searle

“Signature, Event, Context,” is an essay that was originally delivered as a lecture at the Association of French Speaking Societies of Philosophy. The theme of the event was “Communication.” True to form, Derrida sets out, straightaway, to thwart the easy assumption that the meaning of this theme could be readily defined. In this, he takes on what should be an extremely difficult challenge: to defy the belief that even in the carefully defined context of an international convention of French speaking philosophers, that something so central and basic to the participants’ goals, intentions, and actions in that space could even be determined or established. The very term that announced their purpose, set the parameters of their concern, designated and determined their activity—and that presumably described various aspects of the most central behavior in which they would be engaged—according to Derrida, was not certain *to*

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<sup>245</sup> *HW* p. 9 final italics mine.

<sup>246</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989 p.88

<sup>247</sup> John Searle, “Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida” *Glyph* 1 (1977): 198-208 p. 203 hereafter, “RD”

*communicate a communicable meaning*, a determined *content*, an identifiable concept, or a describable value.<sup>248</sup> In the epilogue of that essay, Derrida performs an unfolding of the implications of the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor, looking to demonstrate the depth of their roles, and the pervasiveness of their presence, in the very articulation of the concept of communication. Notable among his concerns is the fact that radically questioning the concept of communication has an interesting constraint. He writes:

However, even to articulate and to propose this question I have had to anticipate the meaning of the word *communication*. I have been constrained to predetermine communication as a vehicle, a means of transport or transitional medium of a *meaning*, and moreover a *unified* meaning.<sup>249</sup>

His effort in this essay is directed at developing an alternative approach and model for thinking about how language functions. He's looking for an alternative that can dispense with the pervasive metaphysical presuppositions which turn on the assumed status of this classical conception of communication. Given our analyses of the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor, we might better understand this essay by briefly considering the essay's title. "Signature" refers to the primacy and authority of consciousness as first personal subjectivity, "Event" refers to the moment of the deliberate intention *to put one's thoughts into words*, when the plenitude of present meaning is under the direct mastery of the conscious subject, and "Context" is the relevant space of discourse, the appropriate field in which the transmission of the subject's meaning can presumably be maintained in its full integrity.<sup>250</sup> The work of the essay is largely a demonstration that language functions perfectly well with no necessarily determinate input from any of these factors. As such, Derrida is looking for a way to describe linguistic

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<sup>248</sup> *MP* p. 309; *LI* p. 1

<sup>249</sup> *LI* p. 1; *MP* p. 309

<sup>250</sup> With respect to event-hood, Derrida writes the following in *Speech and Phenomena*: "I must from the outset operate (within) a structure of repetition whose basic element can only be representative. A sign is never an event, if by event we mean an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular. A sign which would take place but "once" would not be a sign; a purely idiomatic sign would not be a sign." (p. 50)

efficacy without the deep metaphysical assumptions that seem inevitably to resurface—even for thinkers who see no allegiance in their work to any form of metaphysics.

He begins by posing a question that can, perhaps, be made to resonate with Davidson's questions concerning conceptual schemes, when he asks "Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of the *context*?<sup>251</sup>" His response, however, approaches this problem from a very different perspective than we see in Davidson's work.<sup>252</sup> He first looks to detail the ways in which a range of unexamined assumptions have guided a history of the analysis of communication, noting the central role that the concept of writing plays in the organization of the themes of this history. He begins to approach this problem through an analysis of writing rather than that of speech. This is a deliberate methodological reversal, one that is meant to counteract the assumptions of the classical conception of communication. Specifically, his target is the oversimplified conception of the relationship between consciousness and speech, which is, on his view, wholly inadequate as a model for describing the function of writing. In the classical concept, as exemplified in the works of various authors,<sup>253</sup> writing is inevitably treated as secondary to speech, being, as it is, separable from the conscious intentions of its author, from the moment of its inscription, and from the contexts which serve to sustain its integrity. The classical assumption, he tells us, has

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<sup>251</sup> *MP* p. 310

<sup>252</sup> It should be noted that they are also very different questions that these two thinkers are posing, and that the model for their analysis is quite different as well. Davidson's analysis is primarily focused on *experience* (and even the integrity of the meaning of this term is under scrutiny for Davidson), of a first personal, perceptual, sort, and whether language and its use transforms the nature of our experience so radically that different uses of language might produce radically different experiences of the world—so different that there may not be any way to adjudicate, translate, or even understand, the same world if described according to schemes of competing worldviews. Derrida's question is about the function of signification and whether or not there are features of discursive practices which can restrain the inevitable transformations that the use of signs constantly display—transformations that, on his view, may be so radical that the meaning of an utterance may not be translatable into "itself;" in other words, that the transforming functioning of signification might convert an utterance's use so dramatically that it may come to function in the exact *opposite* way from which it might be *intended*.

<sup>253</sup> In this essay, he focuses on Warburton, Condillac and Husserl, although in the corpus of his work he addresses this problem in a variety of thinkers including Saussure, Freud, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, and many others. He treats this as a virtually universal starting point, and it is worth noting that this is, on his view, a natural extension of "philosophy's unique thesis."

always been that speech alone maintains a connection to these essential aspects of communication, and that speech is therefore communication in its purest form.

To further explore this concept of communication, he sets forth a preliminary sketch that draws upon the dictates of the joint functioning of the metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory. Under review is the fact that in various developmental histories of the concept of communication, it has been taken for granted—to the point of it being taken as a trivial truth—that writing is a subset of communication that is modelled after speech. It is also assumed that it should be modeled in basically the same way, as the transport of a determined and unified meaningful content by a different means. The medium of writing is able to extend the range and efficacy of the force of speech, thereby extending the scope of the context in which ideas can be communicated. He writes:

When we say that writing *extends* the field and powers of a locutionary or gestural communication, are we not presupposing a kind of *homogenous* space of communication? The range of the voice or of the gesture certainly appears to encounter a factual limit here, an empirical boundary in the form of space and time; and writing within the same time, within the same space, manages to loosen the limits, to open the *same field* to a much greater range. Meaning, the content of the semantic message, is thus transmitted, *communicated*, by different *means*, by technically more powerful mediations, over a much greater distance, but within a milieu that is fundamentally continuous and equal to itself, within a homogeneous element across which the unity and the integrity of meaning is not affected in an essential way. Here, all affection is accidental.<sup>254</sup>

Derrida is challenging the general assumption that it is obvious that speech and writing function in the same way. More broadly in this essay, he is challenging the assumption that the same things can be achieved through writing and speech—and in the same way. It is the central components of both the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor that preserve the assumed identity of these features of communication. The ways in which their implication complexes set the terms for these analyses of language function surreptitiously, and are usually unquestioned. In this, the integrity of semantic content and the homogeneity of the space of the

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<sup>254</sup> *MP* p. 310

semantic field are emphasized, although their function in the texts in which they appear<sup>255</sup> go unnoticed, although not unproductively.

What they produce, are unexamined chains of reasoning which develop according the logic of their implication complexes without any conscious recognition of their centrality. Thus, we get a history of the concept of communication, and subsequently of writing, which is marked by surface transformations (first gestures, sounds, then paintings, then hieroglyphics, then pictographs, then alphabetic writing) which persist in transporting they very same mental/semantic content, ever more efficiently, across an ever growing range of communicative effects that extend in direct proportion to the particular medium's efficacy.<sup>256</sup> On Derrida's view, this model's general impetus is the goal of maintaining the value of presence. Communication is, in one way or another, concerned with making one's ideas present to one another, or even of *representing* one's own ideas back to oneself as a matter of recall or of restoring memory. He surmises that in pursuit of this value of presence, philosophers will persistently forget, obliterate, or otherwise negate the degree to which the system is disrupted by the value of *absence*.<sup>257</sup> In spite of the goal of maintaining the presence and representation of the idea, of the content, Derrida claims one will always find evidence of the functioning of absence that cannot be denied even if it is unrecognized. What we find, as communication proceeds through various forms, first *as gesture*, then *as speech*, then *as writing*, is that there will be undeniable and determined

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<sup>255</sup> In this case, the analysis is of Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*. Generally, Derrida claims that he chooses this work because of its specific treatment of the origin of writing. But he also makes the bold claim that this tendency is so pervasive that "...I do not believe that one could find, in the entire history of philosophy as such, a single counterexample..." *MP* p. 311

<sup>256</sup> *MP* 312-13; *LI* p. 4-5

<sup>257</sup> It might be worthwhile to take another look at the discussion of the role which "dead metaphors" play in the production of absences. This discussion begins in first chapter, toward the end of the subsection "...No Longer of Account as Coins..." This process and its implications are elaborated in the following subsection, "Kill the Messenger." The key features are described on p. 56-57, but the whole section elaborates on the production and effects of such absences within the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of language.

absences which will inevitably threaten the presumed continuity of the space of the efficient function of the conveyance of thought.

Following his reversal, he then conjectures that such absences are the crucial aspects of writing's function which mark its specific difference from other media. From this, he reasons that if he can prove that absence conditions all other aspects of communication (i.e. meaning, idea, content, speech, gesture, etc.), then the whole model can be reversed to show that speech, gesture, content, etc. are a subspecies of writing, from which they derive their structure. His argument is as follows: absence conditions writing by virtue of the fact that for it to function, it must be able to function in the physical absence of both its author and that of its presumed addressee. Furthermore, it must be able to remain legible even if it never reaches its addressee, and therefore its function must potentially exceed the necessity of ever being received at all, and thus its function goes beyond the necessity of any possible audience. As a consequence of this, the possibility of designating the proper space of its function erodes, and with it, the *identity of its content* and the *integrity* of the contexts which are often presumed to be the basis of the stability of a communicative act's reception. He writes:

It is here that *différance* as writing could no longer (be) an (ontological) modification of presence. My 'written communication' must, if you will, remain legible despite the absolute disappearance of every determined addressee in general for it to function as writing, that is, for it to be legible. It must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the addressee or of the empirically determinable set of addressees. This iterability (*iter*, once again, comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows may be read as the exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself...<sup>258</sup>

The function of writing ruptures the necessity of the integrity and homogeneity of the presumed space of any possible context. Iterability means that the mark is repeatable irrespective of any specific addressee, and hence *possibly every* specific addressee. Furthermore, writing as iterability, will continue to function irrespective of the sender as well, *and therefore its*

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<sup>258</sup> *MP* p. 315; *LI* p. 7

*functioning will not be presided over by her intentions, meanings, contexts, or any other constraining effect.*<sup>259</sup> Nothing can protect the *integrity* of written communication as it undergoes the always possible transformations of reading and re-reading, writing and re-writing. This is because what centrally characterizes any writing is the mark, and the mark's very emergence, depends on the spacing by which its difference is established. It is on this basis that the mark may enter into, and be extracted from, any possible context.

If any sign is functional at all, its effect comes from its repeatability or iterability. In the repetition, there is an inevitable emergence of difference, as no two utterances, no two marks, occupy the same space and the same time. Continuing with his reversal, Derrida sees fit to generalize writing's "essential predicates" of absence, alterity, rupture, and breaks—those predicates that he calls "graphematic in general"<sup>260</sup>—to all forms of recognizable and repeatable marks. Thus, he is able to conclude that speech can be thought of as a subset of writing, and that it is best characterized according to its condition as the emergence, recognition, and iterability of differential marks. Stated differently, the character of any recognizable mark is defined by *absence*, by the *possibility* of its break with any origin, and hence, by the possibility of going beyond any speaker, any intention, and any possible context. Likewise, the possibility of the recognition of a spoken utterance is part of an inheritance of phonemes, the intentions of which, the contents of which, and putatively original contexts of which, do not *necessarily* enter into the structure of any given speech act.

The very fact of the iterable structure of such phonemes guarantees a kind of freedom from all determination. Of this "structure," Derrida describes the situation in the following way:

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<sup>259</sup> This is a crucial point to which we will continually return. In the next chapter I will attempt to link this claim to both the function of catachrestic ("dead") metaphors, and to the nature of the specific metaphors which compel belief in the integrity of such a presiding function of intentional consciousness.

<sup>260</sup> *MP* p. 322; *LI* p. 14

Let us consider any element of spoken language, a large or small unity. First condition for its function...that a certain self-identity of this element (mark, sign, etc.) must permit its recognition and repetition. Across empirical variations of tone, of voice, etc. eventually of a certain accent, for example, one must be able to recognize the identity, shall we say, of a signifying form. Why is this identity paradoxically the division or dissociation from itself which will make of this phonic sign a grapheme? It is because this unity of the signifying form is constituted only by its iterability, by the possibility of being repeated in the absence not only of its referent, which goes without saying, but of a determined signified or current intention of signification, as of every present intention of communication. This structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its context) seems to me to make of every mark, even if oral, a grapheme in general, that is, as we have seen, the nonpresent *remaining* of a differential mark cut off from its alleged “production” or origin. And I will extend this law even to all experience in general, if it is granted that there is no experience of *pure* presence, but only chains of differential marks.<sup>261</sup>

With this, Derrida’s reversal is complete. He concludes that iterability is the condition upon which “communication,” whether spoken or written, is possible. Thus the acts, whether as speech or writing, can be performed in innumerable circumstances and in innumerable conditions. The very structure of the sign is such that it does not require any specific, determined, present intention, referent, context, subject, speaker, or writer. The central point is that writing and speech can function and continue to function on these very minimal bases: spacing, absence, and that which this structure enables, iterability. In terms of the *necessary* features communication, the central aspects of the classical concept of communication prove themselves to be superfluous. They are, of course, importantly related to the use of language, although, as we will see, they are better thought of as effects, as consequences of its use, but not as essential predicates.<sup>262</sup>

When Derrida discusses “the inevitable consequences of these nuclear traits of all writing,” the first consequence he lists is “the break with the *horizon of communication* as the communication of consciousnesses or presences, and the linguistic or *semantic transport of meaning*...”<sup>263</sup> If correct, this revelation would, of course, prove to be devastating to

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<sup>261</sup> *MP* p. 318; *LI* p. 10

<sup>262</sup> *MP* p. 329; *LI* p. 20

<sup>263</sup> *MP* p. 316; *LI* p. 8 italics mine.



“philosophy’s unique thesis” and its concomitant goal of univocal discourse. If language functions irrespective of intended meaning, the entire prospect of devising strategies for adequately conveying the essence of thought in its rigorous purity will prove to be a lost and impossible cause. Such a condition reveals the scope of the inherent risk of loss in any linguistic act, and it furthermore reveals that such risks are essential, are in fact, among the *necessary conditions* for the possibility of linguistic use in general. The inevitable risk of loss is a necessary condition of any possible gains. It is the mark of *usure*, the mark of iterability, to render impossible the regulatory constraints demanded by metaphysics.

### Risk and Regulation

“I now propose to elaborate *this question* a little further with help from—but in order to go beyond it too—the problematic of the performative. It has several claims to our interest here.<sup>264</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

“I must explain again that we are floundering here. To feel the firm ground of prejudice slipping away is exhilarating, but brings its revenges.<sup>265</sup>”

—J.L. Austin

It should be noted that Austin and the question of the prospect of the performative do not make an appearance in “Signature, Event, Context” until just over halfway through the essay.<sup>266</sup> This, alone, should give us some pause when we read much of the debate surrounding this work, as almost every commentator treats the essay as if it were primarily about Austin. As I’ve shown, the essay is actually an ongoing inquiry into the structure of communicative acts; Austin is introduced in an effort to elaborate on the questions concerning that structure. The impetus of Austin’s work was to rethink the use of language so as to minimize the centrality of meaning and

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<sup>264</sup> *MP* p. 321; *LI* p. 13 italics mine. The question is the question concerning the assumed structure of communication.

<sup>265</sup> *HW* p. 61.

<sup>266</sup> Although an allusion to “ordinary language” is made on the first page.

consciousness for its functioning, thereby opening the analysis of language up to its many polyvalent uses. This is a strategy that has a natural appeal for a project like Derrida's, and he is thus looking to explore its potential.<sup>267</sup> If we take him at his word, he sees his approach to Austin as an effort at rendering a "certain determination of what Austin's discourse implies and in what still remains to be carried out in his project."<sup>268</sup>

The performative, for Austin, is not efficacious on the basis of its connection to or correspondence with reality, nor is it a function of the rules and structure of grammar, nor to the lexical, syntactical, or semantic properties of sentences; rather, it is evaluated on the basis of the kinds of effects that it tends to produce. He is careful to point out to his reader that with regard to the category of performatives, a speaker is not *transmitting* a meaning or proposition, is not reporting a fact, and is not making a statement that is either true or false. And importantly, although some may contend that in the performance of any utterance a speaker's intentional or psychological state, the contents of her mind, must in some way correspond to the act, Austin warns that this would be a misunderstanding of the source of locutionary force. He writes:

One of our examples was, for instance, the utterance 'I do' (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife), as uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony. Here we should say that in saying these words we are doing something—namely, marrying, rather than reporting something, namely that we are marrying. And the act of marrying, like, say, the act of betting, is at least preferably (though still not accurately) to be described as saying certain words, *rather than as performing a different, inward and spiritual, action of which these words are merely the outward and audible sign*. That this is so can hardly be proved, but is, I should claim, a fact.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Stanley Cavell cites numerous other reasons for this appeal. He writes: "I note that I will be taking for granted...that these thinkers, i.e., Derrida and Austin: 1) share the object of dismantling the metaphysics of Western philosophy; 2) find philosophical procedures that are neither those of commentary nor interpretation nor of refutation, but ones of what Derrida calls going through texts; and specifically 3) going through exemplary texts, exemplary of their respective traditions, in order 4) to produce an exemplary text in response; and specifically one meant 5) to show how to think in the aftermath of some destruction of thinking." From Stanley Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995 In the chapter, "What Did Derrida Want of Austin?" p. 47-8, hereafter "WDA"

<sup>268</sup> Leonard Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance: The Difference Between The Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida*. Albany, NY: SUNY press, 1988, p. 154 Hereafter, *IC*

<sup>269</sup> *HW* p. 13

Imagining that a performative must be accompanied by an “inward and spiritual” action simply restores the primacy of the conscious subject, her meaningful intentions, and her ability *to put her thoughts into words* for the sake of *transmission*. Thus, to the extent that he can avoid this, his position overcomes two problems at once. First, the location of discursive efficacy resides neither in one’s conscious intention, nor *in* the words or sentences as their meanings or content. Second, that the efficacy of language is not a function of a set of absolutely determinable semantic or grammatical rules or properties. The performative, then, is not expected to have a single clear relationship to the world or to the conscious subject as such. It is a social phenomenon which is best considered in terms of its role in producing effects and in facilitating social interactions. The value of language is an emergent product of the social circumstances in which its use may have various effects.

With this strategy, many of the concerns that, according to our present study, have motivated and organized the philosophy of language throughout its history seem to be put in abeyance. More specifically, for Derrida’s effort in “Signature, Event, Context,” this strategy suggests an opportunity to explore a model of “communication” that is not determined by the classical conception he had, for the first half of the essay, been criticizing. In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin forgoes an account of meaning and truth to instead consider language use in terms of its effectiveness as a practice. Rather than casting his analysis in terms of meaningfulness, reference, intelligibility, and truth and falsity, he describes linguistic efficacy in terms of forcefulness, satisfaction, success and failure, felicity and infelicity. This is a significant shift in emphasis as it fundamentally reorients the focus of the analysis of language by redefining the salient features which are under central consideration. By treating language as a form of behavior, the concrete circumstances in which communication takes place become indispensable

features which must be included in the analysis. Treating speech as an act obviates the need to assess language primarily in abstraction, thereby also dispensing with the need to define meaning in any absolute, non-contextual, sense. What one can do with language becomes a matter of circumstance, an achievement of sorts that is not a function of the “properties” of language, but a consequence and condition of human interaction.

During the course of a developing project, Austin defines four major kinds of speech act: the constative, the locutionary, the perlocutionary, and the illocutionary. Constative acts are those with which the philosophy of language had, up until Austin’s contribution, been almost exclusively occupied. Constatives and their assumed primacy and centrality are the primary targets of Austin’s critique of the philosophy of language. Central among his gripes with his contemporary scene in philosophy was the tendency, “not always formulated without unfortunate dogmatism,<sup>270</sup>” to imagine that utterances, statements, must be verifiable, and that thus they must be understood according to their truth value. These are the kinds of sentences and utterances which are primarily defined by their meaning, by their capacity or incapacity for the bearing of truth. Such sentences and their centrality in philosophy have been the central focus of this paper so far, and are of the type that Davidson claims set the strict boundaries of semantic theory. As I’ve tried to argue, along with Derrida, their centrality is of a piece with the classical model of communication, and its inevitable allegiance with the metaphor of theory. It is Austin’s attempt to move beyond the centrality of constative acts (although not only this), that marks the natural connection between his and Derrida’s projects.

Perlocutionary acts are the kinds of speech acts which produce effects that are indirect and tangential to their performances. The effects of such an act are not, in any way, *necessarily*

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<sup>270</sup> HW p. 2

concomitant with the act. So if, a speaker intimidates another by claiming to have some secret information, the fact that her interlocutor is intimidated is indicative of perlocutionary force. It is important to note, however, that her interlocutor may not be intimidated at all, she may be excited by the prospect of secret information, or perhaps indifferent. Perlocutionary acts are always aimed at achieving some possible goal, but are defined more by their actual consequences, by their effects, than they are by the acts themselves. As such, it is recognized that perlocutions are just as likely to produce unintended consequences as they are to produce intended ones. Furthermore, the effects of perlocution are effects which are not explicitly tied to any particular kinds of language use, as Austin himself says: “For clearly any, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without calculation, *of any utterance whatsoever...*”<sup>271</sup> As such, they are inevitably beset by risk, uncertainty, and the very particular circumstances of their utterances. There is no sense in which perlocutions can be thought outside of a very robust contextuality.

Illocutionary acts are those speech acts which, in their very performance, produce the speaker’s desired effects. An example of such an act would be that of warning one’s audience of some impending danger. By the very act of saying “I warn you that these snakes are very deadly,” a speaker has, in fact, achieved her aim of warning her audience. The paradigmatic case of the illocution is that of the promise. In declaring that one promises to do or achieve something, one has entered into a shared social arrangement with publicly recognized conditions of satisfaction. Illocutionary acts can only be achieved within the context of some form of shared cultural practice or convention. In such a case, the shared circumstances which obtain between speakers and their audiences are of critical importance. The operation of these acts requires the

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<sup>271</sup> HW p. 110

securing of one's audience's "uptake."<sup>272</sup> In other words, one's audience must also recognize and respect the organization, structure, and rules of the convention which is announced, or implied, in the illocution.

One of the crucial markers of the distinction is that illocutions can announce and name what they do, what is achieved in them, while perlocutions cannot. For example, one can say "I promise you" or "I apologize" and achieve, in these utterances, the acts of promising or apologizing. One cannot, on the other hand, say "I intimidate you" or "I seduce you" and have achieved what is named in the utterance. This, again, is because of the conventionality of the illocution, that it can explicitly call upon and name the shared recognition of conventional norms. Thus, there is often an asymmetry in the registry of effects between these kinds of locution. In the case of promising, for example, it is often the promisor who is best positioned to know whether she has actually effectively promised (perhaps she is lying, or she doesn't really know the nature of the conventions that she's invoked, etc.) and in the case of seduction, it is those who are presumably seduced that register the perlocutionary effect.<sup>273</sup>

It is only when certain conventional conditions obtain that illocutionary acts are possible, and it is only when said conditions satisfy the terms of the convention that an act is achieved, and is, according to Austin's nomenclature, felicitous. An illocution is felicitous when it follows the prescribed norms of recognized and respected convention, thereby transforming the social circumstances in which the convention functions. Strictly speaking, perlocutions cannot be felicitous, as whatever can be achieved through them does not depend on social convention, and

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<sup>272</sup> *HW* p. 147 See in this essay, Chapter 2, "Of Rebirth and Death" for a preliminary treatment of catachrestic uptake.

<sup>273</sup> It is worth noting that the registry of said effects need not be conscious. The perlocutionary *effect is manifest in a hearer's behaviors*, which can be very simple, very complex, conscious or unconscious.

hence does not have explicitly articulable conditions of satisfaction.<sup>274</sup> Perlocutionary effects are, in an *indeterminate sense*, connected to utterances. Still, they are often, but not always, also connected to a speaker's intentions<sup>275</sup> or goals, and as such can be viewed as achievements of a sort. Nevertheless, the effect, and hence the achievement is, in an important sense, unpredictable. We might say, given that the effects of illocution are to be found in the enacting of the scripts associated with publicly recognized conventions, that successful illocutions affect conventions themselves. By contrast, we might say that the effects of perlocution are to be found in the often unpredictable responses of listeners' bodies and in their behavior.

Without the input or regulation of intention, meaning, or consciousness, however, it isn't obvious that even by convention that an illocutionary act can be said to produce any single, determinate, effect. As with any general claims regarding causality and the production of effects, there will inevitably be some indeterminate range of effects that escape our attention *in every* case—but that are no less effects for that reason. Thus, even if we focus on illocutions, as Austin does,<sup>276</sup> and we see that there are indeed recognized tendencies in the consequences of performatives, such tendencies still do not appear to favor one unique kind of consequence *to the exclusion of others*. In other words, the mere speaking of certain words on certain occasions does not guarantee any specific kinds of effects, and certainly not necessarily, or *exclusively*, those which are regarded as conventional. Nothing about conventionality can prevent unpredictable effects, even effects that are precisely opposite from that which said convention intends. The

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<sup>274</sup> Furthermore, an explicit effort to define felicity conditions for Perlocutions is nowhere to be found in Austin's work.

<sup>275</sup> The claim that effects are "connected to" utterances and the claim that they are "connected to" intentions will be further investigated. Not least of all because these are, of course, importantly metaphorical descriptions. Beyond this, however, investigating this kind of language, particularly in the case of intention, will open our analysis up to a broad array of possibilities with respect to assessing some of the common vocabularies which are employed to describe consciousness, meaning, intention, and the integrity of the subject.

<sup>276</sup> As most speech act theorists do. Judith Butler, Steven Davis, and Ted Cohen are notable exceptions.

only way to imagine appropriate circumstances for the intended use of a convention is to imagine, however implicitly, some consciousness(es) for whom said intention was relevant, meaningful, and determinate. Such an intention which would have no outward mark or social effect, and its integrity and priority could only be established, by reference to something like univocal meaning which could fix the context, “the total speech situation,” the boundaries and limits of convention.

It is in the face of such difficulties that Derrida detects the need for the inconspicuous reemergence of the centrality of the conscious subject and its meaningful intentions. On Derrida’s reading, this necessity signals the mark of what is left to do in Austin’s work. What he thinks he’s discovered is *why* Austin’s treatment of the performative fell short of its full potential. Of key interest for Derrida, is the sense that *Austin has turned back on his own potential*, and furthermore, that this occurs in a very specific, “rather remarkable,” way. On Derrida’s reading, the consequences of locutionary force, unrestricted by meaning and consciousness, should inevitably open up to a form of discursivity which could not be regulated by the common assumptions which organize the classical concept of communication, *thus opening the analysis of language up to the risk* of “a dissemination which cannot be reduced to polysemia.”<sup>277</sup> Rather than following this possibility out to its unwieldy consequences, Austin sees fit to restore a sense of familiar order to his project, and in this move returns to the very assumptions in the philosophy of language that his work had initially set out to oppose. It is with this in mind that we should read Derrida’s treatment of Austin’s “exclusions.” He actively

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<sup>277</sup> *MP* p. 329; *LI* p. 21 This concern is importantly related to the function of absence in Derrida’s conception of iterability. The first concern that Derrida is eager to point out is that writing “continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions.” *LI* p. 5; *MP* p.313



excludes speech acts which do not have the *proper intention* or the standard use of a convention.

He writes:

a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy...Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—*used not seriously*, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.<sup>278</sup>

By evoking the distinction between serious and parasitic speech, Austin belies the claim that consciousness, that some “inward and spiritual” act, is not central to the meaning of the speech act. What would “seriousness” be in such a circumstance if not something like an *intention*, or something like an act of consciousness? If an act of consciousness or an intention can condition the meaning of a convention, then the consequences of an illocutionary act would ultimately be attributed to the subject who intends and we find ourselves saddled with a conception of illocutionary force that looks a lot like cognitive *content*. Likewise, if conventions can be defined by *the intentions behind* them, rather than by the effects of their performances, it becomes unclear what one seeks to indicate by evoking convention in addition to intention. As such, it becomes unclear exactly how Austin is distinguishing himself from other, more meaning and intention-centered, conceptions of language.

Implied in this line of questioning is the ongoing questioning of which factors, *in the structure of a locution*, are taken to contribute to its effects. With regard to Austin, the concern is with which factors he takes to be centrally relevant in considerations of the production of locutionary force. In this model, in this “communication of an original movement” what, exactly, contributes to linguistic efficacy?

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<sup>278</sup> HW p. 22 second italics mine

Austin's "exclusions" are, in part, indicative of the move to establish the *appropriate boundaries* of what counts in his analysis—he is primarily concerned with identifying those locutions which have force. He is thus unconcerned with detailing the *structure* of those which do not have force; as such, they will be excluded:

Austin's procedure is rather remarkable, and typical of the philosophical tradition he prefers to have little to do with. It consists in recognizing that the possibility of the negative (here, the *infelicities*) is certainly a structural possibility, *that failure is an essential risk in the operations under consideration*; and then, with an almost *immediately simultaneous gesture made in the name of a kind of ideal regulation*, an exclusion of this risk as accidental, *exterior* one that teaches us nothing about the language phenomenon under consideration.<sup>279</sup>

His exclusions function in service to, or as a proxy for, the kinds of exclusions that some might claim are essential to idealization.<sup>280</sup> For Derrida, a very different consideration emerges. Importantly, on his reading, Austin's exclusions are the preliminary statements setting the regulatory *boundaries* within which force can be *appropriately* and *intelligibly* transmitted and conveyed. For Derrida, this move is problematic insofar as it inevitably suggests that there are

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<sup>279</sup> *MP* p. 323 italics mine.

<sup>280</sup> In his defense of Austin in "Reiterating the Differences," Searle justifies these exclusions as simple temporary measures employed for the sake of organization. He argues that despite Derrida's take on these exclusions that they are not a matter of great moment. See also Searle's *Speech Acts* p. 56 for a parallel move, when excluding certain cases of "defective" promises he justifies their exclusion with the claim that "Without abstraction and idealization there is no systematization." For Derrida, such exclusions, even for the sake of hypothesis, are problematic. He writes "Rather, the very structure of the mark (for example, the minimum iterability it requires) excludes the hypothesis of idealization, that is, the adequation of a meaning to itself, of a saying to itself, of understanding to a sentence, whether written or oral, or to a mark in general. Once again, iterability makes possible idealization—and thus, a certain identity in repetition that is independent of the multiplicity of factual events—while at the same time limiting the idealization it makes possible: broaching and breaching it at once." *LI* p. 61 Later, in a similar vein he writes "Nevertheless, I must repeat that iterability prohibits a priori (and in principle) the full and rigorous attainment of the ideal plenitude such exclusions purport to isolate. These hypothetical exclusions cannot be formed. They are illegitimate and impossible as they suppose the self-identity of an isolated element which iterability—i.e. an element constitutive of the hypothesis—divides at once." *LI* p. 63 This is importantly related to the possibility of the type-token distinction. For Derrida, there can be no types in any fundamentally determinate sense. There are only tokens. It is for this reason that he writes on p. 67 "Rather, what is at stake above all is the structural impossibility and illegitimacy of such an "idealization," even one which is methodological and provisional." We might also consider Searle's general move in light of his claims that Derrida is "Pre-Wittgensteinian." Note the following passage from *Philosophical Investigations*: "130. Our clear and simple language-games are not preparatory studies for a future regularization of language—as it were first approximations, ignoring friction and air-resistance. The language-games are rather set up as objects of comparison which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities. 131. For we can avoid ineptness or emptiness in our assertions only by presenting the model as it is, as an object of comparison—as, so to speak, a measuring-rod; not as a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy)" (50e-51e).

regulatory mechanisms of some sort—outside of the acts themselves—that independently determine whether and what kind of force a particular act might have.<sup>281</sup>

Derrida is pushing back against Austin on this matter, maintaining that if locutionary force is really about the effects of discourse, then nothing about intention, meaning, or context could finally determine *the single appropriate effect of any* uttered locution.<sup>282</sup> He thus finds a conflict in the overall structure of the locution when, in trying to specify the nature of illocutions, Austin retreats from his broader goals. Hence, when Austin writes that “The total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort we are engaged in elucidating,<sup>283</sup>” Derrida sees an irresolvable tension: if understanding a locution depends on a carefully defined field of reference, on the possibility of univocity, and the possibility of a position from which an observer might consciously and objectively detail the totality of a context, then the basic goals of Austin’s project are undone. It is in this gesture that Austin restores the classical model, albeit in a hardly perceptible form.

Derrida sees this move as indicative of the common impetus of metaphysics, which, on his view, is the will to regulate discourse so as to ensure the possibility of the proper transmission of ideas. In this case, it is the non-serious or recited language which cannot qualify as a genuine forms of speech, as a genuine speech-acts. This would be, presumably, because such speech does not have content, (as Austin himself says, it will be “hollow or void.”) or at

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<sup>281</sup> As an analogy, we might consider some very simplistic mechanistic form of efficient causality: If we compare locutionary force to that of the interaction of billiard balls, we might say that nothing other than the normal, physical, causal forces have any bearing on how they are able to affect one another. Nothing about the rules of the game of pool, our desires for victory, our particular goals for a shot, have any effect on the ways that the balls actually interact. It would be strange to think that whether or not one was serious when one took a shot would have an effect on the basic forces of interaction. Derrida is making a similar claim regarding what must be necessary about locutionary force if it is to retain its integrity and if it is to serve Austin’s stated purposes, while—at the same time—not being a report on some “inward, spiritual, act.” See also note 369 of this essay, p. 238.

<sup>282</sup> This, again, is because a locution is likely to produce any number of effects. Most such effects will not be tracked, defined, or limited, by appropriateness of a context or by an intention (as it is with *any* forms of causality).

<sup>283</sup> *HW* p. 148

least that it does not have the right kind of content. Such language is parasitic on normal or ordinary language because it can simply mirror the form of ordinary language, despite presumably lacking the crucial properties which make communication efficacious. But which properties, exactly, are missing from recited and nonserious performances?

In attempting to isolate certain kinds of locutions, illocutions which are felicitous, Austin artificially selects certain uses and effects as relevant to understanding performativity and others as irrelevant. Derrida's position picks up on the fact that even for this basic aspect of Austin's characterization to work, that he must, in principle, return to the classical conception of communication which has proven to unconsciously condition the foundations of every philosophy of language. In Austin's case, this model returns, in spite of himself, in the form of the conscious and intentional subject, the one who thinks and knows her meaning, field, and target, before she speaks, and whose speech has its efficacy by virtue of its own internal properties. In other words, the classical model returns in the form of the conscious subject who performs an "inward and spiritual action" of which her "words are merely the outward and audible sign."

This is to be found, according to Derrida, in Austin's "exclusions," the few statements whereby Austin *delimits the ultimate boundaries* which support the integrity and structure of illocutionary force. In this movement, Austin's concept of the performative shows itself to depend on the very same components on which the classical concept of communication relies.

He writes:

Thereby, performative communication once more becomes the communication of intentional meaning, even if this meaning has no referent in the form of a prior or exterior thing or state of things. This conscious presence of the speakers or receivers who participate in the effecting of a performative, *their conscious and intentional presence in the totality of operation, implies teleologically that no remainder escapes the present totalization*. No remainder, whether in the definition of the requisite conventions, or the internal and linguistic context, or the grammatical

form or semantic determination of the words used; *no irreducible polysemia, that is no "dissemination" escaping the horizon of the unity of meaning.*<sup>284</sup>

Thus, for Derrida, Austin's project breaks down, or at least misses its mark, because it ultimately must resort to fundamental, unified, properties and concepts, whose efficacy can only be determined within the scope of a specific field of application which are ultimately presided over by a conscious subject—all of which comprise the conditions of communication that the structure of the performative was motivated to avoid.

What is lost, for Derrida, in this breakdown, is another thing that Austin was *perhaps unconsciously* motivated to avoid—but that the character of the performative inevitably implies—*the prospect of an unfettered dissemination*. In other words, if Austin remains consistent, performativity implies unintended effects as much as it implies intended ones. Furthermore, as is always the case with intended effects of any sort, there are more ways in which they can fail than ways in which they succeed. Further still, the successful production of intended effects does not, in any way, *exclude* the possibility or actuality of unintended effects. All of this together implies a system of the effects of discourse which will always exceed any intention, any context, any meaning, and any ordering, or regulating, mechanism: a process of discursive effect and transformation that Derrida calls *dissemination*.

In each of Austin's efforts at setting limits on the possibility of locutionary force, Derrida detects the persistent metaphysical attitude toward discourse that compels philosophers to restrain its effects to the intelligible, the true, and the proper. If locutionary force is not about meaning or intention, but is about the overall effects of discourse, why should Austin consider seriousness to be an essential aspect of a locution's efficacy, especially when it is clear that non-serious speech has effects? Furthermore, to repeat, if locutionary force is not about meaning or

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<sup>284</sup> *MP* p. 322; *LI* p.14 italics mine.

intention, then by what aspect of a locution's function will it *gain* or *lose* its effects? In other words, in losing which property—specifically—does a locution become hollow or void? And provided that Austin can tell us, specifically, which property is lost, then we have to wonder in which ways is that property *unlike* meaning as content which is conveyed from one subject to another. In other words, one must wonder which ways this form of communication essentially differs from that dominated by the constative, organized around the transmission of meaning and truth. Derrida reads these exclusions as if Austin has simply submitted to the common regulatory procedures of the philosophical tradition that demand a well ordered system over which the authorized subject presides as a watchman. This is the essence of metaphysics for Derrida, a tradition which both he and Austin actively sought to oppose.

On Derrida's reading, what Austin is looking for is a kind of guarantee, or perhaps a *guarantor*, some source that can stand as the final arbiter which ultimately marks the difference between the proper and non-proper, the serious and non-serious; it is only in establishing this distinction that the "total speech situation" can be anchored, the anchoring and clarity of which is presumably required for defining the force of a locution. In his treatment of the signature, Derrida closes his essay with an assessment of this guarantor. He writes:

The justification of last appeal is that in these forms reference is made to what Austin calls the source (origin) of the utterance. This notion of the *source*—whose stakes are so evident—often reappears in what follows, *and it governs the entire analysis in the phase we are examining*. Not only does Austin not doubt that the source of an oral statement in the first person present indicative (active voice) is *present* in the utterance and in the statement, (I have attempted to explain why we had reasons not to believe so), but he no more doubts that the equivalent of this link to the source in written utterances is simply evident and ascertained in the *signature*...<sup>285</sup>

Derrida rightly interprets Austin's justification of last appeal, the source of the ultimate adjudication concerning the status of the locution, as the unintended retention of one of the essential components of the classical model of communication: the unified, authorized,

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<sup>285</sup> *MP* p. 328; *LI* p. 19

*autonomous* conscious subject. With this also comes the implicit reentry of the communicator who knows and who communicates her conscious intentions, her meanings, to her audience. The classical model begins to reemerge inconspicuously in Austin's exclusion of certain kinds of peculiar speech acts, when he actively excludes speech acts which do not have the proper intention or the standard use of a convention. The classical model comes to its full presence, so to speak, in the potential anchorage of the signatory.

Derrida wants Austin to abandon the guarantor and to give an account of locutionary force that addresses what it means that the *risk* of infelicity is *always* possible, and not dependent on the presence or absence of some special property. Austin introduces and belabors his treatment of infelicities, detailing the many possible ways in which things can go awry. Nevertheless, according to Derrida, he excludes the positive contribution that understanding the role that infelicities should, indeed must, play in understanding performatives. In this regard, what Derrida wants from Austin is a way to generalize the concept of infelicity, a way to recognize infelicity as "an essential predicate or *law*."<sup>286</sup> The risk of failure, of loss, is everywhere indicated in Austin's work.<sup>287</sup> The conscious subject (and her signature, by proxy) is

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<sup>286</sup> *MP* p. 324; *LI* p. 15

<sup>287</sup> This fact, we might say, is *performed* in Austin's approach to the problem—defining felicity by contrast to infelicity. Many astute readers, including Stanley Cavell, Shoshana Felman and Jonathan Culler, note that the vast majority of Austin's treatment of the performative depends on repeated emphasis on infelicity. Some go so far as to point out that this was an explicit methodological strategy for Austin, defining felicity negatively, only over and against the vast and indefinite range of possible infelicities. With this in mind, the claim that is often attributed to Derrida—that Austin excludes infelicities would clearly be false. On the face of it, this seems like a fairly powerful counterargument, especially given Austin's own proclamations, for example: "Besides the uttering of the words of the so-called performative, a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action. What these are we may hope to discover by looking at and classifying types of case in which something *goes wrong* and the act...is therefore at least to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general *unhappy*. And for this reason we call the doctrine of *the things that can be and go wrong* on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the *Infelicities*" (*HW* p. 14). I think that this is an important point in thinking through Austin's project, but also that it is not a counterargument to Derrida. Listing the many possible infelicities that a performative may undergo may very well help us to isolate which utterances are felicitous, but it does not, in itself, *give us a specific reason why such utterances are felicitous*. In other words, such a negative definition would give us even less reason to believe that there could be any possible recourse—even theoretically—to a "total speech situation" in which an illocution could be defined. Further still, it would also give us less reason to believe that seriousness could play any role in a locution's force. After all, many

meant to regulate this risk. This task cannot be achieved, according to Derrida, because of the graphematic predicates, and because both consciousness and intention have proven to be inessential to the effectiveness of communication.

On Derrida's view, Austin's attempt to deny force to the non-serious ultimately fails to acknowledge the potentially polyvalent aspects of force. He thus artificially constrains the range and possible consequences of performativity in service to retaining the sense of an ordered, or at least orderable, speech situation. Derrida's response is that no amount of defining what counts as serious can restrain the odd and unpredictable consequences of the effects of language use. There can be no law or regulatory principle that can decide in advance what will and will not have force. The serious and the non-serious are characterized by the same kinds of threats, the same kinds of consequences. The same kinds of loss constitute the possibility of gain; there is the same risk of unintelligibility, of meaninglessness, of infelicity, of impotence, inherent in every use of language. The nonserious and the peculiar are full of surprises.

### *A Vehicle for Intentionality?*

“The history of writing will conform to a law of mechanical economy: to gain or save the most space and time possible by means of the most convenient abbreviation; hence writing will never have the slightest effect on either the structure or the contents of the meaning (the ideas) that it is supposed to transmit [*véhiculer*]<sup>288</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

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infelicitous performatives are uttered seriously, and there is nothing which prevents a nonserious act from being felicitous. Those considerations aside, Derrida's position is best understood as him lamenting that Austin did not explicitly thematize the primacy of infelicity. Derrida sees in the primacy of infelicity that the performative's basic structure is essentially defined by those same features that he identifies in the graphematic structure of the mark. He writes: “Austin has not taken into account that in which the structure of locution (and therefore before any illocutionary or perlocutionary determination) already bears within itself the system of predicates that I call *graphematic in general*...” *MP* p. 322; *LI* p. 14

<sup>288</sup> *LI* p. 4; *MP* p. 312



Derrida's reception of Austin has been met with mixed reviews. Much of what has been written on the subject approaches "Signature, Event, Context" with the belief that the essay is, in large part, marked and organized by various misunderstandings, misreadings, and perhaps a *lack of reading* on Derrida's part. In this way, Searle is perhaps correct when he claims that "the confrontation never quite takes place." This, however, is not for the reasons that he suspects. In this section, it may appear that I will be doing for Derrida what Austin's supporters have done for him in opposing Derrida's reading; but this would only be partially correct. Only partially, because it seems to me that Derrida is not, at all, opposing Austin's project, but rather he is looking to intensify some of the greatest strengths of Austin's work.<sup>289</sup> In further clarifying Derrida's position, I will further identify what he takes to be the value of Austin's contribution to philosophy. Building from this, in this section and continuing on into the next chapter, I will be attempting to further develop both positions in and through one another. I will argue that to the extent that Derrida is looking to intensify the strengths that he identifies in Austin's work, he fails to fully develop its potential. In this process, I will define what I take to be a limit in Derrida's work that, I think, becomes importantly salient in his encounter with Austin. This limit, though, is not a matter of misreading, but, ironically, it is a matter of an *exclusion*, or perhaps, an omission. This may be excusable, generally speaking, as most of Austin's readers have made the very same exclusion, focusing primarily on illocution to the exclusion of perlocution. Although, given what Derrida wants from Austin, I will argue that this seems like too big of an omission; and it is one that I will seek to remedy.

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<sup>289</sup> For preliminary evidence for this reading, we might take Derrida's own claims as a guide. He claimed that "I was less interested in the critique than in a certain determination of what Austin's discourse implies and in what still remains to be carried out in his project." From "Philosophy and Communication: Round-table Discussion between Ricoeur and Derrida." From *Imagination and Chance* p. 154. In *LI*, he writes "I consider myself to be in many respects quite close to Austin, both interested and indebted to his problematic." p. 38

Before developing this position, I will review some of the most prominent responses to, and expositions of, this possible encounter. An analysis of the ways in which Derrida is misread on this matter will help me to draw some important distinctions that will shed light on my overall project. The general claim that will guide my presentation here is that in virtually every case, the thinkers who have treated this encounter have responded as if “Signature, Event, Context” was primarily about Austin and his work. They have thus failed to recognize the overall problematic of Derrida’s essay, which, as noted above, is concerned with the *assumed* meaning and integrity of the concept of “communication,” the model according to which it operates, and the general consequences of the uncritical acceptance and reiteration of this model. The specific concerns with Austin are an extension of this general line of questioning, and not taking sufficient note of this proves to yield only further misunderstanding. All things considered, this is perhaps an inevitable consequence of the conditions of all communication. Although, concerning these exchanges, one gets the feeling that some inevitabilities are more inevitable than others.

I think that Searle’s approach in “Reiterating the Differences” is a good faith attempt to articulate Derrida’s position.<sup>290</sup> It is, perhaps, owing to the strictures of the field that he was

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<sup>290</sup> A position, it should be noted, that Derrida persistently puts into question in “Limited inc a b c...” Derrida, rightly, I think, points out many of the places where Searle is actually agreeing with him, but is nevertheless posing said agreements as if they were oppositions. Concerning such arguments, Derrida toys with the possibility that these arguments were derived from *Sec* and reapplied to it as if they were objections. He writes “Sarl opposes to it an argumentation that in fact has been borrowed from it. To the extent of this borrowing, at least, Sarl can be said to have understood *Sec* quite well, even if everything is done to create the contrary impression, one which, it must be admitted, often seems very convincing.” *LI* p. 54 Later, concerning their “disagreement” over the nature of intentionality, Derrida writes that “The *fifth objection* thus develops one of *Sec*’s arguments while at the same time pretending to pose it as an objection—all this by means of a feint or pose which could either be a sort of infelicitous ruse (the first sense of *to pretend*) or a successful fiction (or at least for the duration of a good show, in the second sense of *pretend*).” p. 105 Finally he writes, in parentheses, “(I shall leave this question open and not claim the copyright, in the name of the signatories of *Sec*, to the arguments borrowed from it and reproduced, almost literally and with regularity by Sarl, while pretending to pose them as objections. I will not claim the copyright because ultimately [*en dernière instance*] there is always a police and tribunal ready to intervene each time that a rule [constitutive or regulative, vertical or not] is invoked in a case involving signatures, events, or contexts. This is what I meant to say. If the police is always waiting in the wings, it is because conventions are by essence violable and precarious, in themselves and by the fictionality that constitutes them, even before there has been any overt transgression, in the ‘first sense’ of *to pretend*.” *LI* p. 105 the parentheses close a full page later.

compelled to attempt to put so much distance between his and Derrida's positions. It is true that they do not agree on much, but the contrast is not so stark that the differences are all there is to reiterate. His approach has the potentially productive strategy of attempting to translate Derrida's expressed positions into an idiom with which he is more familiar. He does so with the expressed purpose of focusing "especially on those [points] where [he] disagree(s) with his conclusions" and his method is to "simply list the major misunderstandings and mistakes<sup>291</sup>" in Derrida's work. It is, perhaps, not so much of a surprise, then, that his reply seems to be so much at odds with what is happening in *Sec*. Rather than focusing on points of disagreement, I will try to elaborate, for the most part, on the topics about which they agree, or can at least be put into productive dialogue.

To his credit, Searle is one of the very few commentators who hasn't simply ignored the opening sections of the essay.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless, I think his reading of these sections can be shown to exhibit a few of the fairly common errors associated with the reading of *Sec* on the whole. This reading can be seen from the very first paragraph of the first section of Searle's essay, in which he attempts to state the nature of Derrida's project, with an emphasis on writing and iterability. As he sees it:

In the first part he mounts an attack on the idea of writing as the communication of intended meaning. The argument is that since writing can and must be able to function in the radical absence of the sender, the receiver, and the context of production, it cannot be the communication of the sender's meaning to the receiver. Since my writing can continue to function after I and all of my intended readers are dead, and since the context of the writing may be totally forgotten or unknown, the horizon of communication is not the communication of consciousness nor is it the transport of the intended meaning (*vouloir dire*) of the author.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> "RD" p. 198; p 203

<sup>292</sup> Although in *Limited Inc*, Derrida complains that Searle takes the essay as if it had two natural sections "His paper divides naturally into two parts" ("RD" p. 198), when in fact it has three main sections and an epilogue. Beyond this, Derrida bristles at the fact that Searle's reading, although rife with definitive statements regarding *Sec*'s "most important points," still manages to neglect a few salient concerns. He writes: "In this case, he can verify without difficulty that among the 'points' totally omitted by Sarl are included all those involving 1. Signature 2. Event 3. Context." *LI* p.46

<sup>293</sup> "RD" p. 199

This may seem right on the surface, in some respects, but it both overstates and understates Derrida's position in important and telling ways. In this description there is already a tendentious emphasis that is both central to Derrida's purpose and central to Searle's misunderstanding. Searle emphasizes what Derrida claims that writing cannot do, he thus *begins by implying the general potentiality of communication based on a general property, that he thinks Derrida is claiming that writing lacks*: "it cannot be the communication of the sender's meaning;" "the horizon of communication is *not* the communication of consciousness or presences *nor is it the transport of the intended meaning* of the author."

Searle reads Derrida as denying to writing what should otherwise be thought of as a perfectly reasonable capacity for communication.<sup>294</sup> What Searle has failed to note is that Derrida trying to put this very capacity—and its statement in these very terms—in question. In other words, he is not marking out a general shortcoming of writing's potential, rather he is attempting to begin the work of rethinking the possibility of this conception of communication in general—in part by challenging the particular metaphors that mark out the scope, components, and purview of what he refers to as the classical concept of communication. He is thus challenging the very capacity for thinking of communication *as essentially the transmission of content, of the vehiculation of intended meaning*, and thereby drawing attention to the bases of the assumptions which guide this description.

As such, I think the better way to state his position would be something like the following: intended meaning *does not preside* over writing's function because it is, evidently, not essential to its effects. Or, to play directly on the metaphor of theory, we might say that writing's

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<sup>294</sup> This is actually a fairly common misreading. Both Gordon Bearn and Raoul Moati read Derrida in this way. I detail the problematic character of this particular reading later in this chapter in the final section, "Concerning Near Misses in Open Spaces."

function cannot be primarily characterized in terms of its being a vehicle for intentions as writing is perfectly legible irrespective of one's knowledge of an author's intentions. Furthermore, that that legibility does not necessarily imply the reception of said author's intention: for example, one may just as easily read an author "ironically" as "literally" and *nothing about the text itself* can guarantee the reception of the "correct" interpretation. In other words, although it might be fair to say that it is perfectly *possible* to derive an author's intentions from a piece of writing, *nothing about what makes that piece of writing legible guarantees or insures any particular interpretation, and furthermore, the presence or absence of an intention in the writing does not make a difference in this matter.*<sup>295</sup>

Lending more credence to my interpretation of Searle here is the way he initially frames the problem of Derrida's approach. He sees Derrida as trying to identify what distinguishes written from spoken language. He thus sees Derrida as attempting to show, at least in part, that writing lacks certain capacities that, again, speech does not. In line with this, Searle's first argument against Derrida begins with a straightforwardly misplaced question. He writes:

In order to get at what is wrong with these arguments let us begin by asking what is it exactly that distinguishes written from spoken language. Is it iterability, the repeatability of the linguistic elements? Clearly not. As Derrida is aware, any linguistic element written or spoken, indeed any rule governed element in any system of representation at all must be repeatable, otherwise the rules would have no scope of application. To say this is just to say that the logician's type-token distinction must apply generally to all the rule-governed elements of language in order that the rules can be applied to new occurrence of the phenomena specified by the rules.<sup>296</sup>

This question is off the mark, at the very least, for the simple reason that Derrida's claim about iterability is not—at all—meant to identify what distinguishes the written from the spoken. On the contrary, Derrida is stating what the history of the assumed concept of communication

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<sup>295</sup> In connection with this, we might pose a range of questions: Could we derive the author's intentions from the text in a case where the author was lying? In a case where she hadn't yet really come to understand her own intentions? In a case where she was writing metaphorically? Or in cases where she was accidentally—as in cases with those with a penchant for melodrama—writing hyperbolically? These are questions to which I will return shortly.

<sup>296</sup> "RD" p. 199

suggests is the distinguishing feature of writing, he is not endorsing this view himself. Rather, he is trying to show that the connection between the necessary and sufficient conditions of both speech and writing are those that the classical model attributes exclusively to writing. Thus, to revisit the quote:

Let us consider any element of spoken language...first condition of its function...let us say that a certain self-identity of this element (mark, sign, etc.) must permit its recognition and repetition. Across empirical variations of tone, of voice, etc...one must be able to recognize the identity, shall we say, of a signifying form. *Why is this identity paradoxically the division or dissociation from itself which will make of this phonic sign a grapheme? It is because this unit of the signifying form is constituted only by its iterability, by the possibility of being repeated* in the absence not only of its referent, which goes without saying, but of a determined signified or current intention of signification, as of every present intention of communication.<sup>297</sup>

In fact, the point of Derrida's treatment of iterability is to demonstrate, as I mentioned above, that it is the characteristic form of all marks or communicative acts. He thereby hopes to show that the forms of unity and integrity of meaning which are overtly endorsed by many thinkers, Searle included, cannot be attributed as essential properties of sentences or utterances at all. On one level, he is simply noting that many of the aspects of the classical concept of writing that were taken to be shortcomings when compared to the assumed full presence of speech, actually affect speech in the very same ways that they affect writing. As a consequence all linguistic acts can be reduced to these factors, *the graphematic predicates*, rendering many of the assumed features of discourse (for example, reference, meaning, and intention) superfluous to legibility. In other words, to repeat, Derrida is trying to show the extent to which we can think of speech as being a subset of writing on the basis of a minimalist account of the necessary and sufficient conditions of its functioning. The minimalist account reveals that intention is not among the necessary components of a piece of writing's legibility.

Continuing his line of reasoning, Searle then asks whether it is absence that marks writing's efficacy, noting that while a sender or addressee may very well be absent from the

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<sup>297</sup> *MP* p. 318; *LI* p. 10

functioning of an act of communication, that this is not a necessary feature of writing's function. He gives examples such as the cases where one may write reminders to oneself, or where one may write a note to another secretly when they are not in a situation where vocal communication would be appropriate, but they *are* in the same locale (like passing a note during class). This point, and its examples are, again, misplaced. The point of Derrida's claim about absence is that signification functions perfectly well in the absence of *particular senders and/or particular recipients*, but he nowhere says that it *must exclusively* or even *actually* do so. The point is that it remains a possibility, and that this possibility is not an *accidental* one. The inference to be drawn is that whatever role intention or speaker meaning might play in the functioning of language, in neither case can it be said that these are *essential* or *necessary* functions, and hence it cannot be said that they are essential properties.<sup>298</sup> That writing functions perfectly well without knowledge of either factor demonstrates that they are extraneous, and can therefore be dispensed with when in the explanation of its use. Furthermore, as extraneous, such factors certainly do not serve any kind of permanent regulating function.<sup>299</sup>

The first argument that Searle introduces that is, perhaps, not based on a misunderstanding of Derrida's project is that Derrida confuses iterability of writing with the "relative permanence of the text."<sup>300</sup> This argument, though not based, strictly speaking, on a

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<sup>298</sup> See *Limited Inc* p. 47, where Derrida writes the following "*Sec never said* that this absence is *necessary*, but only that it is *possible* (Sarl agrees) and that this possibility must therefore be taken into account: it pertains, *qua possibility*, to the structure of the mark as such, i.e., to the *structure* precisely of its iterability. And hence must not be excluded from the analysis of this *structure*." My emphasis on structure.

<sup>299</sup> With this kind of position in mind, the meaning of the *derived intentionality* that Searle attributes to writing stands in need of some pretty serious explanation. How can we detail, from the syntactical elements of a written utterance, where the property of intentionality is located? If intentionality is a property of human consciousness, how does it come to be *transferred* to written sentences? Through what kind of mechanism? It should be noted, in passing, that treating writing in this way, as having a derived, secondary, relation to intentionality, is of a piece with the classical concept of communication that Derrida points out as among the parasites of that model of communication. See *MP* p. 325 "It is also as a "parasite" that writing has always been treated by the philosophical tradition, and the rapprochement, here, is not at all fortuitous."

<sup>300</sup> Although he does not give an example of Derrida's work that would demonstrate a case of this confusion, he is happy to correct the error thusly: "He thinks the reason that I can read dead authors is because their works are

misunderstanding, *is* based on a misattribution. Iterability is a condition of possibility for *any* mark's functioning. Derrida's point is clearly meant to include both written and spoken communication. As such, it is unclear how Searle came to the conclusion that iterability could be confused with the permanence of the text. Just how permanent can speech be?<sup>301</sup> Searle does add a brief caveat to account for audio recordings of voices but only to set such recordings in contrast to the permanence of the written (presumably to reinforce the centrality of writing's relative permanence *as distinct from other forms of communication*). He further develops his position, anticipating his responses regarding Austin specifically, that Derrida conflates two very different mechanisms of iterability: that which occurs as texts exceed the life of their authors, and that which occurs through citationality. The first, again, is a simple matter of the relative permanence of the text, a feature that Searle honors as being "genuinely 'graphematic.'<sup>302</sup>" The second, which is more connected to the first than Searle seems to think, ends up being an interesting point that, I think, can help to focus the position that Derrida is trying to take. Searle:

...the principle according to which quotation (citation) allows us to consider an expression apart from its meaning is simply this: since any system of representation must have some representing devices whether marks, sounds, pictures, etc. it is always possible to consider those devices quite apart from their role in representation. We can always consider words as just sounds or marks and we can always construe pictures as just material object.<sup>303</sup>

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repeatable or iterable. Well, no doubt the fact that different copies are made of their books makes it a lot easier, but the phenomenon of the survival of the text is not the same as the phenomenon of repeatability." "RD" p. 200 Although since there is no indication anywhere that Derrida has said such a thing, it's unclear what problem Searle seems to think that he's cleared up so quickly.

<sup>301</sup> "Finally, if *Sec* had indeed even been remotely interested in the 'permanence of the written text over the spoken word' (Reply, p. 200), why does the phrase cited by Sarl speak not of the 'written text' but of the 'grapheme in general'? And why should it include under that heading 'oral' marks as well ('seems to me to make every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general; which is to say, as we have seen, the non-present remainder [*restance*] of a differential mark cut off from its putative "production" or origin'). How could 'permanence' attributed to an 'oral mark'? Once the necessity of passing from writing (in the standard sense) to the grapheme in general, an essential movement of *Sec*, had been neglected, Sarl could only go from one confusion to another." *LI* p. 52

<sup>302</sup> "RD" p. 201

<sup>303</sup> "RD" p. 201



And while this is, of course, true, in order to understand Derrida's point, a further inference must be recognized. The fact that there are these features of signification that we can think of, irrespective of their capacities for representation, suggests that they can be thought of *in any way whatsoever*. As such, whatever ways we might want to privilege in their function (in terms of literal meaning, for example), have no unique hold on their structure. Searle doesn't notice that this is the move that Derrida wants to make, and in this demonstrates that he does not quite notice what Derrida is trying to say about the "graphematic structure" of all language. He states that there is "nothing especially graphematic" about this possibility, noting that:

the type-token distinction, together with the physical realization of the signs makes quotation possible; but these two features have nothing to do with previously mentioned special features of graphemes. I conclude that Derrida's argument to show that all elements of language (much less, experience) are really graphemes is without any force. It rests on a simple confusion of iterability and permanence.<sup>304</sup>

Despite these misinterpretations, and what seems like an overt disagreement, there are a number of important but unexplored resonances between Derrida and Searle concerning these matters that may help to clarify a few things. When it comes to the fact of the *necessity* of iterability the two are in agreement. Of iterability, Searle writes later that:

...without iterability there is no language at all. Every utterance in a natural language, parasitic or not, is an instance of iterability, which is simply another way of saying that the type-token distinction applies to the elements of language.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> "RD" p. 201 Although I don't plan to develop this point further here, the way to respond to the type-token distinction on the basis of Derrida's approach, is to argue that, for Derrida, there are no sentence "types." Searle continually draws on the type-token distinction but fails to recognize that the point of Derridean iterability is the claim that there are, in fact, only tokens. On Derrida's view there is nothing that we can identify in tokens which can keep them permanently organized under a general typology. The iterability of tokens ensures that there is no way to regulate the range of their possible function. Any sentence whose function is to designate the type of another sentence is simply another token. Any statement to the contrary will require some kind of metaphysical determinant, whether some ghostly unique "property" or some kind of higher level, order, or organizational system according to which it can regulate tokens. On Derrida's view this is unacceptable, and more importantly, unjustifiable. More to the point, no such level or order is discoverable in the functioning of marks. One must create and impose such an order or system from a space of authorization.

<sup>305</sup> "RD" p. 206

Searle seems not to think that there would be any value in exploring the fact that, at a very basic level, when it comes to the role of iterability, that that he and Derrida are in agreement.

Exploring this minimum connection, I think, can help sharpen the import of *Sec*. If we think about iterability in the terms of the type-token distinction, as Searle does, we might say that Derrida takes iterability as a starting point then draws the further inference that the fact that an infinite number of sentences can be generated from a finite list of elements (possibilities he articulates in terms of iterability, citationality, and the possibility of the graft), implies that no particular, unconditioned, meaning or intention can preside over the totality of such a system. This is, in part, because there is no “totality” in an infinite number of possible sentences. There is thus, no way to finally delimit a single appropriate context in which any given sentence can be finally determined according to a serious, literal, meaning. This is a sentiment that Searle actively endorses in his essay “Literal Meaning,” when he is specifically attempting to generate examples that prove that meaning must vary by context and writes that “there does not seem to be any upper limit on our ability to generate such *deviant* contexts.”<sup>306</sup>

In this, it is fairly clear that Searle has missed Derrida’s message, which, owing to the graphematic structure of discourse, is always a standing possibility—and one, therefore, for which Derrida cannot *reasonably* fault him, all things considered. However, it should be noted that iterability is not specifically about the materiality of words on a page which are available, waiting, to be read. It is not, strictly speaking, about the possibility of reading dead authors, although the ability to read dead authors can be thought of as an extant consequence of iterability. Iterability is about the aspects of the structure of discourse which enable its function, *and that can be shown to be necessary to this function*. Iterability is about what we can do with

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<sup>306</sup> Searle, “LM” p. 217

language, why we can do it, how we can do it, and the conditions of its effects. If, as Davidson and Searle suggest, language has effects because of sentences' contents, properties, etc., and if, as Austin conjectures, that their effects come from their *force*, we might think of Derrida responding to the question of how and why language has effects, takes effect, it is because of its iterability.

The key to this difference is that, for Derrida, iterability does not imply some *present* or *internal* property of words or sentences. For my purposes, we might say that each of these thinkers is attempting to explain language use according to different predicates that they take to be essential, necessary, for a word or sentence's function. For Austin, Davidson, and Searle, *it is the presence of some property*—force, meaning, intentionality, etc.—that enables the effective use of language. For Derrida it is not a *property of language, whether spoken or written*—some feature that may or may not be present—that constitutes its efficacy. Rather, it is more like a behavioral and structural capacity: it is the very absencing, the clearing, the inevitable distancing from any particular target or source (sense, reference, sender, receiver), that enables discourse's potentially limitless range of uses.

The way that Derrida intensifies the type-token distinction, i.e., the way he looks to generalize the import of the connection between iterability and the graphematic predicates of rupture, absencing, and citationality, remains relevant throughout this exchange. For example, when Searle writes of the possibility of reading and understanding a dead author's intended meaning, that "the fact that the author is dead and all his intentions died with him is irrelevant to this feature of his surviving written utterances,"<sup>307</sup> Derrida rightly takes credit for the thesis:

This last argument, which I have just underlined, should not be opposed to *Sec*. It derives from *Sec*: namely, from the first of its three sections, which places much emphasis on the fact that

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<sup>307</sup> "RD" p. 201

“death,” and in general the non-presence of a vital, actualized, determinate intention, does not prevent the mark from functioning.<sup>308</sup>

So, on one level, this is another concern about which these two thinkers seem to agree. The difference, again, comes as the consequence of what they might mean by “the functioning of the mark.” Searle, of course, thinks that language is a *vehicle* for intentionality, and that therefore, for it to function it must *transmit* that intentionality. Thus, Searle’s point is that writing preserves the author’s intention, and that nothing, not even his death, nor the death of his intentions, can change this. On such a view, however, one might wonder why the state of author’s intentions would be irrelevant to a process that depends on transmitting said intentions.<sup>309</sup>

For Derrida the mark only has to be repeatable for it to be used, for it to function. The key to this, though, is that it can be used for any purpose, with any intention, and with any meanings, *or with none of any of these factors*. As Searle himself countenances, one can always decide to make a radical break from a strategy reading in service to deciphering intention, or reading for comprehension of the origin of production. What he does not seem to notice, is that if this is the case, then these factors are demonstrably *not necessary* to the mark’s function. If they were necessary, then, of course, discourse could not function in the absence of such factors; *one could not, even casually or nonseriously, make such a break if the connection between intention and discursive function were necessarily linked*. Searle’s position, however, is that even if one does decide to make such a radical break with attempting to read according to the author’s intentions, according to

the strategy of understanding the sentence as an utterance of a man who once lived and had intentions like yourself...even then there is no getting away from intentionality because *a meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act*. To understand it, it is necessary to know that anyone who said it and meant it would be performing

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<sup>308</sup> *LI* p.61

<sup>309</sup> How would anyone, including the author himself, know if he had adequately captured said intentions in any particular writing? What if he were writing metaphorically? Or a harder case, still, what if he was writing metaphorically and didn’t know it, as in the case of the use of “dead” metaphors?

that speech act determined by the rules of the language that give the sentence its meaning in the first place.<sup>310</sup>

This is, in a certain sense, a rather extraordinary claim coming from Searle. Regarding this, it seems to me that the questions to pursue here concern whether or not this claim constitutes a contradiction in Searle's own thought, a disagreement with Derrida, or perhaps even an agreement, of sorts, with Derrida. I will argue that is a straightforward contradiction of many of Searle's other stated descriptions of intentionality, particularly of the intentionality of language. In *Mind, Language, and Society*, Searle writes straightforwardly that "The key to understanding meaning is this: meaning is a form of derived intentionality. *The original or intrinsic intentionality of a speaker's thought is transferred to words, sentences, marks, symbols, and so on.*"<sup>311</sup> The question here, with respect to the claim that "a meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act" would be a matter of figuring out what direction intentionality is transferred. Is it *from* meaningful sentences as standing possibilities waiting to be actualized by corresponding (intentional) speech acts? Or is it *from* a speaker's thought *to* sentences which are thereby made meaningful? The two positions are incompatible.

Tellingly, Searle states the relationship fairly clearly in his essay "What is an Intentional State?" when he writes that:

Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in exactly the same sense that speech acts represent objects and state of affairs. I will develop this answer by making explicit several connections and similarities between Intentional states and speech acts; but it is important at the beginning to avoid creating one fairly obvious sort of misunderstanding. By explaining Intentionality in terms of linguistic acts, I do not mean to suggest that Intentionality is somehow essentially linguistic. The analogy between speech acts and Intentional states is drawn as an expository device, as a heuristic for explaining Intentionality. Once I have tried to make the nature

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<sup>310</sup> "RD" p. 202

<sup>311</sup> John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society* New York: Basic Books, 1988 p. 141 italics mine. Hereafter, *MLS* This formulation is doubly exemplary of Derrida's treatment of meaning and metaphor as it depends explicitly on the metaphor of theory and implicitly on the metaphor of metaphor. Put more directly, Searle's overall view of language and consciousness is a detailed and fairly elaborate application of the metaphor of theory, and his treatment of metaphor in general is exemplary of this fact.

of Intentionality clear, I will argue that the direction of dependence is precisely the reverse. Language is derived from Intentionality, and not conversely.<sup>312</sup>

In light of the tension based on this duality, it might be worth considering one last, and even more extraordinary, claim. In an effort to reinforce the centrality of intentionality, Searle charges Derrida's position with operating within the grip of two illusions:

The first...illusion (is) that somehow illocutionary intentions if they really existed or mattered would have to be something that *lay behind* the utterances, some inner pictures animating the visible signs. But of course in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions: there need be no *gulf* at all between illocutionary intention and its expression. The sentences are, so to speak, fungible intentions. Often, especially in writing, one forms one's intentions (or meanings) in the process of forming sentences: there need not be two separate processes. This illusion is related to the second, which is that intentions must all be conscious. But in fact rather few of one's intentions are ever brought to consciousness as intentions. *Speaking and writing are indeed conscious intentional activities*, but the intentional aspect of illocutionary acts does not imply that there is a separate set of conscious states apart from simply writing and speaking.<sup>313</sup>

Given what we've seen, it is unclear how this set of claims can be consistent with any of Searle's other work. If Searle maintains "that there need be no gulf" between intention and expression, and that the two are fungible, then the essential distinction between speaker meaning and word/sentence meaning is unnecessary as well. Many of his claims actively depend on this gulf, and much of his position becomes unintelligible without it. Furthermore, it would seem unusual for Searle, of all people, to refer to the belief in "something that lay behind the utterances, some inner pictures animating the visible signs" as an illusion, given how much his own definitions and descriptions of intentionality would fit this description.

Beyond this, this claim about there not being two processes or phenomena is everywhere

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<sup>312</sup> John Searle, "What Is an Intentional State?" *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 88, No. 349 (Jan., 1979), pp. 74-92 p. 75. Hereafter "WIS"

<sup>313</sup> "RD" p. 202 final italics mine. It is worth noting that the claims about unconscious intentions are not particularly relevant given that the entire discussion is focused on language use, and in particular, illocutionary acts. This should be obvious from the fact that, for Searle, illocutionary acts are necessarily of the conscious, intentional, sort. In addition to this point, it is worth considering that in Searle's later work, he forwards a more explicit connection between *any* intentional state and conscious intentional states. In "Consciousness, Unconsciousness, and Intentionality," he writes that "In this article I will argue that *any intentional state is either actually or potentially a conscious intentional state*, and that for this reason cognitive science cannot avoid studying consciousness." p. 47 For our purposes, we may also review the discussion in chapter 1, under the heading "Wandering Toward the Meaning of its Death," in the present essay.

belied by Searle's treatment of language. The fact that there is an original, biologically based, cognitive phenomena that all conscious beings have that may or may not be subsequently transferred to sentences sounds quite a lot like two processes.<sup>314</sup> Such a distinction would be precisely the kind of "gulf" that Derrida is trying to counteract in the models of communication that Searle overtly endorses and that Austin is trying, but according to Derrida failing, to avoid. Despite what seems to be an egregious misreading on Searle's part, these "illusions" are, nevertheless, the most interesting and productive topic around which Searle and Derrida can be put into dialogue. We can start by simply posing the question of seriousness, often taken Derrida's crucial concern with Austin, here, to Searle's position.

If Searle's argument is that the utterances are fungible with intentions, then how can one know that any such utterance is or is not serious without recourse to some other factor(s)? Or we could ask the question from the other direction by questioning the position of the actor onstage: If her utterance is fungible with her intention, how do we track the difference between her utterances on stage with those spoken in more serious situations? Wouldn't answering these questions imply that seriousness must be marked by yet another factor which would be either present or absent from the actor's utterance? Even if we accept Searle's claim about Derrida's first illusion, the question that he poses to Austin remains: In his description of locutionary force, what is the difference that makes the difference between the serious and the non-serious? Is this to be identified as a state of mind, as an inward and spiritual act, as a function of the meaning of the words, or is it the unspecifiable total speech situation? In short, what is the justification of

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<sup>314</sup> See John R. Searle, *Consciousness and Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. In his chapters concerning "Animal Minds" and "Intentionality and its Place in Nature," Searle discusses the biological bases of intentionality which precedes any transference to language. He writes, straightforwardly, that "Intentional mental phenomena are part of our natural biological life history." p.79 Broken down at this level, one would imagine that there would be *at least* two processes, and likely many, many, more.

last appeal in defining locutionary force? The bigger question, left in the background, is why a phenomenon whose merits are supposed to be defined in terms of its *effects*, needs to be justified in the first place.<sup>315</sup>

It is this need for justification, and ultimately, authorization that drives Derrida's response to Austin. The import of this fact goes entirely unrecognized by Searle. This is, perhaps, owing to the fact that Searle is deeply committed to the classical model of communication that Derrida is criticizing—and certainly more so than Austin, who Derrida only charges with having left unconscious traces of this model in his work, despite his best, and admirable, efforts. Searle, on the other hand, could not be a more perfect example of the general argument concerning the tendencies of philosophers' dependence on the classical model of communication. Furthermore, the unconscious use and dependence on the unacknowledged metaphors of metaphor and theory is powerfully exemplified in Searle's work, a fact that is perhaps nowhere more readily on display than in this exchange. Searle seems to implicitly call for the metaphor of theory as the appropriate, and perhaps exclusive, model for thinking about the intelligibility of language. This is on display throughout all of his work, but the depth of this assumption is nowhere better exemplified than when he asks, incredulously and rhetorically, "Does the fact that writing can continue to function in the absence of the writer, the intended receiver, or the context of production show that *writing is not a vehicle* of intentionality?"<sup>316</sup>

The difference in the functioning of the metaphor of theory, and the contrasting position that Derrida is attempting to forward in terms of iterability and the graphematic predicates can be easily demonstrated through exploring one of Searle's examples: when Searle claims that Derrida thinks that "I can read an author's words after he has died, and even while he is alive he

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<sup>315</sup> All things considered, what other kinds of cause and effect relationship have to be justified?

<sup>316</sup> "RD" p. 201 italics mine.



himself cannot tell me the *entire content* of all of this books, only his books can do that.<sup>317</sup>”

Searle thinks that the relative permanence of the text will make the reading of said author’s books possible. He thinks this because, so long as the sentences on the page are intact (as in, not physically degraded in terms the material quality of the pages and in terms of the configuration of the ink) that he will be able to read all of these books and thereby to access the *entire content* of these books. This is because on Searle’s model, those sentence types are instantiated in tokens which are composed of relatively permanent physical marks on the page. These tokens, by virtue of their types, have specific properties and characteristics which remain *in those sentences*, whether they are read or not. Among the crucial properties therein are 1) Sentence meaning (which is always also literal meaning), 2) intentionality (somehow *derived* from human consciousness and subsequently *transferred* to words and sentences), and 3) the regulating mechanisms of literal meanings on any of the metaphorical or other figurative forms of speech (those cases where conscious intentionality and sentence meaning have *come apart*).

From Derrida’s position, the response to how one might come to know the entire content of some author’s books would be that *not even his books can do that*. There simply is *no entirety of content*. This is because so long as there are any possible readers his books will continue in their capacity to signify with or without the author, with our without his intentions, with or without any particular reader, with or without any specific interpretation; and hence, with or without any particular meaning, any particular consciousness, or any particular intentionality—a fact that proves that these were never essential properties of any of the sentences involved in the first place. Iterability means that this author’s words will continue to acquire and accrue meanings as they are read and reread, as they are cited and recited by other thinkers and are

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<sup>317</sup> “RD” p. 200 italics mine.

applied in contexts for which they were never *meant*. And that they will function perfectly fine irrespective of the fact that they may be used in ways which are the exact opposite of the author's intentions. In other words, consciousness, intention, and literal sentence meaning will not preside over a text's function. Thus, none of these properties will contribute, *essentially* or *necessarily*, to a mark's effects.<sup>318</sup>

### *The Force of Meaning, the Meaning of Force*

"For some years we have been realizing more and more clearly that the occasion of an utterance matters seriously, and that the words used are to some extent to be 'explained' by the 'context' in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in a linguistic interchange. Yet still perhaps we are too prone to give these explanations in terms of 'the meaning of the words.'<sup>319</sup>"

—J.L. Austin

"A neglect of the Principle of Expressibility seems to be one of the reasons that Austin overestimated the distinction between meaning and force.<sup>320</sup>"

—John Searle

"...I sometimes felt, paradoxically, closer to Austin than to a certain Continental tradition from which Searle, on the contrary, has inherited numerous gestures and a logic that I try to deconstruct...<sup>321</sup>"

—Jacques Derrida

In a certain sense, speech-act theory seems like it could provide some perspective, and perhaps some tools, for a project like Derrida's. Likewise, in him, it seems like its adherents and proponents should find a natural ally. If for no other reason, the fact that Austin was looking for a way to assess language without taking the centrality of meaning for granted should be a clue to the natural connection. His effort in *How to Do things With Words* represents an important shift in emphasis, and one that, presumably, is not bogged down by the goals of univocity, the

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<sup>318</sup> We might connect this with Wittgenstein's comments from *Philosophical Investigations*, nos. 139-55. In those sections, we are given a picture of linguistic function in which almost anything or nothing at all could be going on "in our heads" when we utter or claim anything. Such an absence, we are shown, would not preclude the possibility of discourse functioning intelligibly.

<sup>319</sup> *HW* p. 100

<sup>320</sup> "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Oct., 1968), pp. p. 418 Hereafter, "ALI"

<sup>321</sup> *LI* p. 130

primacy of literality, the foundational integrity of frames of reference and, most importantly for my purposes, the need to articulate what is achieved in discourse according to the classical model of communication—the metaphor of theory. Furthermore, his work provides a promising set of tools for the analysis of language as it is enmeshed in human life by including speech and language use as one among many other forms of human behavior.

As much as Searle sees himself as protecting Austin’s legacy from what he takes to be Derrida’s egregious misreading, he is not, strictly speaking, a partisan. In “Reiterating the Differences” he assures us that he “hold(s) no brief for the details of Austin’s theory of speech acts. I have criticized it elsewhere and will not repeat those criticisms here. The problem is that Derrida’s Austin is unrecognizable. He bears almost no relation to the original.<sup>322</sup>” With this comment, he points us to his essay, “Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts.” In that essay, Searle begins to trouble the distinction between the locutionary and the illocutionary on the basis of certain kinds of locutionary acts that, he claims, could not fail to also be illocutionary acts *by virtue of their meanings*. With this move, it becomes clear that Searle’s treatment of speech act theory is a significant revision that shifts focus away from Austin’s central discoveries—particularly that of locutionary force—explicitly drawing Austin’s model into closer proximity to semantic theories. Importantly, this is not a charge that Searle would deny. In the opening of his essay “Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts,” he writes the following:

In attempting to explore Austin’s notion of an *illocutionary act* I have found his corresponding notion of a *locutionary act* very unhelpful and have been forced to adopt a quite different distinction between illocutionary acts and propositional acts...In this paper I want to explain my reasons for rejecting Austin’s distinction and for introducing certain other distinctions, and in so doing to show how these questions bear on some of the larger philosophical issues.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> p. 204

<sup>323</sup> “ALI” p. 405

Generally speaking, Searle focuses his energy on cases where, he suggests, illocutionary force is necessarily entailed by the meaning of a locution. The example he uses is “I hereby promise that I will do it.” He argues that the meaning of the words determine that this locution must be an illocution. He writes that “Its serious and literal utterance must be a promise.<sup>324</sup>” From such possibilities he surmises that the distinction between the locutionary act and the illocutionary act must break down. The distinction is meant to track the difference between uttering a meaningful sentence, and uttering a meaningful sentence which has force. Although this transformation may appear subtle, the denial of the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts has quite far reaching implications.

The question that emerges in consideration of this distinction is the question concerning what, exactly, contributes to locutionary force in general. Force, for Austin, is the difference which makes the difference between success and failure, between felicity and infelicity. For Searle, this difference cannot be adequately maintained on this basis alone. This, for him, becomes clear in consideration of the possibility that felicity conditions of certain “locutions” are built into them by virtue of their meanings. From this position, he extrapolates further that illocutionary acts can be established and identified exclusively on the basis of the *propositions in the sentences*. As such, in the general theory of speech acts that he develops, when he takes on the *structure* of the illocutionary act, he does so with the transformative intention of isolating the propositional conditions of such an act. Taking the standard practice of promising as a paradigm case, he writes:

In order to give an analysis of the illocutionary act of promising I shall ask what conditions are necessary and sufficient for the act of promising to have been successfully and non-defectively performed in the utterance of a given sentence. I shall attempt to answer this question by stating these conditions as a set of propositions such that the conjunction of the members of the set entails

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<sup>324</sup> “ALI” p. 407

the proposition that a speaker made a successful and non-defective promise, and the proposition that the speaker made such a promise entails this conjunction.<sup>325</sup>

By stating these propositional conditions, Searle contends that one may establish clear rules for the successes and failures of speech acts. Language speakers, he claims, are already operating within such a system of rules. His goal is simply to make this system explicit.

It is not lost on Searle that certain other conditions must be met for the success of an illocutionary act. For example, he notes that in establishing the explicit rules of communication, illocutionary acts cannot be grounded in other illocutions. To explain illocution on the basis of illocution is clearly circular and explains nothing. There must be some facts which stand outside and condition the possibility of felicitous acts. For Searle, these conditions are met by what he calls “institutional facts.”

...there are many kinds of facts, and facts which obviously are objective facts and not matters of opinion or sentiment or emotion at all...their existence...presupposes the existence of certain human institutions. It is only given the institution of marriage that certain forms of behavior constitute Mr. Smith's marrying Miss Jones. Similarly, it is only given the institution of baseball that certain movements by certain men constitute the Dodgers' beating the Giants 3 to 2 in eleven innings.<sup>326</sup>

Such facts are contrasted with “brute facts” such as the mass number of boron, the speed of sound, or the dimensions of the pyramid at Tikal, facts that can be established objectively and with absolute certainty. Brute facts, we are told, “share the feature that the concepts which make up the knowledge (of them) are essentially physical, or, in its dualistic version, either physical or mental.<sup>327</sup>”

Although there are important differences between institutional and brute facts, on his view, institutional facts are no less objective and certain than are brute facts. Part of my argument against him will turn on my belief that a stronger distinction between such “facts”

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<sup>325</sup> John R. Searle. *Speech Acts*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1969 p. 54 hereafter, *SA*

<sup>326</sup> *SA*. p. 51

<sup>327</sup> *SA*. p. 50

should be drawn. Typically, the kind of reductionist view on brute facts he espouses would entail that the objectivity of such a fact be recognizable from *any* perspective. Whether or not you accept such strict a formulation about brute facts, there does always seem to be something of this intuition, however minimally, built into the notion.<sup>328</sup> Importantly, when it comes to institutional facts, there can be no such correlate. This is because many if not most such facts are constantly in dispute and are being negotiated by those who are affected by the institutions from which such “facts” may be drawn. Such facts are never as neat and well-formed as Searle wants to suggest. Human interaction and the contingencies and consequences of such interaction render any such fact extremely pliable and always under revision. With this in mind, it would be hard to characterize such facts as having the same or even a relative similarity with the kind of certainty that one may attribute to the objectivity of brute, physical, facts.

If this is right, then Searle’s account runs up against a few important challenges. The first is partially signaled in the general sense that felicity conditions might be established in the meanings of sentences. This position is enabled and reinforced by the fact that Searle’s account is surprisingly bereft of treatments of the speakers who actually speak in social circumstances. Although the structure of illocutionary acts, on his view requires human institutions, such institutions are abstracted from any actual institution such that the meaning and consequences of actual speech cannot be addressed. Thus, in abstracting from real speech situations, Searle’s

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<sup>328</sup> My position, as articulated in chapter 3, would not be of this sort. Derrida’s position on this matter is characterized in the following way: “What is called ‘objectivity,’ scientific for instance (in which I firmly believe, in a given situation imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, powerfully established, stabilized or rotted in a network of conventions (for instance, those of language) and yet which still remains a context. And the emergence of the value of objectivity (and hence of so many others) also belongs to a context. We can call ‘context’ the entire ‘real-history-of-the-world,’ if you like, in which this value of objectivity and, even more broadly, that of truth (etc.) have taken on meaning and imposed themselves. That does not in the slightest discredit them. In the name of what, of which other ‘truth, moreover, would it? One of the definitions of what is called deconstruction would be the effort the take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualization.” *LI* p. 136

conception of illocution fails to register the crucial conditions of the development and creation of “institutional facts.” He thereby simplifies conventionality beyond recognition, replacing it with some ideal form of behavior which has no basis in human experience but that can, for the purpose of discovering the truth, be systematized. As a result, the nature and character of the conditions in which speech acts take place is simplified to the point that speakers completely drop out of the discussion. His position is distilled in the following:

The meaning of a sentence is *entirely* determined by the meaning of its elements, both lexical and syntactical. And this is just another way of saying that the rules governing its utterance are determined by the rules governing its elements.<sup>329</sup>

As we’ve seen elsewhere in his work, despite the contextual determinants of background assumptions and social practices, *the properties of sentences* are treated as if they had an independent status with certain rules upon which successful communication rests. This takes the form, again, of an overt attempt to render language univocal, to demonstrate that it operates on the basis of some clearly shared set of conditions and properties. Treating human institutions as if their contours were certain and objective is an oversimplification which disavows the struggles by which such institutions are often established and maintained. Searle’s unwillingness or inability to recognize this is a function of his assuming both that there are certain relations between words and things, and that he occupies some distinctive perspective from which he is equipped to detail and systematize those relations *in their totality*, never fully considering the other ways in which such “facts” might be framed.<sup>330</sup>

This is a complete reversal of Austin’s overall project. And it is explicitly the circumstantial effort that goes into producing locutionary force that Searle disavows. His denial

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<sup>329</sup> *SA* p. 61 italics mine. This position seems to be almost exactly reversed by the time of his publication of “Literal Meaning” (1978) see p. 210. See also this essay, chapter 3 “Narrowing Our View.”

<sup>330</sup> We may consider here, Ricoeur’s presentation of the philosopher as a watchman, presiding over the integrity of the categories of Being. *TRM* p. 308 This is, of course, also a parallel to the image of the autonomous subject that, according to Derrida, Austin tried, but failed, to escape. This is a topic to which I will return.

of the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts minimizes the possibility of fully countenancing *the risk of failure* inherent in every act. He explicitly treats this problem, giving two examples of cases where one may utter a meaningful act that has its illocutionary force by virtue of its meaning, that one might claim, nevertheless, has no force. The examples he gives are when one utters an illocutionary sentence but isn't heard, or cases where one is not appropriately qualified so as to garner the right uptake, such as when a private in the Army gives a general an order. Searle argues that since such sentences' illocutionary status depends entirely on their meaning, their serious and literal utterances are at least *trying* to be illocutionary acts—but they simply happen to be failing. In which case the only relevant difference would be between the locutionary act and the illocutionary act would be that of trying and failing and trying and succeeding in general. Thus, what Austin would have called locutionary, Searle reduces to the failed illocutionary. This, however, is a general condition that all acts face, not just speech acts, and it is a difference that, he claims is “a much less interesting distinction than the original distinction between the locutionary and the illocutionary act.”<sup>331</sup>

It seems to me that in this argument there is an elision that gives Searle's argument an appearance of validity that cannot be sustained. Consistent with many of his other positions, Searle looks to reduce the efficacy of an utterance to some kind of internal property of *sentences*. As such, in these examples he proceeds as if he has shown that the *felicity of conditions* of said

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<sup>331</sup> “ALI” p. 409 Not only do I find this to be a very poor argument (since when does the interestingness of a distinction warrant its value as applicable?) but it runs directly contrary to Austin's very specific claims about the distinction. He writes “It has, of course, been admitted that to perform an illocutionary act is necessarily to perform a locutionary act: that, for example, to congratulate is necessarily to say certain words; and to say certain words is necessarily, at least in part, to make certain more or less indescribable movements with the vocal organ. So that the divorce between 'physical' actions and acts of saying something is not in all ways complete—there is some connexion. But (i) while this may be important in some connexions and contexts, it does not seem to prevent the drawing of a line for our present purposes where we want one, that is, between the completion of the illocutionary act and all consequences thereafter.” (HW p. 113) Elsewhere Austin notes that one way to tell the difference between the locutionary and the illocutionary is that there are cases in which one may know what words are uttered, and the meanings of particular locution but still not know whether, as a matter of its illocutionary force, a locution was a threat, advice, or a warning, for example (see HW p. 115-16 n. 1)



utterances—that of the failed promise that went unheard and that of the failed order that did not respect the hierarchy—were *in the sentences themselves*. This, however, simply cannot be the case, as is demonstrated in his own examples: felicity conditions, even as he states them, demand recourse to sociality. In short, the difference between the locutionary act and the illocutionary act is to be found in the social conventions by which an utterance, of any sort, can be “taken up” as an act.

By extension, we have to assess even the possibility that the illocutionary status of a sentence can be defined exclusively in terms of its meaning. In his example of the illocution which is necessarily so by virtue of its meaning, “I hereby promise that I will do it,” it is worth considering what, exactly, is entailed by the meaning of “promise.” It seems to me to be very clear that the meaning of promise entails the social convention of binding oneself to some course of action in the service of achieving or producing some future good. If the meaning of promise did not already entail the conventions by which felicity conditions can be established, it wouldn’t make sense to claim that such an illocution could be established by its meaning alone. In other words, Searle folds the convention into the utterance and then promptly forgets its crucial function. As such, Searle was perhaps over-hasty in surmising that the difference between trying and succeeding and trying and failing was a much less interesting distinction than that between the locutionary and the illocutionary. This is because the difference between trying and succeeding and trying and failing can only be thought in terms of the social conditions which enable an utterance to function as an act in the first place. Furthermore, trying and succeeding and failing is part of the meaning of “act.”

With this in mind, it is not simply the case that Searle reverses the most central concern in Austin’s work—that he was looking to analyze language in terms of relevant factors in

communication that go beyond meaning—but it is indirectly a dramatic *distortion* of it as well, as it fails to give account of, and actively neutralizes, that which renders speech an act: effort, chance, and the social and conventional circumstances in which utterances are conferred with the possibility of being “taken up” as acts. It seems to me that Austin’s treatment of speech act theory cannot be made sense of without these factors. And that furthermore, his account gives a more realistic treatment of the nature of institutions, which he refers to as conventions. Conventions, on Austin’s account, are of central importance to the nature of illocution. For this reason, much of Austin’s description of how language works hinges on the use and nature of convention. The crucial difference that we see in Austin’s account is that conventions are not, in any way, treated as factual. In fact, detailing the tenuous nature of their use makes up the bulk of his concerns in *How to do Things with Words*. Unlike Searle, who forgoes and excludes the detailed description of troubling cases, Austin makes certain kinds of troubling cases central to his analysis. This fact may be noted, at least provisionally, in Searle’s transformation of Austin’s vocabulary. Where Austin discusses difficulties in communication in detail, calling them infelicities of various sorts, Searle, with little explanation, prefers to refer to miscommunications with a more definitive, teleological, and value-laden moniker, calling them “defective.”<sup>332</sup>

The location and conditions in which the speaker speaks are, from the outset, among the most important considerations from Austin’s perspective. It is the speaker who, through her speech, invokes the conventions in which illocutions can be forcefully uttered. Conventions, once invoked, call for behaviors and speech patterns which are appropriate to the contexts that they constitute. Communication, on this view, is infelicitous when the participants have different

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<sup>332</sup> *SA* p. 54 This, for me, is a crucial distinction which will become more apparent as we proceed. For now, it is at least worth noting that felicity is a description of properties of life and life giving properties (etymologically, felicity can refer to happiness, fertility, good fortune, and fecundity). Defectiveness is more about objects which are designed for specific purposes but that inadequately perform their tasks. They are broken.

conceptions of the relevant convention or when they do not share a familiarity with its invocation.<sup>333</sup> Felicity, then, is an importantly contingent possibility which may be the result of any kind of speech. Felicity is not a product of language's ability to track a common coordinate system, nor is it a product of the relationship between propositions, their elements, and the rules which guide their use. There is no higher logic; there is no context-free perspective by which felicity can be evaluated. Felicity is not a property of words, sentences, or anything else. It is a product of shared, and more and less coordinated, human behavior. The only standard by which felicity can be evaluated is according to the behaviors of the people for whom said conventions function. Austin's conception of speech act theory is about the participants involved in the performance and enactment of language and conventional practices.

In this way, Austin's account takes a significant step away from the constative, and positivistic (and subsequently semantic) accounts of language use, as it does not depend on meaning, as properties of sentences, as its basis. In this way, it is noteworthy that Searle is deliberately reversing the central impetus which guided Austin's work. Language, for Austin, is not efficacious on the basis of its connection or relationship to reality, nor is it a function of the rules and structure of speech, nor to the lexical, syntactical, or semantic properties of sentences; rather, it is evaluated on the basis of the kinds of social effects it tends to produce. He is careful to point out to his reader that what is tracked in a speaker's utterance of a performative is not the transmission a meaning or proposition, is not the reporting facts, and is not the making of statements that are efficacious on the basis of their truth or falsity.

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<sup>333</sup> Such cases where the invocation or applicability of the convention are disputable are specifically referred to as *misfires*. In such a case, the act, itself, is not achieved (although, per Derrida's recognition, it should be noted that even misfires have effects that should be worth noting. That they are not the desired effects does not mean that they are not effects). Felicitous acts that are achieved through some kind of improper procedure, such as those involving deception, are referred to as *abuses*. See *HW* p. 16

Austin's work has garnered significant attention from a variety of different thinkers whose varied interests have spawned a number of interesting, and importantly provocative readings. In addition to Searle, thinkers such as Stanley Cavell, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, and Shoshana Felman have all forwarded readings that pick up on the importance of Austin's strategy and its potential consequences. All read him and/or criticize him for different reasons and with different emphases but ultimately with the same goal of trying to deepen the analysis of the scope, depth, import and potential of the *act* in speech acts. The potential in Austin's work can be found in its inevitable, if unintended and implicit, call to action. If speech can be used to do something, exactly how much can be done with it? If speech has its impact in concrete social circumstances, then we should further explore such consequences and their effects in human life. If such effects are to be taken seriously, it is incumbent on language users to employ it, to speak and write, effectively and responsibly. Such concerns will linger in the background of my attempt to draw Derrida and Austin together, although not without some resistance.

*The Effect of Meanings, The Meaning of Effects*

"Now given that both speaker and hearer are finite, what is it that gives their speech acts this limitless capacity for communication? The answer is that the speaker and hearers are masters of the sets of rules we call the rules of language, and these rules are recursive. They allow for the repeated application of the same rule."<sup>334</sup>

—John Searle

"*Limited Inc*, which aside from its use-value in the legal-commercial code that marks the common bond linking England and the United States (Oxford and Berkeley), also *mentions* in translation a seal related to the French code (s.a.r.l); *condenses* allusions to the internal regulation through which the capitalist system seeks to limit concentration and decision-making power in order to protect itself against its own 'crisis'..."<sup>335</sup>

—Jacques Derrida

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<sup>334</sup> "RD" p. 208

<sup>335</sup> *LI* p. 84

Most of the commentary on “Signature, Even, Context,” is focused on whether or not Derrida has misread or misunderstood Austin’s work. Some of the more productive responses raise important questions concerning how much Derrida had read of Austin’s work at the time of its publication, warranting the legitimate consideration of whether a more thorough treatment of Austin’s work may have yielded a different response from Derrida. I think that it is doubtlessly the case that a deeper and more robust encounter with Austin’s work from Derrida would have been of great benefit to any thinker who has any interest in the philosophy of language and its many implications for knowledge and human behavior. That said, I will argue in this section that considering the topic that Derrida is treating in this essay, i.e., the integrity of the meaning of the concept of “communication,” the common and easy assumption of its definition and articulation, and the persistence of the metaphors that support this easy assumption, no aspect of Austin’s work would be more appropriate for him to have considered than the topics addressed in *How to Do Things with Words*. Furthermore, while I do think that a treatment of Austin’s broader works would open up a whole range of possibilities to Derrida’s thought, I do not think that such a treatment would change the thesis of this essay, nor Derrida’s overall strategy in treating the nature of locutionary force.

I will generally argue that Derrida’s reception of Austin has been largely misunderstood, and this is a result of the fact that “Signature, Event, Context” is read primarily in terms Austin, and moreover in terms of questioning the *meaning* of seriousness in Austin’s work. At issue in such responses is almost always the nature and consequences of the *kinds* of exclusions that Derrida charges to Austin. This emphasis has redirected the force of Derrida’s position by compelling the broad belief that Derrida is most directly concerned with whether Austin favors the serious in some *explicitly evaluative* sense, as if Derrida believes that Austin would devalue

and hence exclude poetry, fictional discourse, theater, and the artistic aspects of language *use*, in some broad, general sense.<sup>336</sup> I will counter that while such implications can be, and often are, drawn from Derrida's assessment, they are not at all central to his purposes in questioning, not the *meaning* of seriousness—but its *role in producing locutionary force*—in what he takes to be Austin's *almost*-revolutionary conception of language use.

Because of the misplaced attention on the *meaning* of seriousness, Austin's defenders are often concerned to show the degree to which Austin's own style, his own performativity, his humor, and the broad goals of his work are not at all of the serious type that Derrida presumably suspects. And I don't doubt that any of these aspects of Austin's work do not absolve him of such suspicions,<sup>337</sup> I just doubt that Derrida *had* such suspicions. In this and the next few sections I will make my case, drawing on a number of thinkers who have tried to make sense of this encounter. This discussion will serve three purposes: 1) to draw out Derrida's point concerning Austin and the possible role that of seriousness could play in locutionary force, 2) to further develop Derrida's treatment of Austin (which, again, is meant to be an intensification, not a rejection) in order to broaden and deepen the role and meaning of *perlocutionary force*, and 3) to segue, on the basis of perlocution, to a discussion on meaning and embodiment. I will continue my presentation by working through Searle's reply, slowly drawing in other thinkers such as Stanley Cavell, and in the next chapter, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler, all of whom read this exchange with different but related emphases, all of whom will, in different ways, help set the stage for the development of my overall project.

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<sup>336</sup> "RD" p. 205 "Derrida supposes that the term 'parasitic' involves some kind of moral judgment; that Austin is claiming that there is something bad or anomalous or not "ethical" about such discourse. Again, nothing could be further from the truth...Such parasitism is a relation of logical dependence; it does not imply any moral judgment and certainly not that the parasite is somehow morally sponging off the host (Does one really have to point this out?)."

<sup>337</sup> I have Shoshana Felman's brilliant work to thank for that, among other things.

As Searle turns his attention away from Derrida's general commentary on the structure of communication and the source of its efficacy, toward his "misunderstanding" of Austin, he appears to be on stronger footing, but his conviction that Derrida's reading is full of fairly simple confusions keeps him from getting very far. He thus limits his presentation to an enumeration of the many errors that he attributes to Derrida's reading, without offering much analysis or anything approaching a serious engagement with Derrida's position. Most centrally, he focuses his attention on the "completely mistaken status of Austin's exclusion of parasitic forms of discourse," a crucial focal point, considering that Derrida claims that the abnormal and parasitical forms of discourse are most central to his concerns.<sup>338</sup> Concerning this, Searle notes that Derrida has, again, completely misconstrued Austin's position. He contends that:

Derrida seems to think that Austin's exclusion is a matter of great moment, a source of deep metaphysical difficulties, and that the analysis of parasitic discourse might create some insuperable difficulties for the theory of speech acts. But the history of the subject has proved otherwise.<sup>339</sup>

On Searle's reading, the purpose of the exclusion of this form of non-serious speech is a simple matter of practical prioritizing. It therefore plays no centrally important role, as Derrida might imagine. Given that this exclusion is not "a matter of great moment," but really just a temporary strategic measure, the import of parasitic language is not one that yields any important difficulties, and furthermore, to the extent that they might produce minor problems, such problems have been addressed since the time of Austin's writing.<sup>340</sup> He claims that for Austin, this exclusion is simply a matter of recognizing that "we had better not *start* our investigation with promises made by actors on stage in the course of a play...we do not, for example, hold the

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<sup>338</sup> *MP* p. 234; *LI* p. 16

<sup>339</sup> "RD" p. 205

<sup>340</sup> He cites his own essay here, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse." (Winter 1975) an essay that Derrida, in *Limited Inc*, notes came out *after Sec* (1971).

<sup>340</sup> "RD" p. 204

actor responsible today for a promise he made on stage last night...<sup>341</sup>” This sounds like a perfectly good assessment of Austin’s purposes, and may very well constitute something like a refutation if, for Derrida, the status of “seriousness” was his main target in Austin. But as I will show, this still does not get to the central matter that concerns Derrida.

Searle then opens what I think ends up being among the most common readings of Derrida on this matter, that he “supposes that the term ‘parasitic’ involves some kind of moral judgment.<sup>342</sup>” This interpretation, I think, is not entirely unfair. Derrida makes similar such claims elsewhere about the ways in which writing, for example, in being excluded from the fullness of the meaning of truth in speech, has often been treated or at least described in terms of ethical inferiority in philosophy. As such, it wouldn’t be out of the realm of possibility to suspect that Derrida may be extrapolating from his positions developed elsewhere, and charging Austin with being an exemplary case in this already well documented narrative.<sup>343</sup> As I hope to show, although such concerns are relevant to this topic, they are still only indirectly under consideration in “Signature, Event, Context.”

For my reading I want to redirect attention back to the broader scope of this essay, in order to consider what, exactly, is at issue for Derrida in such exclusions. In connection with this, we have to ask what, exactly, the important difference can be, on Austin’s model, between the serious and the non-serious. Again, this is a question concerning what constitutes the *efficacy* of communication. The important questions that Searle misses are the somewhat obvious questions of *why* we do not hold the actor responsible for his promises on stage, and *how*, on Austin’s

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<sup>341</sup> “RD” p. 204

<sup>342</sup> “RD” p. 205

<sup>343</sup> Perhaps best exemplified in *Of Grammatology*.



model, we might account for the differences between these effects.<sup>344</sup> We might ask whether we do not hold the actor responsible because of *some feature of the language*? Because of *the meanings of the sentences she utters*? Because of *some other properties of the sentences*? Because of *some feature of the actor's conscious state*? Or are there other reasons altogether that are not a matter of the features, properties, meanings, or intentions of the utterances at all? We might raise these questions in connection with Searle's response to the possible seriousness of the actor in mind. He argues that:

The existence of the pretended form of the speech act is logically dependent on the possibility of the nonpretended speech act in the same way that any pretended form of behavior is dependent on nonpretended forms of behavior, and in that sense the pretended forms are *parasitical* on the nonpretended forms.<sup>345</sup>

And while something about this is this is likely to be frequently true, the point that Derrida is making is that if the structures of the pretended and non-pretended are identical, then when it comes to speech behavior, the non-pretended is no less pretended than the pretended; they come from the same script, so to speak, and they *embody the same acts*. As such, if one wants to attribute a specific difference in their function to the language itself, one must identify some other factor which is the difference that makes a difference in their efficacy. Whatever this factor is, *it must be outside of the utterances themselves* (provided, of course, that there are such factors). But, on Derrida's reading, such a concession would destroy the *efficacy*<sup>346</sup> of Austin's work. Derrida wants a consistent, non-semantic, non-logocentric, conception of locutionary force from Austin.

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<sup>344</sup> It is, perhaps, noteworthy that Searle apparently sees no reason to pose such questions as they must be, to him, fairly self-evident.

<sup>345</sup> "RD" p. 205

<sup>346</sup> "Efficacy," here, should be read doubly, meaning both the overall value and potential consequences of his work, and the component of his conception of communication from which linguistic effect issues: locutionary force.

Stanley Cavell's reading of Derrida's encounter<sup>347</sup> with Austin appears, in part, to be alert to this fact. On the other hand, Cavell's reading takes issue with Derrida's focus on this matter. His direct commentary begins with the claim that Derrida has "misplaced the role of force" in Austin's work. In this, he cites Derrida's claim that:

Austin was obliged to free the analysis of the performative from the authority of the truth *value*, from the true/false opposition, at least in its classical form, and to substitute for it the value of force, of *difference* of force (illocutionary or perlocutionary force).<sup>348</sup>

To this claim, Cavell responds that:

We might say that what Austin 'substitutes' at the place of a concept of truth is *not force but felicity*. Statements, if adequate to reality, are true; if not, false. (This defines the concept of a statement.) Performatives, if adequate to reality, are felicitous, if not, then, in specific ways, infelicitous.<sup>349</sup>

I think that there are a number of important considerations we can make in response to this claim, which, taken out of context, does appear to be a serious charge against Derrida. First, it is important to keep in mind that in this section of his essay, Derrida is enumerating the many reasons he takes Austin's work to share certain affinities with his own. This particular quote is taken from the fourth and final aspect of Austin's work that he lists as important. In the third point, just above the quote that Cavell cites, Derrida has clearly made the connection between *force* and *meaning*, not force and truth:

This category of communication is relatively original. Austin's notions of illocution and perlocution *do not designate the transport or passage of a content of meaning*, but in a way the communication of an original movement (to be defined in a *general theory of action*), an operation, and *the production of an effect*. To communicate, in the case of the performative, if in all rigor and purity some such thing exists (for the moment I am placing myself within this

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<sup>347</sup> It should be noted that Cavell, who also sees himself as a defender of Austin, explicitly alerts his readers that he is "going to pretend that the controversy between Derrida and Searle did not happen—as in a sense each of them insists that it did not." ("WDA" p. 46)

<sup>348</sup> *LI* p. 13; *MP* p. 322. Last italics mine. Cavell is reading from *Limited Inc.* which has a different translation of "Signature, Event, Context" (the Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman translation) than the one that I have been using (the Alan Bass translation). That said, this quote in particular is only slightly different in the two translations. The Bass translation of this passage is as follows: "Austin had to free the analysis of the performative from the authority of the *value of truth*, from the opposition true/false, at least in its classical form, occasionally substituting it for the value of force, of difference of force (*illocutionary or perlocutionary force*).

<sup>349</sup> "WDA" p. 51

hypothesis and at this stage of the analysis), would be to communicate a *force* by the impetus of a mark.<sup>350</sup>

In this quote, which, again, comes one paragraph before the one that Cavell cites, it is clear that Derrida is alert to the analogy that *might be attributed* to the relationship between force and meaning.

Noting this should help us to recognize that while Cavell charges Derrida with mistakenly believing that force was substituted for “a concept of truth,” Derrida makes no such connection. Derrida’s claim is that the performative’s efficacy is not determined according to its “truth value.” It is not dependent on a model for which the opposition true/false is definitive. For many semantic theorists, *the meaning* of a sentence *is* its “truth value.” As such, it is reasonable to think that meaning and “truth value” are being used interchangeably here.<sup>351</sup> After all, in the cited quote, Derrida does not write “a concept of truth,” as Cavell suggests, but instead writes “truth *value*”, with the emphasis on ‘value.’ He then follows up by elaborating that it is the “true/false opposition” that he is focused on, not truth as such. Furthermore, Derrida claims that “the true/false opposition” is substituted by the value of force, of *difference* of force.” In other words, the focus concerns what force *contributes* to the efficacy of the utterance. Thus the truth value, or true/false opposition would be the analogue of the force value, or the difference of force (the presence/absence of force). Thus, the analogy between force and meaning implies the following: if the presence or absence of meaning is what determines the value of a statement on the classical model, then what determines the value of an utterance on Austin’s model is the

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<sup>350</sup> *MP* p. 321 italics mine (except for the parentheses); *LI* p. 13

<sup>351</sup> This reading, for example, would be consistent with Davidson’s conception of meaning. Beyond this, there are context clues which suggest that Derrida is intending to juxtapose the structure of semantic conceptions of meaning and communication to the structure of locutions. See *MP* p. 309; *LI* p. 1 Although other disciplines are implied, his stated targets are semantics, semiotics, and linguistics.

presence or absence of force. In short, truth is the possible achievement of a meaningful utterance. Likewise, felicity is the possible achievement of a forceful utterance.

Derrida does not get to the point of what may be achieved in communication in this essay. His focus is on the minimal conditions for the possibility of communication. Hence, the questions of truth and felicity are not under direct review. Truth may be a goal to be attained, but attaining it is not a prerequisite for communication. The same is true of felicity. Cavell's reading here depends on the sense that Derrida is trying, but failing, to make a perfect analogy between the terms of Austin's conception of communication and that of the classical model. He then surmises that what Derrida should be able to recognize is that for Austin, *force* has taken the place of *meaning* and that *felicity* has taken the place of *truth*. And while I do think that this is a productive way of thinking about the conditions of Austin's transformation of the model of communication, this is not, at all, what Derrida identifies. Derrida's assessment is much bolder. He writes:

For these four reasons, at least, it could appear that *Austin has exploded the concept of communication* as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept. The performative is a "communication" which does not essentially limit itself to *transporting an already constituted semantic content guarded by its own aiming at truth* (truth as an unveiling of that which is in Being or as an adequation between a judicative statement and the thing itself).<sup>352</sup>

Derrida is not reading Austin in terms of a semantic or positivistic model, and he is not primarily looking to identify the various substitutions according to which we might characterize Austin's concept of "communication." He is trying to read Austin on his own terms and, perhaps, in terms of a revolutionary thinker who is on the verge of fundamentally disrupting the classical model of communication through the introduction of force, of differences of force, as the measure for

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<sup>352</sup> *MP* p. 322 italics mine; *LI* p. 13 This clause "guarded by its own aiming at truth" is translated in the Weber/Mehlman translation as "already constituted and dominated by an orientation toward truth." In either case, we should be alert to the extent to which Derrida is emphasizing the potential *risk* of creating effects which are not predetermined, guarded, or regulated in advance by the goal or necessity of aiming at truth. Thus, when Austin makes his exclusions, it's as if he abrogates this risk by stipulating that "Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances." (*HW* p. 21-22)

understanding language and its effects. This would be no small task, and no small achievement.<sup>353</sup> It is in this way, among others, that Austin's potential transformation of the concept of communication is, on Derrida's reading, "nothing less than Nietzschean."

His concern, again, is with the ways in which it seems that Austin has turned back on the potential of his own project. The key to understanding what Derrida wanted of Austin, is to understand exactly what Derrida thinks Austin has turned his back on. I think that this is best captured in this quote that is also an important counterexample to Searle's claims concerning Derrida's illusions. Of Austin's work, he writes:

Differing from the classical assertion, from the constative utterance, the performative's referent (although this word is inappropriate here, no doubt, such is the interest of Austin's finding) *is not outside it, or in any case preceding it or before it*. It does not describe something which exists outside and before language. It produces or transforms a situation, it operates.<sup>354</sup>

In this, Austin has inaugurated a conception of communication that does not depend on the classical model, the metaphor of theory. To repeat:

Austin's notions of illocution and perlocution *do not designate the transport or passage of a content of meaning*, but in a way *the communication of an original movement* (to be defined in a *general theory of action*), an operation, and *the production of an effect*.<sup>355</sup>

He has thus introduced an entirely new conception of linguistic function according to Derrida's reading. This is a model of communication whose movements might be metaphorized, if I may, as tremors—as movements in a landscape whose surface has no depths, no internal properties to discover, no external rules to decipher. There are simply effects for which there may be some very general predictability, but whose features are each so unique that any specific anticipation is likely to be met with surprise. In such a case, the landscape itself, the field in which such

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<sup>353</sup> This is especially the case when considered in terms of his, perhaps, overstated claims that no counterexamples can be found in the history of philosophy as such that do not aim at the goal of univocity ("White Mythology") and the development of the model of communication as the transport of a determined content across a homogenous space ("White Mythology;" "Signature, Event, Context;" *Of Grammatology*)

<sup>354</sup> *MP* p. 321; *LI* p.13 italics mine.

<sup>355</sup> *MP* p. 321; *LI* p 13 italics mine.

transformations emerge, is itself unpredictable. The field, the context, is both the source of the causes and the fluctuating and ever transforming loci of its effects. Though potentially smooth, it is also potentially chaotic; it is a fluid of broken symmetries. It is a dynamic past and an unforeseeable future. In it, is the possibility for the recognition of an open and dynamic systematicity, a dissemination irreducible to polysemia. This is a new model. It is a product of a project with which Derrida sees himself as allied, and whose *force*, he was looking to intensify.

### Fields, Loss, Perdition

“If, perchance, the predicate thus assumed to characterize the absence proper to writing were itself found to suit every species of sign and communication, there would follow a general displacement: writing no longer would be a species of communication, and all the concepts to whose generality writing was subordinated (the concept itself as meaning, idea, or grasp of meaning and idea, the concept of communication, of sign, etc.) *would appear as noncritical, ill-formed concepts, or rather as concepts destined to ensure the authority and force of a certain discourse.*<sup>356</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

“I find so many confusions in this argument of Derrida that I hardly know where to get started on it.”<sup>357</sup>”

—John Searle

Although I think that Cavell makes some of the same mistakes that Searle does—at least in failing to identify the broader purpose of Derrida’s essay—he nevertheless offers some important insights and explanations that will help me to develop my position as we continue. For example, he raises the important point that what Derrida takes to be Austin’s exclusions may best be read as focused references to other aspects of Austin’s work; that these exclusions are quite specifically addressed to two, separate, theories that are worked out elsewhere. Austin is attempting to think of performatives with respect to actions, and since all actions are subject to failure, extenuating circumstances, etc. such “exclusions” in *How to Do things With Words* are

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<sup>356</sup> *MP* p. 315; *LI* p. 7

<sup>357</sup> “RD” p. 206

worked out elsewhere in his theory of excuses. Likewise, the second exclusion, that of the non-serious and citational, is tracked by Austin's theory of pretending and imitation.<sup>358</sup> As such, Cavell thinks that the general theory that Derrida wants from Austin, that which could identify and directly countenance absence, failure, misfires, abuses, and infelicity in general is, in fact, to be found in Austin's work, just not in *How to do Things with Words*. And furthermore, again, Austin doesn't provide a single general theory, but two distinct theories, each corresponding to the two "exclusions" that Derrida here identifies.

While I do believe, along with Cavell, that a Derridean treatment of Austin's theories of excuses and imitation could have been/might still be quite productive and illuminating, nevertheless, within the context of "Signature, Event, Context," such an analysis would be extraneous and, perhaps, irrelevant. Cavell's approach is exemplary of the fact that most commentators fail to recognize that "Signature, Event, Context," again, is that it is about the structure of "communication," specifically whether its features and function can be rigorously defined. It is furthermore about the nature of the general range of assumptions that motivate our sense that we know what we mean when we use the term. The "we" here concerns *us*,<sup>359</sup> the presumed philosophers. Although, depending on your orientation, one might perhaps say, more specifically, those particular philosophers present at the original address. In any event, the quotes

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<sup>358</sup> "WDA"

<sup>359</sup> In which case, we might take an opportunity to productively play on a few connections here. 1. The *us* of *ususre*, drawn from "White Mythology," and the condition of community which can be developed and organized on the basis of the productive power (*usury*) of catachresis, on worn out, *used up*, and "dead" metaphors "that seem to a nation fixed, canonic, and binding." And 2. The "*Us*" that we are to read in the final section, of "Signature, Event, Context." This section, "The Ends of Man," is subtitled "Reading Us." Those of "*Us*" who, according to Heidegger, always already have some implicit understanding of Being, who are thereby among the exemplary beings who, by virtue of the clarity of self-presence, are authorized *as* identities, as both the inquirer and as the interrogated; those of "*us*" who are inscribed within "the so-called formal structure of the question of Being within the horizon of metaphysics, and ore widely within the Indo-European linguistic milieu, to the possibility of which the origin of metaphysics is essentially linked. It is within these limits that the factum can be understood and accredited; and it is within these determined, and therefore material, limit that the factum can uphold the so-called formality of the question. It remains that the meaning of these 'limits' is given to us only on the basis of the question of the meaning of Being. Let us not pretend, for example, to know what 'Indo-European linguistic milieu' means (*MP* p. 125)."

around the “we” above are not, exactly, scare quotes. In the first two paragraphs of “Signature, Event Context,” a number of Derrida’s comments are addressed to a speech community whose authorization as communicators is subtly called to task.

Now, the word *communication*, which *nothing initially authorizes us* to overlook as a word, and to impoverish as a polysemic word, opens a semantic field which precisely is not limited to semantics, semiotics, and even less to linguistics...Nevertheless, *we* will not say that this nonsemiotic sense of the word *communication*, such as it is at work in ordinary language, in one or several of the so-called natural languages, constitutes the *proper* or *primitive* meaning, and that consequently the semantic, semiotic, or linguistic meaning corresponds to a derivation, an extension or a reduction, a metaphoric displacement. *We* will not say, as one might be tempted to do, that semiolinguistic communication is *more metaphorico* entitled “communication,” because by analogy with “physical” or “real” communication it gives passage, transports, transmit something, gives access to something. *We* will not say so: 1. because the value of the literal, proper meaning appears more problematic than ever, 2. because the value of displacement, of transport, etc., is constitutive of the very concept of metaphor by means of which one allegedly understands the semantic displacement which is operated from communication as a nonsemiolinguistic phenomenon to communication as a semiolinguistic phenomenon.<sup>360</sup>

Derrida’s encounter with Austin is an extension of this general line of reasoning and questioning, and, in a certain sense, Austin’s approach is given credence as the best available option for outthinking the assumptions of the classical model of communication, and specifically, as I’ve been trying to point out, the metaphor of theory that silently organizes these assumptions.

The classical model of communication (exemplified in the joint application of the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor), precludes the possibility of the recognition of the foundational aspects of the graphematic structure of all language use (this is the point of the first half of the essay), and ultimately favors predicates that privilege presence, consciousness, intention, the *homogenous* space of discourse, and the integrity of meaning. So, generally, while both Searle and Cavell seem to think that had Derrida had a better grasp of Austin’s overall project, this exchange may have had a more productive outcome (which, in a certain way, I don’t doubt), my argument is partially dependent on the claim that that had Searle and Cavell (among

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<sup>360</sup> *MP* p. 309-10; *LI* p. 1-2 I’ve added only the italics concerning the designation of a community of speakers. All of the italicized and non-italicized “communications” are as they are in the original.



others) been more careful readers of this particular essay, they may have been able to identify what Derrida took to be at stake in “Signature, Event, Context,” a position that is articulated in the first three sentences of the essay.

So when Cavell astutely points out that Derrida “seems obviously to be taking Austin to be excluding one theory twice rather than invoking two separate theories,<sup>361</sup>” it seems to me that he does get the characterization right, in part, but for the wrong reasons. What Derrida is charging Austin with excluding in this case is not *primarily* a general theory. Derrida is giving an account of why Austin *continually defers* the general theory that his overall project promises.<sup>362</sup> What Derrida is charging Austin with, is the exclusion of particular phenomena, infelicities and citations, *as standing in need of thorough explanation*, as indicators whose active theoretical assessment *should be expected to be every bit as fruitful and productive* as theoretical assessments of felicities and serious, ordinary, language use. Giving such a theoretical treatment would imply an analysis that could detail the component parts, the very structure of locutions in general, that could account for infelicities in terms of the productivity of *force*.<sup>363</sup> On such a model, infelicities would not have to be excluded as accidental or external to the analysis. Derrida, of course, suggests that such a general theory is possible and should be pursued, but that

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<sup>361</sup> “WDA” p. 57

<sup>362</sup> It would be a mistake to think that Derrida is alone in reading Austin’s effort in *How to Do Things with Words* as one directed at developing a general theory of speech acts. Searle, for example, in his essay “Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts,” writes that “The main theme of Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* is the replacement of the original distinction between performatives and constatives by a general theory of speech acts” (p. 405).

<sup>363</sup> As an analogy, we might return to the example of a simplistic mechanistic causality (see note 286, p.193 of this essay)—The forces which compel a billiard ball into a corner pocket is the very same force which compels a scratch, a missed shot, the ball flying off of the table, and its use in any imaginable capacity. Nothing about our intention changes the possibilities inherent to these kinds of force. Denying force to all or any of the misapplications and misdirections of billiard balls in a game of pool would belie an understanding of physical force and the conditions of its use even in cases of our intended purposes. The possible effects of the billiard balls exceed our intentions for their use, and any theory of force that could not countenance this fact would fundamentally misunderstand the phenomena at hand.

it will not emerge as a consequence of the classical model of communication.<sup>364</sup> With this in mind, Derrida's treatment of Austin should become a bit clearer.

As such, my point in response to Cavell would be the following: while it might be true that a theory of *excuses* and a theory of *pretending* need not be secondary to a theory of *locution*, they must, in some sense, be secondary to a theory of force—as presumably, it is force that these performatives either lack, or possess in some modified or vitiated form. In both cases, for Derrida, what is at issue is answering the question of what, exactly, they lack. What is *present* in serious speech, and what is *absent* from nonserious speech? A theory of excuses is a response—it entails the need to address something which is lacking or absent. Derrida's response is that such an absence does not need to be rectified—and nor can it be.<sup>365</sup> A theory of pretending is a justification for the fact that there are locutions of the same form, and the same outward appearance, which nevertheless lack the force of their serious counterparts. Derrida's response is that force is simply nowhere near as predictable as such an account makes it seem, and that furthermore, what one intends to be nonserious may nevertheless have serious effects—and vice versa. The need for justification, rectification, in either case, is simply the need to restore order to a system that implies far more uncertainty, and far more risk, than we philosophers can tolerate.

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<sup>364</sup> Recall that this classical model of communication, for Derrida, is a model which begins with speech as the conveyance of a determined content as thought, and that writing is a development of this power, which, although it can potentially carry out this task, and is able to do so over greater distance (both spatially and temporally), it is also always beset by various forms of absence (the graphematic predicates) and hence cannot be trusted. This general model has surreptitiously compelled the belief that studying the efficacy of communication will always have to return to the original efficacy of communication *as speech*, as that which presumably retains the presence, consciousness, and intentionality. Derrida thinks that an analysis of language can be organized around a different model, one that draws from the aspects of writing which prove its force irrespective of presence, consciousness, and intentionality. This is the project of *Of Grammatology*.

<sup>365</sup> As any such attempted rectification would simply be the iteration of other marks which would still be subject to the same risk of loss, uncertainty, etc.

Furthermore, to the extent that Derrida is focusing his attention on alternative ways of thinking about *communication*<sup>366</sup> in general, he is emphasizing the graphematic predicates. Pretense and the need for and failure bear the marks of the graphematic—of absence, error, and the nonserious. In short, Derrida’s insistence on the graphematic predicates of absence, and unconscious effects, marks out the same territory as Austin’s theory of excuses, even if in a very different way. His treatment of citationality is precisely the kind of account that one would need for making sense of pretending. Derrida is actually trying to specifically identify the parallels he sees between his view and Austin’s. The difference is that that he is offering up a model—the iterability of marks—which is meant to cover the same ground, but to do so without recourse, without the possibility of justification, and without the desire or belief in the ability to sum up the whole in an orderable system.

Both Searle and Cavell, along with most other commentators, overstate the centrality, and misstate the focus, of Derrida’s concern for seriousness. Generally speaking, none of them seem to notice that in his questioning of the *function* of seriousness in Austin, he is posing a general question about the structure of locution. Both thinkers assume that what Derrida is trying to do is to somehow reproach Austin’s work because it does not take the non-serious, the theatrical, and the artistic in general, *seriously*. Both are, therefore, quick to point out the degree to which Austin is a powerful endorser of all such fun and exciting uses of language (which, of course, is all quite right). Along with the misplaced and, perhaps, exaggerated attention paid to the role of seriousness comes the belief that Derrida is concerned that Austin’s attention to seriousness is

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<sup>366</sup> This, of course, doesn’t absolve Derrida of not having read enough Austin, but it does call into question whether any close reading of what he says in this essay would indicate anything about how much or little he had read in the first place. In other words, it seems to me that if Derrida had read Austin’s theories of excuses and of pretending (and, again, from this essay, there is nothing, strictly speaking, to indicate that he has or has not) that he could make his case even more precise, by trying to indicate exactly how the problems addressed in such theories would have their origins in this more basic graphematic structure of discourse. In any event, nothing about Austin’s theories of pretending or excuses militate against what Derrida says in “Signature, Event, Context.”

somehow an exclusion of “the literary.”<sup>367</sup> And while, to some extent, this is in line with much of the ways in which Derrida’s broader project has been developed,<sup>368</sup> it is not what is directly at stake here. Cavell thinks that the best way to read Austin is as opposed to positivism and to metaphysics, and assumes that Derrida is attempting to read him as opposed to the literary, but this is not the case. Derrida is reading Austin as attempting to oppose metaphysics but as failing to get to the root of the problem.<sup>369</sup>

But since this focus is misplaced and exaggerated, and is, at best, a possible side-effect of what Derrida is trying to do, many of the thinkers who look to respond to Derrida in defense of Austin have largely missed the problem. While it is true that concern for seriousness is an important aspect of his analysis, its import is actually in service to further analyzing *the force of utterances*. As we will see, this is the reason that Derrida claims that the second exclusion (of the non-serious and the citational) is more directly related to his topic than the first exclusion (that of infelicities and mistakes). If not for the sake of the theatrical, artistic, and the literary, we might ask ourselves why Derrida would be more concerned with non-seriousness, and parasitism, than with accidents.<sup>370</sup> My answer is that he is concerned with the difference between the serious and the non-serious with an interest in isolating why, at the level of locution, seriousness should make a difference in the production of locutionary force.

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<sup>367</sup> This is an assessment that I would expect would also be attributed to an attempt to detail a theory of metaphor for the work of philosophy. Such an assessment, in both Derrida’s case and in my own, would be misplaced.

<sup>368</sup> Although more likely attributable to “Derrideans” than to Derrida, himself.

<sup>369</sup> I would also conjecture that Derrida is reading Austin as opposed to semantics, at least to the extent that certain aspects of semantic theory have grown out of positivistic tendencies. Not least of all being what Austin refers to as the descriptive fallacy, that statements describe facts or states of affairs, and that they do so either truly or falsely.

<sup>370</sup> It should also be noted that Cavell doesn’t even think that Austin’s theory of pretending can even account for cases of the nonserious as well as Austin’s theory of excuses can work for cases of extenuation. This is all the more noteworthy in that he doesn’t think that Austin’s theory of excuses is even all that effective as applied to performatives (*A Pitch of Philosophy* p. 105)

Generally speaking, Derrida thinks that the great potential of speech act theory is in its alertness to the scope of misfires, abuses, and other infelicities; and that furthermore, there is something laudable in the general uncertainty of the performative and the strategy and style that Austin employs as he unfolds it. Note that he characterizes Austin's work as "...patient, open, aporetic, in constant transformation, often more fruitful in the recognition of its impasses than in its positions...<sup>371</sup>" but that in this very same passage he claims that:

...all of the difficulties encountered by Austin...have a common root. It is this: Austin has not taken into account that which *in the structure of locution* (and therefore before any illocutionary or perlocutionary determination) already bears within itself the system of predicates that I call *graphematic in general*, which therefore confuses all the ulterior oppositions whose pertinence, purity, and rigor Austin sought to establish in vain.<sup>372</sup>

As I've tried to emphasize, absence, iterability, and citationality function beyond meaning and intention, and all of the various forms of infelicities would be included among the system of what Derrida calls graphematic predicates. Derrida is charging Austin with not actively pursuing—at the level of discourse—how such predicates are essential aspects of any form or system of linguistic exchange. And he is furthermore charging Austin with excluding these predicates *in a very particular way*, noting that "Austin's procedure is rather remarkable<sup>373</sup>": as he excludes these predicates of absence, failure, abnormality, pretense, the unexpected and the unintended, he—in the very same move—looks to establish the value of presence, success, the ordinary, and the authority of intention—all predicates whose articulation depends on the

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<sup>371</sup> *MP* p. 322; *LI* p.14 Cavell notes that "These precious predicates are doubtless awarded by Derrida out of a recognition of specific further affinities his work has with Austin's. Both are philosophers of what may be called limitation, both interested in the morality and politics of speech (out of something like a shared sense that concepts, without the most scrupulous attention, impose, and are imposed, upon us), and both take the struggle against metaphysics as a struggle for liberation, for something more than reason, as it were, itself. Most specifically, there is an appreciation of the fact that Austin's analysis of the performative may be seen to be motivated precisely as an attack on what deconstruction attacks under the name of logocentrism." "WDA" p. 48-9

<sup>372</sup> *MP* p. 322; *LI* p. 14 italics mine

<sup>373</sup> *MP* p. 323; *LI* p. 15

classical model of communication, the very predicates concerning the preservation and integrity of meaning and intention that his work is meant to disrupt.

Derrida is concerned with identifying the factors which Austin takes to be centrally relevant in consideration of the structure and production of locutionary force. In this model, in this “communication of an original movement” what, exactly, contributes to linguistic efficacy?<sup>374</sup> Are intentions at issue? Are properties of sentences, meanings, for example, at issue? Or is there some other mechanism that “causes” *force* as its “effect”? In this inquiry, Derrida is asking what, exactly, is missing from an utterance in a theatrical performance, in a citation, in a case of pretending, in a case of the non-serious locution. Is it something that *if present* would change the effect or force of an utterance? How is such language “etiolated” if it isn’t because it has somehow *lost something*? Some property? On the basis of what aspect of a locution’s composition can this difference be tracked? In short, what, exactly, comprises a locution’s *structure*? Derrida is asking how, exactly, *seriousness* can be a difference that makes a difference in the efficacy of discourse at all without drawing explicitly on intention, consciousness, meaning or some other kind of property—all of which hearken back to the classical model of communication.

It is the concept of communication that attributes some kind of determinate content to sentences and utterances that Derrida is challenging, and it is precisely for this reason that he initially heaps so much praise on Austin’s project. Despite this shared aspect of their projects, Derrida is looking to draw an important methodological distinction. It is with this in mind that he poses the question of whether infelicities—the product of utterances that have no force, or the

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<sup>374</sup> For Davidson it is meaning/content/the effects that words have on sentences. For Searle it is the properties language derives from consciousness, from intentionality. For Derrida, it is iterability. For Austin it is, presumably, force.

wrong kind of force<sup>375</sup>—fall outside of the scope of the right kind of discourse which, presumably, would be endowed with the right kinds of properties, meaning, force, etc. Derrida gathers all such conceptions of the efficacy of communication under the umbrella of the metaphysics of presence. This is for the reason that such models are motivated by *the belief* that *there exists* some general linguistic property,<sup>376</sup> and that the possibility of its presence or absence (*in* a given locution, sentence, utterance, etc.) is what crucially defines the possibility of the “communication” of intention, meaning, force, etc.

The performative is claimed to be defined by its effects, and not by the ideas and intentions that it may putatively convey. As such, defining meaning, intention, and context—while they may be valuable for other reasons—should have no bearing on the essential structure of locution. Returning to these factors as if they were essential to locution’s structure undermines everything about the value of Austin’s project. But, according to Derrida, this is precisely what one should come to expect in philosophy, as the unregulated possibilities of discourse, the dissemination which is irreducible to a polysemia, would undermine the very possibility of a well-ordered discourse and the possibility of univocity which, on his view, proves to be the goal and purpose of every philosophy of language.

As such, when we read Derrida’s concern for seriousness, we should think in terms of the following questions: how would the *presence* of seriousness affect the force of an illocution? If an exceptionally talented actor were able to really generate the right attitude, the right amount of

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<sup>375</sup> This difference would mark the difference between misfires and abuses. We might say that the utterances of the wedding officiant misfired if she were not properly qualified to perform the service. In such a case, it could be claimed that her words *lacked* the appropriate force. On the other hand we might say of a person who says “I do” in a wedding ceremony but who is already secretly married, that their words carried the appropriate force, and that they have thereby *done* something, but that it wasn’t, properly speaking, getting married. It was the performance of becoming a bigamist.

<sup>376</sup> Although given our assessment of the function of catachresis, it should be clear here, as it is with Davidson, that one doesn’t have to believe, *in some thematic or conscious sense*, that meanings are “ghostly properties of words” in order to behave and reason about them as if they are.

seriousness, the right intentional state, would that really be the difference between whether we hold him accountable for a promise made on stage? For Derrida, the pursuit of absence as “an essential predicate or *law*,<sup>377</sup>” is directed at developing a model of language which is not defined by the presence of some undefined property or content. On his view, Austin’s conception of force is an interesting and productive option in this regard. As such, Derrida is looking to draw upon its strengths by generalizing its function in order to show how it would work if further developed. He thinks, among other things, that speech act theory, and locutionary force, cannot reach their full potentials to the extent that they fall back on the other components of the classical model of communication (i.e., consciousness, presence, intention, content, transport, relevant fields, etc.).

### Concerning Near Misses in Open Spaces

“It would be a mistake, I think, to regard Derrida’s discussion of Austin as a confrontation between two prominent philosophical traditions. This is not so much because Derrida has failed to discuss the central theses in Austin’s Theory of language, but rather because he has misunderstood and misstated Austin’s position at several crucial points, as I shall attempt to show, *and thus the confrontation never quite takes place*...I should say at the outset that I did not find his arguments very clear and it is possible that I may have misinterpreted him as profoundly as I believe he has misinterpreted Austin.<sup>378</sup>”

—John Searle

“Once again, to be precise: what is at stake here is an analysis that can account for *structural possibilities*. Once it is *possible* for X to function under certain conditions (for instance, a mark in the absence or partial absence of intention), the possibility of a certain non-presence or of a certain non-actuality pertains to the structure of the functioning under consideration, and pertains to it *necessarily*.<sup>379</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

It seems to me that much of this debate is at least partially conditioned by the fact that even Derrida’s defenders appear to misunderstand the central focus of his position. In an otherwise able exposition of “Signature, Event, Context,” Gordon Bearn manages to mis-state

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<sup>377</sup> *MP* p. 324; *LI* p. 15

<sup>378</sup> “RD” p. 198

<sup>379</sup> *LI* p. 57



Derrida's thesis *just enough* to get it right in some superficial sense, but also just wrong enough to make space for serious confusion. Straightforwardly, he writes that Derrida's "argument is this: since every linguistic expression can be used in contexts which are unusual or out of the ordinary, no linguistic communication is ever successful."<sup>380</sup> Elsewhere, once he isolates the centrality of iterability for Derrida, he extends this thesis to include the performative, claiming that "The most dramatic consequence of iterability is that there can be no successful performative, no successful linguistic act."<sup>381</sup> These claims, in practical terms, could not be further from the mark; even if we add the seemingly necessary qualifiers (*perfectly* successful, *completely* successful, etc.), thus taking some of the intensity out of Bearn's presentation, his position still misses the crucial focal point of the essay.

To begin with, Bearn conflates the "communicative act" with the "performative act." This is a major problem (which, as we will see, is mirrored—in a certain way—by Judith Butler) given that Derrida is trying to challenge the easy interpretation of "communication" in general. Furthermore, he is opposing the performative act to the communicative act, and since he thinks of the performative as a potentially transformative, "relatively original" concept, it is not to be *simply subsumed* within the scope of the broader classical concept of communication. On Bearn's reading, Derrida's assessment here is meant to detail the *impossibility* of "communication" in general because of the failure of its model. However, as it is noted in *Limited Inc.* (in a quote that Bearn himself cites), the *actual* success or failure of communication in general is not central to the thesis of "Signature, Event, Context," on Derrida's own terms. He writes that:

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<sup>380</sup> Gordon C. F. Bearn, "Derrida Dry: Iterating Iterability Analytically" *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 2-25. p. 3. Hereafter "DDA"

<sup>381</sup> "DDA" p. 8

there must be a certain element of play, a certain remove, a certain degree of independence with regard to the origin, to production, or to intention in all of its “vital,” “simple,” “actuality,” or “determinateness,” etc. For if this were not so, the “break” (with all of its consequences, variables, etc.) would be impossible. And if a certain “break” is always possible, that with which it breaks must necessarily bear the mark of this possibility inscribed in its structure. This is the thesis of *Sec.*<sup>382</sup>

That this kind of break must be possible is the thesis of “Signature, Event, Context,” but this does not entail Bearn’s position that communication or performances are never successful. What it does entail is that the classical model of communication that calls for presence, the integrity of determined contents, safe transit, and the homogeneity of the discursive field is inadequate to the task of identifying what makes “communication” possible.

For my purposes, what is interesting about Bearn’s analysis is that he gets so close to this recognition, but never challenges the very metaphors according to which the model of communication is organized. As such, he can come to the *outlandish* (even if common<sup>383</sup>) conclusion that Derrida’s thesis is that because of iterability, successful communication never takes place, without the recognition that Derrida is challenging the *model* of communication and the centrality of the metaphors that structure the assumed conceptions of *how it takes place*. It is true for Derrida that “communication” never “takes place,” but this claim is neither coextensive nor synonymous with the sense that there are no successful speech performances, nor that “no

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<sup>382</sup> *LI* p.64 It should be noted that in Bearn’s citation, he omits the parenthetical remarks “(with all of its consequences, variables, etc.).” While I am not centrally concerned to note that this is a motivated omission, it is still noteworthy that, on my reading, *force*, whether illocutionary, perlocutionary, or otherwise, would be counted among the consequences of these breaks here identified. Bearn reads this quote with an importantly related quote in mind: “What is success when the possibility of failure continues to constitute its structure?” *LI* p. 15; *MP* 324. See also “DDA” p. 8 While it is true that Derrida is looking to minimize the opposition of success and failure, it is not so as to demonstrate the impossibility of success. Rather it is a matter of demonstrating that there is a structural level at which to assess the inevitable possibility of infelicity. In short, Bearn emphasizes success when Derrida is primarily focused on structure.

<sup>383</sup> It is fairly bizarre that this is a common conclusion to reach. This is especially the case when we consider a fairly definitive quote taken from the last paragraph of the penultimate section of the essay: “Above all, I will not conclude from this that there is no relative specificity of the effects of consciousness, of the effects of speech (in opposition to writing in the traditional sense), that there is no effect of the performative, no effect of ordinary language no effect of presence and of speech acts. It is simply that these effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them term by term, but on the contrary presuppose it in in dysmetrical fashion, as the general space of their possibility.” (*MP* p. 321; *LI* p. 19)

linguistic communication is ever successful.” The obvious counterargument to Bearn’s statement of what he takes to be Derrida’s thesis is that, not only does communication take place all the time, but that there is something obviously paradoxical about someone trying to communicate the fact that communication is impossible.

I happen to think that these are both perfectly reasonable responses to Bearn’s statements, but, importantly, they are not counterarguments to Derrida’s thesis. Bearn, *because of his subtle misreading of Derrida*, has to take the obviousness of linguistic efficacy as a realistic counterargument to be addressed. He concedes that “Derridean dissemination seems to be contradicted by these obvious facts about our linguistic life.<sup>384</sup>” This, even though Derrida readily concedes the practical efficacy of the signature, for example. On my reading, nothing about dissemination should give us the impression, even superficially or provisionally, that the practical circumstances of our speech behaviors would belie Derrida’s position. This is importantly connected to the fact that Bearn has not stated Derrida’s position in the first place. In trying to clarify the conditions of the impossibility of communication, he offers this powerful, yet damning, explanation:

But since the objection concedes the disseminating powers of language, *the thought, which might be successfully conveyed from the sender to the receiver*, is not one whose determinacy could essentially depend on language. *If the determinacy of the thought sent and received did depend on language*, then that thought would be subject to the unruliness induced by the disseminating significances of words. In that case *it would be false to say either that there was some definite thought sent or that there was some definite thought received*. Both thoughts would be disseminated by the iterability of every linguistic mark, which would thereby ruin the possibility of successfully communicating those thoughts.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> “DDA” p. 18

<sup>385</sup> “DDA” p. 16 Italics mine. The key to the misreading indicated in this passage is similar to what we saw in Searle. Bearn, here, is making the mistake of surmising that what Derrida is saying is something like “iterability disrupts the possibility of communication because it renders an *otherwise possible transport of a possibly present property* ineffective by disrupting its integrity.” He goes on to write “If thinking, imagining, intending and so forth, rely on language for their determinacy, then the various significances of a word which are aloft in spoken and written language will not be grounded by the turn inside, the turn to the gaseous realm of thought...the iterability of significant signs shakes the determinacy of the sender’s thoughts, the receiver’s understandings (16)” My argument would be something like this: linguistic efficacy only appears to depend on determinacy if one believes that “communication” is about the transmitting of determined content. If you don’t believe that, then you have no reason to believe that dissemination makes communicative success impossible. What it does make *inept*, is the metaphor of

What Bearn has failed to notice, in a somewhat dramatic fashion, is *the assumed structure of communication*, the very same structure that guides his explanation. Thus, even as he is making an argument that, on the face of it, appears to be consistent with Derrida's, the limitation of his position is demonstrated by its inability to escape the metaphor of theory. The central fact about communication that dissemination stands in contradiction to is the classical model of communication, the joint function of the metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory. One way of thinking about the crucial distinction that I am trying to make here would be to make the claim that Bearn's presentation of dissemination gives us an image of communication as the *transmitting of an indeterminate content*. This, of course, would only be a slight revision of the classical model of communication, and one that would still be defined, at the very least, by the metaphor of theory.<sup>386</sup>

In the same essay, he approaches the problem more directly, specifically citing Derrida's isolation of the graphematic at the locutionary level. And while, of course, this is an important concern for Derrida, treating it as central, again, demonstrates the loss of the scope of his primary concern. Bearn rightly notes that "it is Derrida's contention that Austin's project ran into trouble because he did not attend to the fact that the system of predicates Derrida calls 'graphematic in general' already applies at the level of the locutionary act."<sup>387</sup> Again, Bearn states this as if the purpose of Derrida's essay was primarily to point out this particular flaw in

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theory that guides Bearn's chain of reasoning here. Amazingly, he concludes this particular argument in the following way "In such circumstances, the very idea of successful communication—an adequation between the thought sent and the thought received—must also begin to tremble. And this was our original target: If (I) iterability brings (II) dissemination in its wake, then it also follows (III) that there can be no successful communication, no successful linguistic act. And that's it: Q.E.D."

<sup>386</sup> It is unclear to me how or if the metaphor of metaphor would function without the sense that determinate content was, in part, determined by its original source. Although we could imagine, in terms which are somewhat comparable to what with Searle's arguments in "Literal Meaning" imply (probably in spite of himself), that the various contexts in which such indeterminate meaning may appear may have different regulating principles, or perhaps different regulatory authority.

<sup>387</sup> "DDA" p. 6

Austin's project rather than as an extension of his effort to consider the structure of the classical model of "communication." Evidence for this claim can be found in what Bearn takes to be the central concern of his own essay: he is looking to "demonstrate that had Austin engaged in such an interrogation (of the graphematic structure of the locutionary act), he would have discovered two consequences of iterability that contaminate the pure possibility of a successful performative, thus making it inevitable that Austin's distinctions would blur."<sup>388</sup>

On my reading, the purpose of Derrida's response to Austin is not limited to pointing out what Austin may have noticed had he taken a different approach. The key to understanding Derrida's position is his goal of understanding how to make sense of linguistic efficacy in spite of the fact that most of the markers which are typically used to organize and define the structure of "communication" generally are not necessary factors in the production of its effects, its legibility, and its intelligibility. In connection with this, his reading of Austin is largely a matter of attempting to demonstrate the degree to which *Austin returns to the classical model of communication as he makes his exclusions*. Derrida sees this as his turning his back on the originality and vast potential and power of his own project. That project, as Derrida readily recognizes, is about the ordinary effects of ordinary language, in ordinary circumstances.

Thus when it gets to the question of whether there are signatures, i.e., whether there are normal effects of discourse that "take place," whether communication or linguistic performances are "ever successful," Derrida claims that "Yes, of course, everyday. The effects of signature are the most ordinary thing in the world."<sup>389</sup> This claim would seem to straightforwardly belie Bearn's claim about Derrida's thesis. This is a clear endorsement of the possibility for successful communication, and for possibility of the success of a performative. But then we can read the

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<sup>388</sup> "DDA" p. 8

<sup>389</sup> *MP* p. 328 This comment alone is enough to put significant doubt in Bearn's interpretation.

very next lines: “The condition of possibility for these effects is simultaneously the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their *rigorous purity*...it is its sameness which, in altering its identity and singularity, divides the seal.<sup>390</sup>” While this appears to be consistent with something very similar to what Bearn claims, the nuanced difference is a crucial one. Derrida’s position is not about the impossibility of the general efficacy of language, it is about the inability to identify *any pure element in the structure of discursive acts which produces this efficacy*. It is about the failed classical model of communication, and the degree to which that failure is a product of denying absence, breaks, and disintegration as essential to discursive efficacy, as essential to discursive force. Communication takes place, it simply does so by different measures than that which is commonly tracked philosophically.

Bearn is not alone in this very specific kind of misreading. In Raoul Moati’s excellent and provocative book *Derrida/Searle*, his reading of Derrida perhaps best exemplifies the “nearness” of these missed interpretations. Moati, unlike most other commentators, is alert to the focus on the polyvalent aspects of “communication” that Derrida initiates in *Sec*, but he is nevertheless unable to see the depth and specificity of its articulation. He writes:

Derrida asks if the *word* “communication” proves capable of corresponding fully to its proper concept—put differently, if it *communicates a determined meaning*. The concept of communication does describe a movement of meaning, that of the transmission of a content from a speaker to an interlocutor through the intermediary of language. Yet the transmission of a meaning is itself only possible if each word is attached to a univocal signified, in other words, only on the condition that the stability of semantics is acknowledged...It is this very presumption of stability that deconstruction seeks to undermine: since the definition of communication can be maintained only if each word has a univocal signification, to prove that the word “communication” is intrinsically ambiguous is to demonstrate that it cannot maintain its own definition—the transmission of meaning from a sender to a receiver—without contradicting itself.<sup>391</sup>

While, in its broad strokes, it is easy to see how this formulation is comparable to Derrida’s, it is, however, incorrectly focused. Given my reading, it is clear that Derrida’s position is more

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<sup>390</sup> *MP* p. 328-9 italics mine.

<sup>391</sup> Raoul Moati, *Derrida/Searle: Deconstruction and Ordinary Language*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. p. 15. Hereafter, *D/S*

specific than this. This difference, which might seem like a fairly subtle distinction, yields important consequences for interpretation. The key is to recognize it isn't that he is concerned with determining that "communication" is *intrinsically ambiguous*; it's that "communication" has a fairly specific and *indelibly metaphorical* character that thwarts the possibility of univocity. This, as I've shown, he demonstrates quite explicitly in the opening paragraphs of *Sec* and in the bullet-points that follow them.

Specifically, he is troubling the metaphor of theory that persistently articulates the classical model of communication. As such, when Moati claims that "The concept of communication *does describe a movement of meaning*, that of the *transmission* of a *content* from a speaker to an interlocutor through the intermediary of language...only on the condition that the stability of semantics is acknowledged,<sup>392</sup>" he is actively reinscribing the problematic on the basis of the very conception of communication that Derrida is looking to challenge. Importantly, this is an assertion that can only be made if one takes seriously the concept of communication that is here being critiqued *as a concept of communication*.

Moati's position is, perhaps, all the more surprising given that unlike most other commentators, he gives a fairly detailed assessment of the second section of the essay, "Writing and Telecommunication." It is in this section that Derrida gives his most explicit treatment of the extant consequences of the classical model of communication, particularly as it relates to writing. Despite this fact, his characterization of the second section of the essay demonstrates many of the familiar missteps associated with readings of *Sec*. On his reading, Derrida is concerned to answer the question concerning writing's status as a means of communication. He ponders "Does writing ensure the *transmission* of the *content* of meaning undamaged?<sup>393</sup>" He poses this

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<sup>392</sup> *D/S* p. 15 italics mine.

<sup>393</sup> *D/S* p. 23

question as if it is Derrida's, thus demonstrating, again, the failure to register the depth of Derrida's questioning. Furthering this erroneous line of interpretation, Moati takes the following quote—"If one takes the notion of writing *in its usually accepted sense*—which above all does not mean an innocent, primitive, or natural sense—one must see it as a *means of communication*<sup>394</sup>"—to be an affirmation of Derrida's position. He takes it, in other words, as an answer to the question of whether writing is a means of communication. To repeat: Derrida is not questioning whether *writing transmits content*, he is questioning the possibility of the very model which compels one to believe that communication—whether writing, speech, or otherwise—could possibly have such a structure. We can pinpoint the problems of Moati's interpretation by reference to a few fairly straightforward context clues. The first is that, at the stage of the essay from which the quote comes, Derrida is not proposing his own conception of communication so much as he is challenging the classical model of communication which is exemplified in the metaphor of theory. The caveat "in its usually accepted sense" signals the common uses of the meanings of communication, the very ones that—from the opening sentence of the essay—he is working to trouble. Secondly, as he elaborates on the concept of writing, everything about what he characterizes as the graphematic predicates belies the possibility of writing actually functioning "in its usually accepted sense."

Interestingly, Moati makes a similar error in interpretation to the one which Searle makes, although he does it in a far more explicit and deliberate way. Like Searle, he reads dissemination as if it disrupts the possibility of communication because it renders an *otherwise possible transport of a possible presence* ineffective by disrupting the integrity of the sign's cargo. Of Derrida's position he writes:

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<sup>394</sup> *MP* p. 311; *LI* p. 3, quoted on D/S p.23 italics mine



If meaning is determined by the impression of the will in signs, *once this will is detached from signs, these signs will return to the original state of semantic indetermination*, of “dissemination” beneath or beyond volition. Presence, thus represents *only a moment in the life and destiny of signs*, whose dissemination exceeds and exhausts its significance. The continuous legibility of signs is irreducible to *the transient presence of the conveyed imprint* of volition that characterizes the moment of utterance.<sup>395</sup>

There are two important problems here. The first is the mistaken idea that signs are *ever* determined by “*the will*,” for Derrida, in the first place. The second is that, for Derrida, presence is *not even a moment* in the life and destiny of signs. Derrida’s position is not that intended meaning is *lost in transit*; his position is that intention is not, *at any time*, an essential part of the structure of the sign, and that therefore “the will” does not, at any time, *necessarily* preside over the effects of the use of language. Moati’s quote implies that there are cases in which *signs are attached to wills*, and thus that there are times when signs could, in fact, communicate a determined, present, content (in some long forgotten past, a lost origin perhaps? perhaps when spoken?<sup>396</sup>). In a statement that shows this error more explicitly, and demonstrates its inevitable connection to the metaphor of theory, Moati writes:

Once written elsewhere, they *lose* the intended meaning, which gave them a defined semantic impetus: the signs will continue to exist, but my intention to signify something through them will have been lost due to this contextual displacement. In this scenario, the signs will have been detached from their *initial semantic content*.<sup>397</sup>

Writing, then, would be a case in which this link between intention and semantic content could be broken.<sup>398</sup> With respect to just this kind of claim, Derrida has this to say in *Limited Inc*:

To put it more simply and more concretely: *at the very moment* (assuming that this moment itself might be full and self-identical, identifiable—for the problem of idealization and iterability is already posed here, in the structure of temporalization), *at the very moment* when someone would like to say or write, “On the twentieth...etc.,” the very factor that will permit the mark (be it psychic, oral, graphic) to function beyond this moment—namely the possibility of its being repeated *another time*—breaches, divides, expropriates the “ideal” plenitude or self-presence of

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<sup>395</sup> *D/S* p. 37 Italics mine.

<sup>396</sup> These parenthetical comments should alert the reader to Derrida’s responses to Husserl in his *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry, Speech and Phenomena*, and “Genesis and Structure’ and Phenomenology”

<sup>397</sup> *D/S* pp. 40-41

<sup>398</sup> But this formulation would be the exact structure of the classical model that Derrida is opposing. *Of Grammatology*, for example, tracks the history of this aspect of the classical model as it progresses in development toward 20<sup>th</sup> century linguistics. In that book, Derrida poses grammatology as an alternative strategy for analyzing discourse without reference to these presuppositions which are associated with the classical model.

intention, of meaning (to say) and, a fortiori, of all adequation between meaning and saying. Iterability alters, contaminating parasitically what it identifies and enables to repeat “itself”; it leaves us no choice but to mean (to say) something that is (*already, always, also*) other than what we mean (to say), to say something other than what we say and would have wanted to say, to understand something other than...etc. In classical terms, the accident is never an accident...Limiting the very thing it authorizes, transgressing the code or the law it constitutes, the graphics of iterability inscribes alteration irreducibly in repetition (or in identification): a priori, always and already, without delay, *at once, aussi sec...*<sup>399</sup>

The import of this difference cannot be overstated. Moati’s reading implies that the will, intention, and consciousness are part of the origin of the signs efficacy that is subsequently lost once those signs become detached from their animated presence. This, position cannot be attributed to Derrida as it is indicative of the classical model of communication that he explicitly opposes in *Sec* and in many other places in his oeuvre. Notably, opposing this model is the entire project of *Of Grammatology*. Derrida is arguing that this entire model of communication has got to be rethought, and furthermore, that speech—that which in the classical concept of communication is presumed to retain some measure of presence—is a species of writing, and is thus equally marked by this broken link, this constitutive absence, which in the classical concept of communication is taken to be unique to, and definitive of, writing exclusively. Speech, according to Derrida, no less than writing, is characterized by the graphematic predicates, and hence even speech is divested, in its structure, of intentionality, consciousness, meaning, and “will.”

I list these problems in interpretation in order to demonstrate that we see our broad problem return with an unconscious and, perhaps, performative dimension. Read in this way, an assessment of the metaphors which underwrite the concept of communication opens up important new aspects of Derrida’s work. On this basis I will turn my concerns toward a very

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<sup>399</sup> *LI* p. 61-2 My italics. Here I am trying to emphasize the temporality implied by the breaching of intention. Iterability implies an always already breached intention, established in the very act of broaching. This is importantly unlike Moati’s insistence that there was *once* a fully present, unbroken, intention which is *subsequently* lost. This fact, I think, also speaks against Moati’s misreading of Derrida’s attribution of a Husserlian thesis to Austin.

different perspective and a very different strategy for developing Derrida's project. Until we find a way to outthink the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor, we will be bound by its dictates. Among its central decrees are the primacy of presence of meaning to consciousness, its subsequent containment and vehiculation in words and sentences, and the maintenance of meaning's integrity in the passage between the consciousnesses of its senders and recipients.

This point brings up another consideration occasioned by Cavell's reading. Above, I mentioned that Cavell charges Derrida with misreading Austin, in part, because he opposes Austin to the literary. The suggestion is that Derrida did not notice that Austin was opposing himself not to the literary but to the metaphysical. In this, in yet another regard, Austin and Derrida appear to be more kindred spirits than opponents. It is worth noting, however, that while their strategies and points of emphasis do have important parallels, the meaning of the kind of metaphysics which Derrida opposes is very different from the kind of metaphysics with which Austin is concerned. And as such, it should be no surprise that the ways in which they organize their responses to metaphysics are, accordingly, very different.

Derrida's treatment of the metaphysical is not primarily a concern with some set of otherworldly phenomena. His is a concern for strictly bounded systems of thought, and *the philosophical labor that goes into maintaining the strictness of said boundaries*.<sup>400</sup> As such, when discussing the role of the signature, when Cavell thinks that Derrida proves incapable of noting the ordinariness, the sheer banality of Austin's claims about the function of the signature, his focus is, again, misplaced. He writes that:

To look past the banal here is, in terms used earlier, precisely to assume that what is in question is a metaphysical tie from a metaphysically original source to a metaphysically unique signature—which is precisely to beg the question of Austin's claim to the ordinary, which, to repeat, he evokes in contrast not to the literary but to the metaphysical.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> To this extent, to reiterate, metaphysics inevitably demands the organizational effects of the metaphor of metaphor. More about this as we proceed.

<sup>401</sup> "WDA" p. 61

While he is correct about the designation “metaphysical” in his usage here, he seems to be thinking exclusively in terms of some otherworldly conception of metaphysics, which is not the focus of Derrida’s usage.<sup>402</sup> Again, Derrida’s position has more to do with the discursive conditions which compel certain habits of thought, habits of reasoning, and habits of writing that seem to organize *any* philosophical study. Specifically, he is concerned with the inevitable return to systems of thought which are rigorously organized in terms of the presence of determined content localized in sentences and utterances, and the primacy of consciousness and intention. As such, when Cavell asks whether Derrida’s assessment of the signature “take(s) Austin to propose a solution to the unnassurance and opacity” of speech, the answer is, in an important sense, no.<sup>403</sup> But understanding the sense of this answer demands the recognition that the question is, itself, tangential to Derrida’s concern. Derrida’s concern is with why Austin feels compelled to anchor force in some one, single, place and why that place is, for better or worse, coextensive with the classical metaphysical subject.

As such, the difference between “the banal” and “the metaphysical” is not a particularly informative opposition in Derrida’s treatment (although retaining it, in some form, it might prove to be exceptionally helpful to the development my position). In fact, in his treatment of the signature, he is attempting to demonstrate the degree to which “the metaphysical” conditions and enables the banal, and vice versa.<sup>404</sup> And as we’ve seen, “the metaphysical” in the case of the

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<sup>402</sup> Even though, on my view these two different uses still designate “the same things.” An explanation of this will emerge as we proceed. For now it might be enough to note that metaphysics is a practice that compels particular responses from its practitioners.

<sup>403</sup> “WDA” p. 61

<sup>404</sup> Although, this might be a clumsy formulation as it stands. Since for Derrida “the metaphysical” does not designate a thing, a place, or a set of phenomena, it might be unclear how “the metaphysical” can be said to condition or enable anything. As a preliminary, though, it is worth suggesting that there may be *some resonance* (still to be more thoroughly determined) between the demands of the *non-contextual integrity of literality* (as we saw with Davidson) and the structure of iterability as the possibility of any mark’s, any locution’s, break or rupture *from any particular context*. This is a topic to which I will return after I present my theory of metaphor which, I think, can help shed more light on how this works. We might also think about this connection between “the metaphysical” and

metaphysics of communication and the metaphysics of presence therein, is inextricably linked to metaphors. This, however, is not coextensive with the Heideggerian claim concerning metaphor and metaphysics (or Paul Ricoeur's reading of it). It is far more nuanced, and it is a consequence of the possibilities that are made available in the artificial constrictions of discourse which depend on the force of metaphor, on the force of metaphysics.<sup>405</sup>

I will argue that making sense of these factors, and of the meaning and use of force, we will have to go beyond Derrida's treatment of Austin, and take seriously his stated goal of carrying out "what still remains" to be thought in his project. In this, we will find that at least one important factor in Austin's thought, has yet to be thoroughly explored: perlocution. I will therefore look to develop this concept. Through its development, I hope to be able to show a way to extend both Austin's and Derrida's projects, and to further demonstrate the resonance between their efforts.

In Derrida's thought, I will attempt to further elaborate on what, in "White Mythology," he refers to as philosophemes. If we take Derrida's position seriously, then we must anticipate that these "primary" philosophemes stand in "systematic solidarity,"<sup>406</sup> and will thus mutually

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the banal in terms of iterability. In much the same way that I argued that, for Derrida, the type-token distinction is unstable because of iterability, the metaphysical and the banal function according to the same relation. In other words, the belief in the metaphysical is organized around the reification of specific iterable marks whose identity can only be established through their different applications. The metaphysical, then, is not taken as the source of the banal, but rather as its *effect*. See *LI* p. 20; *MP* p. 329 "We are witnessing...the increasingly powerful historical expansion of a general writing, of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc., *would be only an effect*, and should be analyzed as such."

<sup>405</sup> In his essay, "Metaphor, Derrida, and Davidson," David Novitz writes that "this sort of artificial restriction placed on the scope of a sign, and more specifically on "writing," is "named by metaphor." p. 105 *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 44, no. 2 (Winter, 1985), pp. 101-114

<sup>406</sup> And hence, like metaphor, consciousness, presence, and intentionality would be, for philosophy, the mark of a certain kind of limitation. Recall, that with respect to the philosophemic character of metaphor, Derrida has this to say: "the limit would be the following: metaphor remains, in all its essential characteristics, a classical philosopheme, a metaphysical concept. It is therefore enveloped in the field that a general metaphorology of philosophy would seek to dominate." (*MP* p. 219) He also writes that "Metaphor has been issued from a network of philosophemes *which themselves correspond to tropes or to figures*, and *these philosophemes are contemporaneous to or in systematic solidarity with these tropes or figures*. This stratum of "tutelary" tropes, the layer of "primary" philosophemes (assuming that the quotation marks will serve as a sufficient precaution here), cannot be dominated. It cannot dominate itself, cannot be dominated by what it itself has engendered, has made to grow on its own soil,

refer and organize the relevant components and landscape of our attempts to characterize discourse. Furthermore, once they are called upon that they will not be able to escape and preside over the other elements of discourse.<sup>407</sup> Much of what we have seen so far in this essay may be read as a demonstration of this phenomenon. Each of the thinkers who have attempted to explain metaphor in terms of the literal have done so by way of metaphors that they must claim as literal. Each of the thinkers who have responded to Derrida's treatment of Austin, have failed to recognize the degree to which their own positions are constrained by their allegiance to the very metaphors that are meant to secure the integrity of serious and literal speech. In the work of these thinkers we have something like a confirmation of the circuit, the path of a possible detour, of the philosopheme of metaphor. The apparent pervasiveness of this effect, coupled with the broad efficacy of Derrida's articulation of it, stands as an open challenge. Despite this, it does seem to me that there is still a way out of this cycle. Hence the potential value of a new theory of metaphor based on a new model of communication.

With this in mind, the standards to which my theory<sup>408</sup> must rise are significant. The path that I must clear is littered with metaphors and is, of course, metaphorical itself. But we must, nevertheless, push ahead. As I develop my theory of meaning and metaphor, these will be the conditions that I must satisfy if I can bring this project to materialization and consummation: 1) I will explain how the relationship between philosophemes functions, characterizing it as an

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supported on its own base. Therefore, it gets "carried away" each time that one of its products—here, the concept of metaphor—attempts in vain to include under its own law the totality of the field to which the product belongs." (*MP* p. 219-220 italics mine.)

<sup>407</sup> Note consciousness and intentionality here.

<sup>408</sup> Not least of all being the fact that *as theory*, as *theoria*, the "long-dead" metaphor still calls out to us. A position which is implied—and is even reinforced—on my, for lack of a better term, *theory*. This is not a trivial matter, especially given Derrida's claims about the indomitable character of metaphor for philosophy. This inability, on my part, to go beyond this philosopheme in my effort to think through metaphor would seem to be a case in point. And, in an important sense, it is. Thinking through this, coping with this, is among the many difficult tasks I have set for myself.

ongoing process of catachresis; 2) I will begin to resituate how we can more seriously think about locutionary force. In this, I will call upon the function of *perlocutionary force*, looking to extend the force of Austin's model on this seemingly forgotten basis; 3) I will develop the inextricable connection between locutionary force and embodiment<sup>409</sup> along with the unique role that perlocution can play in isolating that in which force consists;<sup>410</sup> 4) I will detail "what metaphysics is really about," which, as the scare-quotes are meant to indicate, is a little bit tongue-in-cheek. Nevertheless, I will then be able to articulate the serious consequences of that can follow on the process of metaphysics. The important side-effect will be that metaphor will be shown to be no less suitable for the moniker of "seriousness" than any other kinds of communicative acts; 5) I will attempt to give an account of the components of the metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor so that I will be able to give a more practical description of their effects and their function. In this, I will focus a good bit of my attention on the catachrestic origins and function of the conscious intentional subject and its role in organizing and localizing the structure of discursive responsibility.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> One that we will see is already anticipated in both Derrida's treatment of Austin, as well as in Cavell's.

<sup>410</sup> In other words, I will answer the question that Derrida *actually* poses of Austin.

<sup>411</sup> I'll be turning to Nietzsche, *Genealogy II* for an account of this.

## Chapter V

# Calling Out to an Original Movement: Embodiment, Force, and The Structure of Metaphor

### A Last Appeal...

“The “rules” that are enforced in determining what we say in what circumstances cannot be linguistic rules. The question of the proper application of a term, at least for public languages, must come down to this: Who is in charge here?<sup>412</sup>”

—Samuel Wheeler

“*Metaphora* circulates in the city, it conveys us like its inhabitants, along all sorts of routes, with intersections, red lights, one-way streets, no-exists, crossroads or crossings, and speed limits. We are in a certain way—metaphorically, of course, and as concerns the mode of habitation—the content and tenor of this vehicle: passengers, comprehended and displaced by metaphor.<sup>413</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

The question, then, will be the question of force. In what, exactly, might it consist? The achievement of “Signature, Event, Context,” is the demonstration that none of the supposedly essential factors that constitute the integrity of the concept of communication—conscious intention, present experience, relevant field and location of discourse—are necessary factors in the production of the effects of discourse. This is a profound recognition. In the span of twenty or so pages, Derrida deftly and thoroughly dismantles the classical model of communication and the centrality of its component parts. Although I have been referring to it as such, it is important to realize that this is not *simply* a model, not simply a concept. Its deconstruction yields troubling revelations for a number of reasons. Among these, is the loss of the integrity of the most common and intuitive set of beliefs and assumptions that guide the very *practice* of communication: people generally *believe* that they know what they mean and that they share

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<sup>412</sup> Samuel C. Wheeler, *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 130

<sup>413</sup> “RM” *Psyche* p. 48



their *intentions* with their interlocutors by means of uttering meaningful statements, *through which* they are able to *convey* the truth of their intentions, of their beliefs, of their *inner lives*.

This is no mere model. This is a form of life.

Seen in this way, we can gain further perspective on how it might be possible that there can be a silent and unconscious metaphysics that can preside over the organization of particular theoretical descriptions of language, despite overt claims to the contrary. Despite the centrality of this model, this way of life, it is clear that this system of beliefs can simply no longer be taken seriously as foundational. Still, this system is likely to maintain its force through the sheer force of habit. This is a behavioral retention. Thus, one of the common criticisms of Derrida's work emerges conspicuously at this point: the deconstruction of this metaphysics does not change the facts on the ground, so to speak.<sup>414</sup> It may not be centrally relevant that, as a theoretical matter, the metaphysical presuppositions that appear to characterize the concept of communication *should not* be taken seriously. It just happens to be a matter of practical fact that they *are* taken seriously; in a certain sense, this is all that matters. These presuppositions are *lived, inhabited, and enacted*, irrespective of their lack of conceptual integrity. While Derrida demonstrates that the conscious subject is no anchor, that there are no firm boundaries of contexts, and that every meaningful utterance or mark is, in virtue of its function, excessive (to the moment of its inscription, utterance, performance, etc.), it seems that he has overstated the importance of his case.

If we are *limiting* our analysis of language to a the classical model of communication, or if we treat it nominally<sup>415</sup> or referentially, or even "under the problematic heading of the

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<sup>414</sup> This is one of Searle's central criticisms of deconstruction, see "The World Turned Upside Down," p. 78

<sup>415</sup> A charge put to Derrida by Ricoeur.

‘arbitrariness of the sign’<sup>416</sup>” then it might seem right to say that contexts are potentially infinite to the extent that they can always be re-described to include more or less detail. It might also make sense to say that, as a consequence of iterability, nothing can keep an utterance, sentence, word, or mark, from functioning in innumerable and unpredictable ways. On such a view, it might make sense to claim that the strict boundaries of a field or context can only operate on the basis of artificial exclusions. However, it seems to me that, contra Derrida, the degree to which one can consider such exclusions to be *artificial* will depend on which elements of a discursive situation one is planning to investigate.

Another way of developing this point would be to ask the following: if on the classical model of communication, the meaning and integrity of contexts, the sense of the strict boundedness of fields, and the deviance that is attributed to discourse as it breaks from its proper field are artificial, why is this so? If it is *because of communication’s indomitable metaphoricity*, or in other words, because of such an exclusion’s dependence on the metaphor of metaphor, then all Derrida has really shown is that this particular conception of linguistic integrity and its concomitant features are self-destructive. Such a demonstration is no minor achievement, but it does appear to be without force. Without a kind of practical uptake, the texts upon which these metaphors have left their deepest marks will remain untouched. In this regard, his is only a first step toward opening onto the future of thought that philosophy has held in store. The important project then becomes a matter of taking the next steps.

It is clear that Derrida saw some potential in in the *prospect* of locutionary force. Austin’s project holds such promise on the powerful basis of its overt denial of “philosophy’s unique thesis;” that his “notions of illocution and perlocution do not designate the transport of or

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<sup>416</sup> *MP* p. 323; *LI* p. 15

passage of a content of meaning, but in a way the communication of an original movement.<sup>417</sup> This attempted shift portends a radical reorientation of the analysis of language. For Derrida, for most of Austin's defenders, and for Austin himself, there is the general recognition that his project remained underway, yet to be finished. The question remains: what would such a completion look like? Searle took up the project of seeing Austin's work through to its proper consummation, but explicitly rescinded and directly reversed its central goal and purpose by restoring *meaning and propositional content* as the most relevant property of an illocution, and by voiding the more general concept of the locution in the process.<sup>418</sup> In his essay "Locutions," Searle claims that "A neglect of the Principle of Expressibility seems to be one of the reasons that Austin overestimated the distinction between meaning and force."<sup>419</sup> He goes on to make the surprising claim that force can be literally *meant* and literally *said*. This is a failed strategy for a number of reasons. The first, somewhat obvious, point is that it is difficult to see how one fully develops the project of one's predecessor by assuming and reinforcing the primary concept that their work was meant to oppose. More substantially, the metaphorical register of Searle's entire model of consciousness and meaning is a *mirroring* of the very kinds of metaphysics that Austin was explicitly writing against. If the greatest popularizer of Austin's work felt the need to so radically transmogrify his project in service to idealization and systemization,<sup>420</sup> then it seems fair to suspect that his work does not represent a *direct development* of Austin's internal potential.<sup>421</sup> As such, I will leave it to myself, with the help of Derrida's, Pierre Bourdieu's, and

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<sup>417</sup> *MP* p. 321; *LI* p. 13

<sup>418</sup> See "ALI" (p. 418). In *Speech Acts*, force is replaced by the propositional content in a force indicator. (see *SA* p. 30-33; 54-57; 62; 68-9; 122-5)

<sup>419</sup> "ALI" p. 418

<sup>420</sup> *SA* p. 56

<sup>421</sup> It's worth repeating that Searle does not take himself to be representing Austin in some broad sense. He is quite explicit in his denunciations of certain aspects of Austin's position. See "RD" p. 204, as well as "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts," *Philosophical Review* (1968), and "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 6 (1975). This comment is meant to divest Searle of his presumed

Judith Butler's readings, to determine "what Austin's discourse implies and...what still remains to be carried out in his project."

The lesson to take away from Derrida's reading of Austin is that if locutionary force can be affected by a particular conscious attitude, seriousness in this case, or if its effects can be *guaranteed* by a speaker's/signatory's presence, then the functioning of the performative is, in an important sense, no different than that of the classical model of communication. Given Austin's claims concerning seriousness and the possibility of force by proxy enabled by the signature, he seems to be conceding that, after all, force would be presided over by the presence of the conscious subject. A locution's force would therefore depend on one's ability to impart upon her words the appropriate properties according to her intended meaning or her will. This simply falls back on the traditional model, the metaphysics of presence and meaning, and the broad assumptions that his work was meant to oppose in the first place. As such, if taken as it is, Austin's position will succumb to Derrida's arguments, and would be viewed, from that perspective, as simply one more failed attempt to escape philosophy's unique thesis.

Without an entirely different kind of explanation, we will be right where we started: language that functions perfectly well in our everyday encounters, but simply not according to the imagined factors that seem to be so intuitive to descriptions of its use. Consciousness, will, and presence, are simply not essential features of linguistic efficacy. Derrida shows us that we must concede that none of the central and familiar aspects of our experiences of the use of language—those that give us a sense of familiarity and control—are essential features of our efforts to communicate. To the extent that we resist these insights, we retain a model for

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*authority* over Austin's work. In other words, it is meant to deflate the plausible import of his claim that "Derrida's Austin is almost unrecognizable." The point here is that Searle, who presumes to guard the integrity of Austin's work, has nevertheless transformed and reversed its most basic impetus.

describing how language works that keeps us comfortable, and helps us to maintain a sense of authorship and authority, but that has a fairly narrow range of explanatory power. If locutionary force is a tool that may enable us to broaden the range of our insight with respect to explaining how language works, it must do more than satisfy our intuitions about our own power over the words we speak.

Despite these absences, despite these potential *disappearances* of the intuitive structures of the roles that we, as communicators, play in communication, our attempts to communicate are regularly met with success. If that success does not depend on the components of our intuitive models of communication, we are left with a set of questions that seem almost too obvious to ask: *how* does communication through language *work*?<sup>422</sup> What is the *force* of the *use* of language? How do we *use* its *force*? My first task for the final stage of this project will be to try to answer these questions. It seems to me that what still remains to be carried out in Austin's project is a more thorough articulation of the source of locutionary force. This will be my central task.

### The Use(s) of Force

“—Well how do I know?—If that means ‘Have I reasons?’ the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then, without reasons, I shall act... When someone whom I am afraid of orders me to continue the series, I act quickly and with perfect certainty, and the lack of reasons does not trouble me.”<sup>423</sup>

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Derrida was not alone in the recognition of the need for a more thorough account of locutionary force. There are thinkers who, I think, offer treatments of performatives that enable a

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<sup>422</sup> Rorty calls this an uninteresting question. He is wrong. It is, however, a difficult question. See Richard Rorty, “Unfamiliar Noises I—Hesse and Davidson on Metaphor” *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes, vol. 61 (1987) pp. 283-296

<sup>423</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, nos. 211-12 p. 84e

more detailed approach to the nature of force. In particular, Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler broaden and deepen the analysis of the specific source of locutionary force in their work.

Provided that we stick with Austin's version of the performative, the clearest path for coming to understand locutionary force is via an understanding of *illocutionary* force and its necessary connection to social conventions. On Austin's view, illocutionary force is demonstrated in the *enactment* of the dictates of social conventions. It should be clear, though, that this isn't so much an explanation as it is a report. That social conventions and rituals take place is clear enough, the questions are how, why, and if, they have any integrity, how, why, and if, they can have *determinate* effects.

We might begin by considering the move which Searle makes concerning the nature of conventions. Recall that for Searle, the status various conventions are supported by "institutional facts." The facts of social life, for Searle, are as objective and static as any other measurable fact. It is the presumed stability of such facts that, on Searle's model, condition the possibility of illocutionary force. It is by reference to, and in conjunction with, such facts that a speaker can know the conditions of any convention's satisfaction, the consummation of which, is a particular circumstantial configuration that can be *meant*; it can be definitively represented, aspectually, modeled, and anticipated in one's consciousness. Force comes in the production and reproduction of events which are organized according to the recognition and manifestation of social arrangements in a manner which is consistent with the facts of social reality. Felicitous performatives are those which accord with the available standards of recognition and production. Those that do not meet the conventional standards are, again, not referred to as infelicitous on Searle's treatment, but as "defective." Such acts are defective because, presumably, they lack the

right properties. If said properties were *present*, in the utterance (and, presumably, *literally present inside(?) the utterance*<sup>424</sup>), they would have the appropriate effects.

Given my argument, coupled with Derrida's, it is hard to see how we could take such a position seriously. First, again, institutional "facts" are simply never as static as Searle would like to imagine.<sup>425</sup> They are frequently under negotiation or contestation, frequently transforming, and even if we took Searle's intentional model seriously, such facts would always be under review, or consciously represented, from particular perspectives; hence they would rarely (never?) have a *singular* objective form, nor would there be any way to be sure about the integrity of such a form, even if it were possible that such a form could exist. Any such fact could have as many possible representational forms, i.e., aspectual shapes, as there are individuals who are conscious. In such a case, it is unclear how one could know from *any* perspective which intentions should be imparted on one's words so as to *ensure* their effects. As a consequence, there would be no way to know the difference between the felicitous and the defective until after a locution had either taken effect or not taken effect. In which case at least two important and interrelated considerations emerge: 1) the effects of any locution, any sentence or any utterance, couldn't be directly attributable to whatever properties could be imparted through intention, as the effect seems only to be retroactively registered. And 2) it would never be entirely clear which factors, in the overall social arrangement, could be the specific source of the effect.

Even on Searle's own terms, there will be, among other things, an indeterminate range of assumptions and background practices which will contribute to the meaning of any sentence, and

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<sup>424</sup> What?

<sup>425</sup> As Mary Louise Pratt notes in her essay "Ideology and Speech Act Theory," In such simplifications, "The 'normalized' forms of expression invoke a harmonious and homogeneous social world that is quite different from any known social formation." *Poetics Today*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1986), pp. 59-72 (p. 69)

hence the force of any locution. With that in mind, Searle owes us an explanation for why, among some vast set of possible factors, those which were uniquely relevant would be *localizable as properties of sentences*. Furthermore, Searle runs into a problem which is similar to that which I charged of Davidson. If properties of sentences are constitutive of some kind of social *effect*, it seems as though Searle must offer some kind of causal account.<sup>426</sup> This is even more pressing for Searle than it is for Davidson, as he explicitly calls upon the objective facts of social arrangements and a direct relationship between such facts, their representability in consciousness, their representability in language, and some kind of necessary connection between all three loci. If properties of sentences fit into some objective scheme of social facts and states of consciousness, and locutions have their effects *because of such properties*, it just seems silly to insist on the fact-hood and of such circumstances but not be able to detail their objective character.

Secondly, it isn't really clear what Searle could *seriously, literally*, mean by *transferring* one's conscious intention to one's words.<sup>427</sup> As argued above, he is certainly calling on

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<sup>426</sup> To be fair, he seems to be alert to this problem, although he doesn't take it to be damning. On his view, working out the minute details of causal relations will be the work of laboratory science. Just because we happen to currently lack a specific and detailed account of such relations, on his view, is no counterargument to the fact that we can at least be aware of the broad facts of social relations and interactions. And while I take this as a reasonable position to take, that position suggests an acknowledgement of the hypothetical character of any explanation of causal relations. As such, insisting on the central importance of the "properties" of sentences in this causal chain seems to be out of place. Furthermore, even if we concede that such questions should be settled in the laboratory, one would expect there to be at least some notion of what kind of lab, what kinds of equipment, and what kinds of tests one should run in service to isolating the properties which give sentences their force. One wonders if, once isolated, the properties of sentences may have some other properties that we might not expect, or some other nonlinguistic uses to which they might be put...

<sup>427</sup> Not to mention the fact that the direction of such transfers appears to be either inconsistent, or at least not very well worked out. In "RD" he gives a very different picture regarding the relationship between conscious intentionality and the intentionality of meaningful sentences. He writes: "A meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility for the corresponding intentional speech act. To understand it, it is necessary to know that anyone who said it and meant it would be performing that speech act determined by the rules of the languages that give the sentence meaning in the first place." (p. 202) The problem here is that he is attributing the possibility of the intentionality of a particular utterance to the rules of the languages, thus enabling a speaker to properly mean what she says by virtue of the standing possibilities of meaningful sentences. In this case, one must surmise that sentence/word meaning precedes speaker meaning, and hence the intentionality of sentences precedes the intentionality of consciousness.



“something” which is “outside” of the utterance itself which *produces* the effect. It seems to me that it is fair to take him at his word when he denies this, but also to note that he is wrong in an importantly informative way. Again, his position makes it impossible for him to countenance the metaphoricity of both the properties of utterances and also of whatever process supposedly allows one to *transfer* the *contents* of one’s consciousness *into* one’s words. With this in mind, this “outside” of sentences and utterances, for Searle, should be read doubly: 1) dead metaphors comprise a destructive blind-spot for Searle’s overall view, and 2) a disavowed allegiance to their function comprises the entirety of the metaphysical “mirroring” of the classical model of meaning as well as the classical conscious subject on which his entire perspective is based. These are important considerations to which we will return. For now, we should explore other options which can give us a more responsive conception of language’s constitutive outside, of its force.

In the work of Pierre Bourdieu, this outside is treated more thoroughly; it is treated with more attention to the importance of social dynamics and their inevitable contribution to linguistic efficacy. He writes of this problem in a way that is a particularly relevant contrast to a position like Searle’s:

As soon as one treats language as an autonomous object...one is condemned to looking *within* words for the power of words, that is, looking for it where it is not to be found...the power of words is nothing other than the *delegated power* of the spokesperson, and his speech—that is, the substance of his discourse and, inseparably, his way of speaking—is no more than a testimony, and one among others, of the *guarantee of delegation* which is vested in him.<sup>428</sup>

From this perspective, the prospect of identifying some kind of property which is somehow *contained within words* is entirely out of place. At the same time, Bourdieu does indicate the source of the intuition that language is subtended by a kind of foundational split. To the extent that language is a fundamentally social phenomenon, it is characterized by the many distinctions

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<sup>428</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. *Language and Symbolic Power*. trans, Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991 p. 107. Hereafter, *LSP*

that mark the organization of the community it serves. Ultimately, the distinction has its foundations in social classes, and access to institutions of authority. He writes:

In fact, the use of language, the manner as much as the substance of discourse, depends on the social position of the speaker, which governs the access he can have to the language of the institution, that is, to the official, orthodox and legitimate speech. It is the access to the legitimate instruments of expression, and therefore the participation in the authority of the institution, which makes all the difference...<sup>429</sup>

On one hand, there are those in a society who are authorized to establish the legitimate uses of a well-regulated discourse, and there are those who use the language but have no recognized authority, no accepted role to play in the delegation of social power. Such speakers are subjected to the social effects and meanings of language more than they are authors of it. Those who are authorized are so by way of their social status, social roles, and their participation in institutions of formal authority.

It is through authorized discourses that the distinctions in linguistic practices become codified, demarcated, and taken as foundational. Where societies form states with institutional apparatuses, there must be a recognizable vocabulary which organizes the activities that the state officially undertakes. Being able to negotiate such vocabularies then becomes essential for effectively operating within the social realities that depend on a relationship to such institutions. In this, there is an immediate benefit for those who are capable of communicating with those who are charged with running the state apparatus. The power to organize forms of life and forms of behavior rests in the vicissitudes of such institutions. The drive toward univocity is a drive toward efficiency in the state apparatus. According to Bourdieu:

The *normalized* language is capable of functioning outside the constraint and without the assistance of the situation and is suitable for transmitting and decoding by any sender and receiver, who may know nothing of one another. Hence it concurs with the demands of bureaucratic predictability and calculability, which presuppose universal functionaries and clients, having no other qualities than those assigned to them by the administrative definition of their condition.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> *LSP*, p. 109

<sup>430</sup> *LSP* p. 48

Thus, the tendency to try to impose systematic order, to establish external rules and regulations, and to carefully delineate the components of language, can be seen as an effort to bring language users into an increasingly pervasive and unified social order. This effort is ultimately subservient to the centralization of political power. To speak the authorized, official, language is to speak the language of power. He writes:

The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses. It is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitutions of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language. Obligatory on official occasions and in official places (schools, public administrations, political institutions, etc.), this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured. Ignorance is no excuse; this linguistic law has a body of jurists—the grammarians—and its agents of regulation and imposition—the teachers—who are empowered universally to subject the linguistic performance of speaking subjects to examination and to the legal sanction of academic qualification.<sup>431</sup>

The ability to operate within the norms and standards of the official language is an essential aspect of effective language use in political and social life. The extent to which the community adheres to these norms is the degree to which these norms codify, and give public representation to, a society's social stratification.

That Bourdieu's treatment begins with the social realities in which we live enables us to reframe, and perhaps to escape, philosophy's unique thesis: the foundational rupture, the radical distinctions which call on the external/internal properties which appear always to render the philosophical treatment of language dual. The theoretical split that Derrida identifies as philosophy's unique thesis is, for Bourdieu, a practical one. It is a split that marks the distinction between authorized speakers and those with no ties to the institutions of authority. If one agrees with his position, the scope of this project (an any project in the philosophy of language) takes on a dramatically different character. The move radically refocuses the topic of discussion from one concerning the status of communication, to a discussion concerning the

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<sup>431</sup> *LSP* p. 45

status of communicators. Following such a move, we could focus on the reasons why the thinkers we have dealt with so far seem to be so committed to instantiating and reinforcing this perceived split. We could continue that almost all of them, despite this seeming commitment, are generally inattentive to this fact. Finally, we might also charge and that they are motivated and incentivized by maintaining this lack of attention and awareness.

One might argue that their social power is authorized by their positions as experts in a system of formal education. Their authority derives from their belonging to an elite subculture of education and intellectual labor. These thinkers promulgate sharp theoretical divisions and boundaries that are presented as necessary for rigor and systematization, and as natural and obvious. We've also seen the ways in which some have responded with incredulity, dismissiveness, and ridicule to challenges to these theoretical claims. For Bourdieu, such responses are exemplary and to be expected in the use of social power in the effort of its preservation. Ultimately, these putative theoretical boundaries are actually transpositions and misrecognitions of practical and social boundaries. In this way, we can characterize the distinctions that I have been interrogating in this essay (literal/metaphorical, deviant/normal, pertinent/impertinent, felicitous/infelicitous/defective) as a product of the distance that the intellectual elite put between the value of their own authorized forms of discourse, and the many undisciplined and unregulated uses which lack authorization.

Bourdieu responds to the character of speech-act theory by attempting to elaborate on the conditions which provide the stability for conventions. Austin's account simply assumes the stability of social contexts which are the bases for the presumed legitimacy of a set of sedimented conventions. It is for this reason that his treatment of force remains inchoate. Because Austin did not question the details of the structure of social conventions, his analysis

has to treat force as something which can be taken for granted, and as something which is readily reported but not explained. Bourdieu enables us to recognize that conventions and their relative stability are the products of the arrangements of social power and the ways that such power can legitimize and maintain social and political institutions. When one inquires more deeply into the conditions of how things are done with words, it becomes clear that much of what organizes those conditions is symbolic in character. Conventions work to the extent that the speakers and interpreters who participate in them believe in them and respond to them in prescribed and predictable ways.<sup>432</sup> Perhaps more precisely, conventions are stable to the extent that participants can be relied upon to honor the distinctions and enact the relevant responses that define the convention's scope and its recognized procedures. Conventions yield real consequences in the actions and behaviors of those for whom such conventions and their dictates appear to be factual and objective.

In this, we may return to a consideration of Searle's conception of the institutional fact. Institutions, for Bourdieu, may become manifest in a culture's way of life such that *they take on the character* of fact. At the same time, it is not enough simply to discuss the superficial stability of such institutions as if this were the final word on the matter. Social facts are always backed by forces whose central interest is to maintain the institutions. Often, this includes defining arbitrary aspects of the social world such that they *are misrecognized* as being factual. Such misrecognitions are the primary means through which symbolic power can be deployed in a community of communicators. The structure of these misrecognitions enables symbols to maintain the illusion of factuality. In a description that should remind us of how "dead metaphor" works in the philosophy of language, Bourdieu tells us that "symbolic power is that

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<sup>432</sup> This is meant to be a stronger, more robust, claim than the comparable claim concerning "uptake" that Austin suggests.

invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it.<sup>433</sup>” This parallel is not coincidental.

Establishing forms of recognition and response which take the conventional as natural, objective, and factual is achieved through the investiture of symbolic power. Those who are authorized are invested with a symbolic force that is coextensive with their social roles. They are *imaginatively conferred* with certain specific efficacies and, correspondingly, specific social values. So invested, these people exercise a symbolic force by virtue of the unique difference such an investiture entails. In other words, they adopt forms of behavior that depend on responding to the order of the world which is instituted in symbols. Bourdieu:

To institute... (is) to sanction and sanctify a particular state of things, an established order, in exactly the same way that a constitution does in the legal and political sense of the term. An *investiture*... consists of sanctioning and sanctifying a difference (pre-existent or not) by making it *known* and *recognized*; it consists of making it exist as a social difference, known and recognized as such by the agent invested and everyone else.<sup>434</sup>

Institutions operate by evoking certain bodily dispositions, practices, behaviors, and patterns of recognition and response. To respond to such an institution is to recognize a set of expectations and standards, and the likely consequences of honoring, or failing to honor, the social order and the social differences that this order entails. Bourdieu writes:

To institute, to assign an essence, a competence, is to impose a right to be that is an obligation of being so (or to be so). It is to signify to someone what he is and how he should conduct himself as a consequence. In this case, the indicative is an imperative... To institute, to give a social definition, an identity, is also to impose *boundaries*.<sup>435</sup>

The compulsion that those who are drawn into an institution have to meet the standards and expectations of the institution is the proximate, and mediated, source of locutionary force. The means by which they are compelled may be quite circuitous, but it is ultimately the threat of

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<sup>433</sup> LSP p. 164

<sup>434</sup> LSP p. 119

<sup>435</sup> LSP p. 120

physical force. This condition of first resort is masked by the many symbolic investitures that make it exceedingly difficult to recognize or acknowledge this fact.

Those who are compelled by symbolic power hardly even notice it, and would scarcely notice that they were under the influence of something *symbolic*. This is because, according to Bourdieu, symbols operate on one's perception of what is real in the social world. In this way, the institution of symbols is also the institution of forms of recognition. One recognizes the order of the world on the basis of a community's shared symbolic investments. The power of such investiture rests in the fact that the order constituted by it is *mistaken* for the natural or fundamental order of the world. The maintenance of this power rests in this fundamental *misrecognition* by which the arbitrary distinctions instituted by the symbolic order are taken for something more foundational, absolute, and objective.

In effect, those who control the symbolic order control the order of the world. The misrecognition upon which it is based, we are told, is a centrally productive mechanism in the dissemination of authority. In this way, hierarchies are established, and the conditions of the social order are given expression as if they were the conditions of a natural order. The contours of the symbolic order act on the world such that its preservation appears to be the preservation of the world, and with it, the preservation of truth. Thus, all meaning and all value is, to some extent, conditioned by the possibilities afforded by its structure. The social roles, credentials, status, and *distinctions* that are enacted and preserved by its order are central in defining the conditions in which human life, political, social, and even biological, comes to be lived. Thus, while the contexts in which illocutions can have effects may never be fully determinable, they are nevertheless, quite real. Furthermore, it isn't obvious what fully determining such a context might yield. For example, it would not answer the key question concerning force: the factors that

could make difference between the serious and the nonserious. Nor would it yield an isolable difference between a true or false utterance that might make the difference in an utterance's efficacy. An illocution will have force to the extent that a speaker is: 1) backed by a range of authorizing investments, 2) is assisted by an audience that honors her authority, and 3) that audience is compelled to carry out the procedures that are recognized to be the appropriate response to the institution invoked. One does not need a fully determined context in order to see this any more than one needs a fully determined context in order to participate in any aspect of the institution.

With Bourdieu's position in mind, we can raise an important objection to Derrida's. Namely, that the graphematic structure of linguistic efficacy is challenged by this more carefully defined locus of force. This is because Bourdieu helps us to see that contexts and their boundaries are simply not as porous as Derrida would have us believe. While it is true that, as Derrida claims, contexts do not maintain *their own* integrity or boundaries, it is also true that they do not have to. There are people, human bodies, waiting in the wings to police these boundaries. Force, for Bourdieu, is ultimately physical force. The justification of last appeal is not the metaphysical subject or its proxy. The justification of last appeal is the acting of bodies upon bodies, the acting of bodies upon minds.

This position challenges the graphematic structure of discourse in at least three fairly fundamental ways. First, the absencing of the graphematic structure is far less devastating to the conception of presence that Bourdieu describes. This conception of presence is not necessarily a presence to consciousness, nor is it a presence of meaningful ideas or content. It is, minimally, the *potential* presence of bodies. In this, the *space of context* is not marked out by discursive boundaries at all. Rather, the space of context is organized by the *movement and coordinated*



*behaviors of groups of human bodies*. In other words, contexts have integrity to the extent that some bodies are invested with authority to police the boundaries of contexts, and that other bodies respond accordingly. And while such policing takes various forms, and hence will have varying degrees of efficacy, the condition of last resort in the preservation of the integrity of social contexts is real physical force and the real threat of violence of bodies upon other bodies. Such regulation can only happen as actual, potential, or at the very least, perceived presence.

The standards of discourse, so organized, restore the integrity of context but in a presumably non-metaphysical<sup>436</sup> way. This brings us to the second way that graphematic structure of discourse is disrupted. We might observe that in Bourdieu's treatment, the question of what constitutes a mark, a sign, a locution, is far more complex than what we've seen in *any* of the thinkers we've so far reviewed. To the extent that *bodies are marks* for Bourdieu, and that they operate as the physical guarantors of contextual spaces, the relevant considerations concerning the possible iterability of signs become far more complex. Breaking free from such contexts is easier said than done; and even if it can be said, that doesn't mean that it always can, or should, be done.

Finally, one may reasonably ask why linguistic efficacy depends on the iterability of *signs*. Why not *powers*? Or *bodies*? With such questions in mind, it may be fair to say that *Derrida artificially constrains his inquiry to the workings and iterability of the mark*. In any event, it is clear that for my purposes, Derrida takes an important step forward, but also a step back. In this context, his account of the radical autonomy of the mark as writing appears to be no

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<sup>436</sup> This assertion portends an importantly complex question, the elaboration of which will tie a number of the threads in this overall project together. For now, I will simply note that this assertion, on my view, is an accurate depiction only if we construe metaphysics in terms of some kind of externally conditioning set of otherworldly phenomena. If, on the other hand, we read "metaphysics" to mean something more like Derrida's general treatment, in terms of a "a certain determination or direction taken by a sequence or 'chain'" of words, a certain effort at the closure and regulation of discursive efficacy (*Dissemination* p. 6), then the question becomes a bit more interesting.

less an abstract account of linguistic efficacy than Davidson's or Searle's. Further, it fails to develop the important social dimensions of language that Austin begins to explore. It is my contention that as any model of communication articulates a more robust sense of context, it must, at the same time, also begin to clarify the contours and stability of such contexts. The fact that Derrida does not define or specify any such details, suggests that he is responding to an oversimplified adumbration of contextual integrity. He thereby minimizes or oversimplifies the fact that speech situations are, as a matter of practical fact, regulated in various ways and according to varying purposes. Contexts both enable and constrain discourse, and they are thus always the site of both struggle and of the possibilities of transformation.<sup>437</sup> So while a context may not have clear boundaries in the ways that Austin appears to need—boundaries that could potentially be organized by a total *speech* situation—there are certainly boundaries, the crossing of which can have the direst of consequences. This is because in real speech situations, the power of words is inevitably backed by the power of *force* and embodied in enforcers.

Without affecting such enforcers and their will to carry out their roles, Searle's one decent criticism of Derrida hits home: "the facts on the ground" do not appear to change. On my view, it is clear that Derrida successfully demonstrated the limitations of the classical model of communication. But once it becomes clear that the conditions of communication that this model institutes are nevertheless enacted by speakers in practical social circumstances, the meaning of

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<sup>437</sup> Derrida begins to countenance something to this effect in connection with the notion of undecidability in "Toward an Ethic of Discussion," countering the common misconception that his treatment of language is fundamentally about indeterminacy. He writes "I do not believe I have ever spoken of 'indeterminacy,' whether in regard to 'meaning' or anything else. Undecidability is something else again. While referring to what I have said above and elsewhere, I want to recall that undecidability is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities (for example of meaning but also of acts) these possibilities are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations (for example, discursive—syntactical or rhetorical—but also political, ethical, etc. They are *pragmatically* determined." (*LI* p. 148) Although it might sound trivial, the difference I'm tracking here is the difference between being "highly *determined*," "pragmatically *determined*," and being "highly and pragmatically regulated." That said, on my view, this acknowledgement should put the brakes on much of what he says about the graphematic predicates. This should have a particularly devastating effect on that status of iterability.

this demonstration takes on a different character. Contexts remain integrated. Meaning and consciousness are still essential to the way that language users enact their roles as speakers. Even if the classical model is shown to misconstrue how communication works, this does not appear to matter much. Ultimately, what we see is that the classical model is *inscribed on bodies* as manifestations and as preservations of an authorized discourse. As such, even if language *can* function without the primacy of intention or meaning, it is nevertheless the case that discourse proceeds and develops as if meaning and intention were necessities. This point is not meant to characterize a fact about the structure of locutions or of discourse in general, it is meant to report on a contingent historical fact regarding the ways in which speakers and writers in the West, and Western philosophers of language in particular, have come to enact and embody the symbolic investitures of the metaphors of theory and of metaphor.

In most cases, as we've seen, the classical concept of communication is a product of the analysis of philosophers who are seeking to *master an authorized code*. In the depth of context that is articulated in Bourdieu's position, this putative code becomes recognizable as one whose *telos* has had a long and eventful history of selecting the appropriate voices—those of the appropriately inscribed bodies—while eliminating others under the authority of a seemingly natural and objective knowledge of how language works when used appropriately. What Derrida's project offers, preliminarily, is an alternative set of reference points which can help to reframe, and perhaps to deconstruct, the systematic and constraining hierarchies which have characterized this history of knowledge. By emphasizing the possibility of breaks in discourse, and by showing how such breaks stand in relation to the familiar, valued, and taken for granted continuities, he is able to open discourse in such a way that the excluded can be recognized as necessary, and as a potentially transformative force. Such a project suggests the potential for

disrupting static principles in the understanding of communication, and thus disrupting the static conditions in which communicators live and move. In this way, the social dimension of speech is opened up for unauthorized speakers, for alternative forms of communication, and thus for the alternative forms of life through which life communicates.

It seems to me that this is the right project. However, it also seems to me that without an adequate conception of force and context, the meaning of this process cannot be given a thorough articulation. The rest of this project will be dedicated to such an articulation. In its service, I will present a conception of locutionary force that, draws from the strengths of Derrida's insights concerning iterability, and that develops in a natural progression from the poorly explored Austinian concept of perlocution. Along the way, I will further explore Bourdieu's position along with Judith Butler's. Taken together, their positions provide important developments of Austin's work that offer crucial insights for the development of my own.

### *Body to Body, Face to Face*

"The very expression "figure of speech" implies that in metaphor, as in the other tropes or turns, discourse assumes the nature of a body by displaying forms and traits which usually characterize the human face, man's "figure;" it is as though the tropes gave to discourse a quasi-bodily externalization...But is not the word "metaphor" itself a metaphor, the metaphor of a displacement and therefore of a transfer in a kind of space? What is at stake is precisely the necessity of these spatial metaphors about metaphor included in our talk about figures of speech.<sup>438</sup>"

—Paul Ricoeur

"What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost along the way?<sup>439</sup>"

—Jacques Derrida

In the final chapter of her book, *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler attempts to articulate the conditions of linguistic agency by reference to the uses of power and force that is made intelligible in speech act theory. Focusing centrally on Bourdieu and Derrida, she attempts to

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<sup>438</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling." In *On Metaphor*, pp. 142 & 3

<sup>439</sup> *MP* p. 321

forge a middle ground between the transformative potential of discourse and the insidious and constraining force of its apparent staying power. In this endeavor, she seeks to establish the necessity of the “breaks” in and from contexts which are often associated with philosophical and intellectual discourse.<sup>440</sup> She argues that it is the interplay between the ordinary and the philosophical—between discourse operating within familiar, stable, contexts, and the unpredictable consequences of discourse as it is employed in unfamiliar, unpredictable, and perhaps *deviant* ways—through which language users may best employ their power. This interplay, she contends, opens possibilities for formulating new and unseen discourses on the basis of familiar language acquiring the status of the non-ordinary.

Drawing on Derrida’s conception of iterability, Butler premises that through reiterations and the inevitably shifting circumstances in which locutions may be uttered, any semblance of a natural and established order of things can be disrupted. As such, discursive and symbolic domination that such an order entails can be upset by the same forces through which they are enabled. This redirection of force occurs in virtue of the graphematic predicates of iterability. As such, language users have the power to speak back against restrictive discursive practices, against the linguistic and symbolic domination which can be euphemized in terms of literality, univocity, and objectivity. With such power a speaker may redefine, reinscribe, and set the path toward rethinking and recalibrating the social perception of the established, recognized, and authorized order of things. What is ordinary may compel extraordinary responses in the right contexts.

Weaving her position between that of Derrida and Bourdieu, she sets the stage for actively assessing many of the concerns which have motivated the present essay. However, her

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<sup>440</sup> In connection with this, it might be helpful to recall Ricoeur, and the distanciation and ruptures associated with metaphor’s deviance and acquisition of new congruence.

reading of Derrida significantly understates the value of his contribution to rethinking the possibilities of discursive efficacy, and consequently of discursive agency. Part of what I will be doing in my treatment of Butler will be to pose the following question to her account: What, exactly, does Butler want from Derrida? My sense is that what she wants from him is a more adequate conception of force, one that is more attuned to the linguistic density of social relations, and one that is more alert to the historical conditions of discursive agency in terms of inheritance, and the specific differences that might obtain in the transformative capacities of particular marks *vis a vis* their likelihood of *actually breaking* from their contexts.

In many ways I have a similar set of concerns, and similar criticisms of Derrida on these matters. There are, however, important preliminary considerations to be made here. For one, I will consider *why* these are Butler's criticisms of Derrida. I will then attempt to indicate why my criticisms are similar, all the while highlighting the specifics of the differences in what we want from Derrida's work. Butler, here, will serve as an interesting and subtle counterpoint. I will read her ultimately as a point of contrast, but only partially. Generally speaking, her discussion and broad positions have inspired my own, but in a somewhat tangential way. In the broadest sense, her stated positions on the nature of discursive agency and embodied meaning are very similar to (and partially constitutive of) the position that I will be developing in this chapter. Nevertheless, her reading of Derrida, and hence the reasons she poses *her* questions to Derrida, strike me as particularly ill-founded—based as they are on a surprising inattention to his text.

With this in mind, I will forward the general argument that Derrida does not, generally speaking, provide for what Butler and I seek; at the same time, it is crucially important to understand why he does not, and why it would go beyond the scope of his aims. In this section, I will attempt to articulate precisely why this is the case. Nevertheless, it does seem to me that the

tools he offers can facilitate a preliminary analysis that lays the groundwork for a productive extension of speech act theory. What Butler finds in Derrida is the logic of iterability, and in it, she finds resources for articulating the conditions of resignification. In the broadest sense, I think that this is a fair and helpful way of using Derrida's response to Austin, although there is an important sense in which her reading misses what is most central to Derrida's response. In this, she manages to identify the unique and interesting potential of iterability, all the while misattributing a central aspect of speech act theory to Derrida—the very one that “Signature, Event, Context” was questioning. As such, what she takes to be the central limitation of Derrida's account can be directly attributed to a fairly systematic misreading. Thus, I will be arguing that her conclusion regarding the central problem with Derrida's conception of iterability—that it fails to articulate a social component to iteration—is not, at all, a limitation that can be reasonably attributed to his model. I will explore her treatment nevertheless, as I do think that she begins to articulate—in her joint reading of Bourdieu and Derrida—the complex conditions which must be explored in service to rethinking locutionary force. Her reading, although a misreading, does provide broad perspective on the different ways in which Derrida's position can *begin* to provide answers—or perhaps, better, suggestions—for how we may proceed toward answering our largely shared questions. This is a strategy that I think will be doubly illuminating as Butler and I will reach similar broad conceptions concerning the nature of force.

The presentation in this section will come in two interrelated phases: In the first, I will argue that Derrida cannot provide what Butler seeks so long as he is read on his own terms—I will demonstrate that there are a number of missteps in Butler's interpretation of Derrida that keeps her from being able to fully respond to his conception of discursive efficacy. Rethinking

his work through eliminating these misreadings, I think, can solve some of the important problems that Butler erroneously detects in “Signature, Event, Context.” Having drawn Derrida and Butler closer together, in a sense, I will then present the ways in which I think Derrida can *partially* answer the questions that my position demands, although I will argue that his answer ends up being more like a *gesture*, one that points the way to perlocution, and interestingly, back to Butler. It will be in the space provided by perlocutionary force that my project dovetails nicely with Butler’s although with importantly distinct points of emphasis, as Butler’s approach aims at a conception of embodied discursive agency, whereas mine aims at metaphor as the crucial discursive practice which facilitates the possibility of the “communication” of embodied meaning.<sup>441</sup> These are importantly related concerns, although it seems to me that the question of metaphor must necessarily precede the question of discursive agency—more on this to follow.

As we’ve seen, Derrida’s approach to the assessment of the classical model of communication is one that we might call deflationary. Meaning, consciousness, and context simply do not play the central role how language works function that is often assumed. As such, it seems natural to suspect that the best way to think about how we might characterize Derrida’s position is to do it as minimally as possible.<sup>442</sup> We might say that for Derrida, iterability,

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<sup>441</sup> The statement of her general question in *Excitable Speech* is “how is it that the norms that govern speech come to inhabit the body? Moreover, how do the norms that produce and regulate the subject of speech also seek to inhabit and craft the embodied life of the subject?” *ES* p. 142. In short, my answer to both questions will be “metaphors.”

<sup>442</sup> This point can be easily justified by reference to *MP* p. 317; *LI* p. 9 when he opens his positive account of writing with the following question: “In effect, what are the essential predicates in a *minimal* determination of the classical concept of writing?” He proceeds to establish which predicates inevitably remain after all of the predicates which *can be subtracted* (we might think of him as extending Husserl’s phenomenological reduction)—including meaning, context, and intention—are *subtracted* from the analysis. Only iterability remains. See *Imagination and Chance*, “Roundtable Discussion,” where he says “In order to demonstrate that a predicate is essential, traditional philosophy tried to separate it from the substance or thing. If you happen to separate iterability from a mark, you’ve demonstrated to me that it is not an essential predicate. If you can’t separate iterability from the mark, then in the language of traditional philosophy it has to be considered an essential predicate. This is what I tried to demonstrate.” (p. 156) Later, in “Limited Inc a b c...” Derrida gives what is probably his most thorough, direct, and explicit statement of the nature of iterability: “Iterability supposes a minimal remainder (as well as a minimum idealization) in order that the identity of the *selfsame* be repeatable and identifiable *in, through*, and even *in view of* its alteration. For the structure of iteration—and this is another of its decisive traits—implies both identity and difference. Iteration



absence, and the other graphematic predicates are the only features of communication *that prove to be necessary* to its function. In other words, any of the other supposed features can be stripped away without disabling the effects and movements of a mark. This is a very different claim than that which Butler attributes reads him. She writes that, for Derrida, “‘force’...*results* from the iterability of the graphematic sign.<sup>443</sup>” This statement is, perhaps, not entirely off base, but it does reveal an important, yet perhaps subtle, shift in scope that partially occludes Derrida’s position. Importantly, it is fairly clear that Butler is attributing far too much to the “force” of the break for Derrida’s position. Evidence for this comes, in part, in the statements in which Butler tries to identify that in which iterability consists. Here is a prime example, although there are others,<sup>444</sup> she writes:

Derrida’s account tends to accentuate the relative autonomy of the structural operation of the sign, identifying the *‘force’ of the performative as a structural feature of any sign that must break* with its prior contexts in order to sustain its iterability as a sign. The force of the performative is thus not inherited from prior usage, but *issues force* precisely from its break with any and all prior uses.<sup>445</sup>

Stating Derrida’s position in this way, her inference concerning inheritance seems reasonable.

Importantly, however, the value of this inference rests on a misinterpretation of Derrida’s claim

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in its ‘purest’ form—and it is always impure—contains *in itself* the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as iteration. The iterability of an element divides its own identity a priori, even without taking into account the fact that this identity can only *determine* or delimit itself through differential relations to other elements and that hence bears the mark of its difference. It is because iterability is differential, within each individual “element” as well as between the “elements,” because it splits each element while constituting it, because it marks it with an articulatory break, that a remainder, although indispensable, is never that of a full or fulfilling presence: it is a differential structure escaping the logic of presence or the (simple or dialectical) opposition of presence and absence, upon which opposition the idea of permanence depends.” *LI* p. 53

<sup>443</sup> *ES* p. 149

<sup>444</sup> See *ES* p.150 when she writes “If the break from context that a performative can, or in Derridean terms, *must perform* is something that every “mark” performs by virtue of its graphematic structure, then all marks and utterances are equally afflicted by such failure, and it makes no sense to ask how it is that certain utterances break from prior contexts with more ease than others or why certain utterances come to carry the force to wound that they do, whereas others fail to exercise force at all.” Italics mine. And while, generally speaking I actually think that she is right in her assessment concerning the differential capacity of marks to break from their contexts, I will argue that she is right, *in spite* of her reading.

<sup>445</sup> *ES* p. 148 Italics mine. The first are to emphasize the claim that Derrida is treating “force” as if it is a feature or property of a sign. The second are to call attention to the imperative aspect of her reading, and the third are meant to emphasize her treatment of iterability as a kind of source of force’s emergence.

here. In place of the italicized “must break” in her statement of Derrida’s conception of iterability, I would suggest a rewriting of this phrase to say “must retain the possibility of breaking.” Derrida never claims that a mark *must* break from its context<sup>446</sup>, although given what he does claim it is reasonable to suspect that it is exceedingly likely that every mark, in fact, *will* achieve such a break.<sup>447</sup> This is a fine distinction, but it is not a trivial one. Importantly, its difference is best tracked in terms of the properties (or lack thereof) of iterable marks. One consequence of this distinction is fairly dramatic for Butler’s reading here. Derrida’s position is not that “the force of the performative is thus *not inherited from prior uses.*” In fact, it’s hard to imagine what iterability could mean without the possibility of such inheritance. More to the point, though, for Derrida the key is that *no particular inheritance*, or better, *no particular “internal” feature of any inheritance*, its force, its meaning, or any other factor, will preside over the consequences of iterability. In other words, it isn’t that inheritance of force, meaning, or some other factor, are not *potentially* relevant, they just aren’t *necessarily* so. The possibility of such inheritances simply do not imply a *necessary, centrally determining, or finally definitive* content, force, or meaning which is retained through proper transmission.

All of this is attributable to the fact that, with respect to iterability, Derrida is not trying to *state* that in which *locutionary force* consists. On the contrary, he is trying to *question* the source

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<sup>446</sup> Searle makes a similar argument with respect to absence in general Derrida responds in *LI* on pp. 47 & 48. He writes. “*Sec never said* that this absence is *necessary*, but only that it is *possible*...and that this possibility must therefore be taken into account: it pertains *qua possibility*, to the structure of the mark as such, i.e., to the structure precisely of its iterability. And hence must not be excluded from the analysis of its structure...Again I have underlined. *Must be able*: to function in the absence of...”

<sup>447</sup> It seems to me that Butler’s misreading may well have begun with this claim: “Ritual is not an eventuality, but, as iterability, is a structural characteristic of every mark.” *MP* p. 324; *LI* p.15 It is as if she reads this claim so as to make it say “Ritual is not an eventuality, but as iterability, it is a necessity.” She immediately follows her citation of this quote with the following, exceedingly un-Derridian claim “If iterability is a structural characteristic of every mark, then there is no mark without its *own proper iterability*; that is, for a mark to be a mark, it must be repeatable, and have *that repeatability* as a necessary and *constitutive feature of itself.*” (*ES* p.149 italics mine) This sentence is attributing iterability as if it were a *proper feature*, i.e., a *property*, of particular locutions. This, of course, is entirely antithetical to what Derrida is attempting to do.

of locutionary force; it is as if he is asking the following question: if force, as Austin maintains, does not come from *intention*, from some “inner, spiritual act” if it is not in *meaning*, then in *what* does it consist?<sup>448</sup> Missing this point, Butler tries to link force to iterability in the following passage she quotes from Derrida: ““communicating, in the case of the performative... would be tantamount to communicating a force through the impetus (impulsion) of a mark.””<sup>449</sup> This quote is actually written in reference to the potential of Austin’s conception of communication, it is *not* a statement about the nature of iterability. Although, again, these concerns are clearly related, they are not identical. It is important to pinpoint this distinction in order to better understand what Derrida is doing. Butler treats Derrida’s reading of Austin as if he is trying to show that locutionary force *actually results from, issues from*, iterability. This, however, misses a key move in his presentation, as he fairly explicitly states that he is not even straightforwardly endorsing locutionary force. Again, he is *questioning* its integrity and possibility. The very sentence that Butler cites here is both misunderstood and, perhaps, *misquoted*. The full sentence, without ellipses reads in the following way:

To communicate, in the case of the performative, *if in all rigor and purity some such thing exists* (for the moment I am placing myself within this *hypothesis* at this stage of the analysis), *would be* to communicate a force by the impetus of a mark.<sup>450</sup>

Butler’s reading takes Derrida as having attempted to answer the question of the effectiveness of discourse *in terms of locutionary force*. This, however, is simply not his goal. Derrida is asking more broadly about the conditions of linguistic efficacy. He trains his attention

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<sup>448</sup> In the afterword to *Limited Inc*, “Toward an Ethic of Discussion” Derrida characterizes his relationship to the concept of force (and power) in the following way: “The words ‘force’ and ‘power’ which I have just joined you in using, also pose, as you can well imagine, enormous problems. I never resort to these words without a sense of uneasiness, even if I believe myself obligated to use them in order to designate something irreducible. What worries me is *that in them which resembles an obscure substance* that could, in a discourse, give rise to a zone of obscurantism and of dogmatism. Even if, as Foucault seems to suggest, one no longer speaks of Power with a capital P, but of a scattered multiplicity of micropowers, the question remains of knowing what the unity of signification is that still permits us to call these decentralized and heterogeneous microphenomena ‘powers.’” *LI* p. 149 italics mine.

<sup>449</sup> *MP* 321; *LI* p. 13; *ES* p.149

<sup>450</sup> *MP* p.321; *LI* p. 13 italics mine

on Austin because he finds interest in the prospect of analyzing language according to locutionary force, but his claims about iterability are not claims about locutionary force. That the two formulations of linguistic efficacy should not be conflated (at least in *reading* Derrida's essay) should be evident, at least to the extent that iterability is not *primarily* about the structure of speech. Iterability is primarily a matter of the *graphematic structure* of discursivity in general, and hence, follows after a model of writing.

Butler equates the condition for the possibility of *linguistic efficacy* with the condition of the possibility of *locutionary force* and thus, mistakes iterability as the *positive*, force-carrying, *presence* that Derrida's entire corpus would otherwise be looking to deny. Thus, when she writes that "The 'force' is not derived from conditions that are outside of language, as Bourdieu suggests, but *results* from the iterability of the graphematic sign,<sup>451</sup>" she is importing locutionary force into Derrida's argument where it simply does not fit. Derrida's position is that iterability is the *sine qua non* of *linguistic efficacy*, and while he entertains the possibility that locutionary force could possibly be adequate to the task of identifying linguistic efficacy, he ultimately concludes, on the basis of Austin's subtle retention of the classical model of communication, that his treatment of force had not quite achieved its goals.

Evidence for my reading is fairly easy to identify. Generally speaking, in Butler's reading she fairly consistently *misquotes* Derrida; among other things, she excludes crucial caveats, and quotes an interrogative as if it were an assertion. For example, where she writes "Derrida claims that the failure of the performative is the condition of its possibility, 'the very force and law of its emergence.' (17),<sup>452</sup>" even though the original quote is printed as follows: "Or, on the contrary, is this risk rather its internal and positive condition of possibility? Is that outside its inside, *the*

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<sup>451</sup> *ES* p. 149

<sup>452</sup> See *ES* p. 151

*very force and law of its emergence?*<sup>453</sup>” Two things should be noted here: 1) it is pretty clear that Derrida is posing this question somewhat *rhetorically*, as such it does strike me as appropriate to assume that the answer to this question would assert the affirmative. However, 2) Since Derrida is only taking the possibility of locutionary force *as a hypothesis*, an assertion in this regard would only be indicative of some aspect of a hypothetical phenomenon, which is not, at all, like a definitive statement or conclusion regarding some explicitly held position.

Nevertheless, based on this reading of Derrida, Butler proceeds to put “his” position concerning the nature of locutionary force in conversation with that of Bourdieu’s. Her broad assessment is that Derrida and Bourdieu occupy two poles concerning the analysis of linguistic agency with respect to linguistic efficacy. On Butler’s view, we might say that Bourdieu’s conception of context is too totalizing and too rigid, whereas Derrida’s is too loose and fluid (nonexistent?) to be of much help in detailing the conditions of the discursive agency associated with performativity. More precisely, Bourdieu’s position offers a more robust and thoroughly grounded source of linguistic efficacy—in the authority of the state apparatus, ultimately backed by the potential threat of physical force—without recognizing the degree to which this very force can be turned against itself via the structure of iterability, and the possibility of citationally transforming the force of any utterances by using them in unexpected ways. Derrida, on the other hand, fails to recognize the factors which contribute to the stability of contexts and hence is unable to give an account of iterability that can analyze the conditions which can constrain the possibility of contextual breaks. He thus gives us a conception of iterability that is bereft of the crucial nuances which would be essential in attempting to account for the concrete conditions of

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<sup>453</sup> *LI* p. 17; *MP* p. 325

social discourse. The social effects of iterability can only be identified and accounted for within the scope of particular contexts; contexts, whose very boundaries, are embodied.

Following on this, she sets out to show how it is the very power of symbolic domination that provides the basis for its subversion. As such, she contends that Bourdieu's position is critical for understanding the realities of speech situations, although it is incomplete. What Bourdieu's work lacks is an adequate treatment of the bodily dimensions of performativity. She claims that:

What Bourdieu fails to understand, however, is how what is bodily in speech resists and confounds the very norms by which it is regulated. Moreover, he offers an account of the performativity of political discourse that neglects the tacit performativity of bodily "speech," the performativity of the *habitus*.<sup>454</sup>

In Bourdieu's account of the symbolic dimension of political and social life, he doesn't fully address the multifaceted dimensions of embodiment. While he does employ the productive concept of the *habitus*, for Butler, his treatment of embodiment stops short of its potential as he fails to recognize the nature of the performative aspects of its structure.

The *habitus*, for Bourdieu, is a product of the complex and interlocking habitual behaviors that emerge in response to both the material conditions of a society, and, perhaps more importantly, that society's set of symbolic investments as they are articulable in authorized, intelligible, discourse. Thus, as certain objects, people, and places are invested with particular meanings and powers, members of a community are expected to *act* in the appropriate manner with respect to their invested symbolic import. On this basis a set of familiar background practices emerge and become codified tacitly, as a practical sense, with little conscious recognition from those who are embodied—who are in the habit of regularly reacting and responding—according to its dictates.

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<sup>454</sup> *ES* p. 142

On Butler's reading, Bourdieu's treatment of locutionary force as a consequence of social power and authority fails to recognize the malleable and perhaps tenuous character of its own force. In part, she suspects that his account accords too much force to the symbolic investments of the social order, a position that is particularly problematic and limited when it comes to the analysis of embodiment and the condition of speaking bodies. Thus, she reads Bourdieu to tie locutionary force to the social positions of the speakers who do serious things with their words, who can make their words function as deeds. The forceful speaking subject is the subject who is already authorized within a publicly recognized discursive space, marked out by the stratifying hierarchies of the symbolic order of things.<sup>455</sup> Thus, locutionary force is, so to speak, already part and parcel of the symbolic order. To use its function, is to be situated *within it* in such a way that one is positioned to direct and redirect an already active force in which the social world is constituted and continually reconstituted by virtue of its activation and reactivation in the carrying out of its prescribed conventions. Thus, the difference between a locution's felicity and infelicity (defectiveness) has everything to do with the authorization of the speaker.

Drawing on Derridean iterability, Butler takes Bourdieu's model to task, claiming that it fails adequately to account for the efficacy that speakers can acquire even while speaking from unauthorized spaces. In fact, Butler argues, in connection with her reading of iterability, that

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<sup>455</sup> It seems to me that this might be a model of locutionary force that can answer a few of Derrida's concerns with respect to Austin. Most importantly, on this model, the question of seriousness would not arise in the same way as it seems to for Austin. In other words, the necessity for individual intention, and the possible "seriousness" that may preside over a locution, is simply unnecessary in this a system in which seriousness is externalized or, perhaps, socialized. On the other hand, the general necessity of infelicity would seem to function a little bit differently on this model. A central factor in infelicities of all types would ultimately rest on the failure or inability to *enforce* the dictates of a convention. In other words, in a hypothetical situation where contexts could be perfectly policed by bodies, where force *could* maintain its integrity, infelicity would be impossible. So we might say that Bourdieu retains the possibility of a break from discourse with respect to citationality, although perhaps not with respect to the infelicities. As such, it seems to me that Bourdieu's model can respond to Austin's second exclusion (the one that is most important for Derrida), but not to his first. It also seems to me that Bourdieu's account cannot address what Derrida wants to treat as the general graphematic structure of the locutionary in general. This is because, to the extent that contexts are tethered to bodies, and policed by their potential presence, it isn't realistic to think of the status of locution in terms of "arbitrariness."

often speakers can commandeer locutionary force *precisely because* they speak from unauthorized spaces, precisely because of their break from prescribed social norms. In such a circumstance, an unauthorized speaker may invoke a well-established convention, and by virtue of its presumably illegitimate, and perhaps *absent* source of force, it may come to have unexpected efficacy. Its function, if effective even while illegitimate, even when not backed by force, can then reveal the established order as a form of critique (as in a case where such an illegitimate invocation makes salient what would otherwise be the unrecognizable source of its supposed force—making conspicuous a structure of power that generally functions only in the background, or unconsciously), or perhaps as parody (perhaps as the mocking of the general source of locutionary force and its policing mechanisms as ineffectual and superfluous, as we might say, for example, being unable “to dominate their own discourse”). In this, the performative aspect of all discourse emerges as centrally relevant: the social designation of authority marks out particular bodies as authorized bodies and it is in the tension associated with such designation and delegation that the locus of authority’s application can be called into question.

This, on Butler’s reading, is the power of iterability. But, because of her reading of Derrida, she is forced to claim that Derrida’s position is unable to cope with the possibility of a *social conception* of iterability. Her broad position, on both Derrida and Bourdieu is as follows:

Whereas Bourdieu fails to take account of the way in which the performative can break with existing context and assume new contexts, refiguring the terms of legitimate utterance themselves, Derrida appears to install the break as a structurally necessary feature of every utterance and every codifiable written mark, thus paralyzing the social analysis of forceful utterance. We have yet to arrive at an account of the social iterability of the utterance.<sup>456</sup>

Later, she continues this thought, writing that

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<sup>456</sup> *ES* p. 150



The question of what constitutes the ‘force’ of the performative, however, can be adequately answered by neither formulation, although both views, taken together, gesture toward a theory of the social iterability of the speech act.<sup>457</sup>

The key to her misreading is exemplified in her assertion that “what constitutes the ‘force’ of the performative” cannot be answered from Derrida’s position. While this is, of course, true, it is not, strictly speaking, a limitation of Derrida’s position on iterability, as iterability was never premised as *constitutive of force* to begin with. And this, of course, is the reason that Butler cannot get a more adequate conception of force from Derrida.

The crucial secondary question that her position poses for Derrida is importantly tied up with the first, but it also signals, as a parallel, one of my central questions.

If the break from context that a performative can or, in Derridean terms, *must* perform is something that every “mark” performs by virtue of its graphematic structure, then all marks and utterances are equally afflicted by such failure, and it makes no sense to ask how it is that certain utterances break from prior contexts with more ease than others or *why certain utterances come to carry the force* to wound that they do, whereas others fail to exercise such force at all.<sup>458</sup>

Trying to take her on her own terms, and leaving Derrida aside for the moment, we might rephrase her question in the following way: If force is the result of an utterance’s break from context, and all utterances must necessarily break from their contexts, then how can we account for the apparent intransigence of particular utterances, and the persistent and dangerous force that some such utterances appear to carry? In other words, on her reading of Derrida’s model, we should imagine that all words, marks, utterances, etc. are *equally forceful*, as their force is a result of their equally inevitable breaks from contexts. But this, of course, is not what we find. We find that utterances have different capacities for carrying force, and different capacities for breaking from contexts, indeed, different capacities for organizing and maintaining the integrity of contexts. On Butler’s analysis, his one dimensional treatment of locutionary force renders Derrida’s position incapable of giving an account of “the social iterability of the utterance.”

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<sup>457</sup> ES p. 152

<sup>458</sup> ES p. 150

My general response to these claims and the conclusion Butler comes to on its basis is, as I've shown, largely a result of a fairly systematic misreading of Derrida's position. Interestingly enough, while I've already detailed some of the more overt problems with Butler's reading, there is, as we've seen elsewhere, yet a subtler problem: the nature of her misreading is attributable to, or is a consequence of, her very rhetoric. Note, that the entirety of Butler's reading of iterability is conditioned by the sense that it is by virtue of iterability that marks can *carry*, *convey*, and *issue* force. Although she gets some of the extant features, and perhaps the *consequences*, of iterability right, she nevertheless attributes to it the very model—even though quite subtly—that its articulation is meant to supplant. When she asks “*why certain utterances come to carry the force* to wound that they do, whereas others fail to exercise such force at all,” this is a clear slip into the metaphor of theory, or, rather, it is a request that Derrida follows suit. Such a shift is more or less on the order of that which Derrida charged of Austin. If we claim that *utterances carry force because of some property* that Derrida is not adequately providing, or if we claim that Derrida's treatment of force fails because it doesn't identify the property which some utterances have and that others, apparently, lack then we are fundamentally missing the point of the graphematic structure of communication that Derrida is attempting to articulate in “Signature, Event, Context.”

Of course, identifying the problematic character of the rhetoric of the question is not, generally speaking, meant to deny its impetus. It is partially meant to show the depth of Butler's misreading, but also, in a roundabout way, it is meant to take us a step closer to showing what is left to be achieved on Austin's model of speech act theory. Importantly, Derrida does not, in “Signature, Event, Context,” try to offer an alternative interpretation or even something analogous to Austin's conception of locutionary force. He offers a very general schematic for

which aspects of language use are essential features of all “communicative” acts, thereby eliminating those factors which are not necessary, but are simply regularly assumed. As such, Butler gets the formulation of what Derrida’s account describes and does not describe exactly backward. In short, he doesn’t provide *any* conception of *force*, let alone an adequate one (as this would be what is left to carry out in Austin’s project), and he *does* provide an account of the “social iterability of the utterance,” as there could be no other kind.

Nevertheless, there is something right about her concern regarding the extant consequences of iterability. The question she poses, therefore, requires an answer—especially for any thinker who looks to extend Derrida’s position in and through Austin’s. I will therefore begin to respond to the question of how and why some marks are more likely to achieve breaks from contexts than others, and, by extension, how and why some marks seem to be intransigent, retaining the particularities of their efficacies and their forces.<sup>459</sup> I will argue that to the extent that philosophy remains a practice in pursuit of univocity, a practice narrated in the terms of the classical model of communication, a practice tacitly organized by the metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory, we will not see ourselves out of this problem of the differential power relations which can be expressed and enacted in the use of language—in what appears to be simply “the saying of certain words.” In this regard, Butler’s position, drawing as it does on both Derrida and Bourdieu, actually begins to flesh out what I take to be the most relevant considerations that might help to best articulate the model of linguistic efficacy that Austin’s locutionary force attempts to identify.

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<sup>459</sup> To anticipate: the answers to this question is, on my view, identical to the questions concerning why some metaphors work and others do not (think Max Black), why some metaphors “die” and others do not. It is importantly related to my responses To Ricoeur, with regard to the questions concerning metaphor in philosophy as well as the difference between poetic and philosophical metaphor.

In many ways, despite her misreading of Derrida, Butler's position goes a long way toward achieving the development of speech act theory that Derrida's treatment calls for. Specifically, she puts the concept of iterability to good use in her interpretation of the performativity of embodiment. She claims that constituted forms of embodiment are every bit as iterable, by virtue of their performativity, as conventions, signs, locutions, etc. As such, it is the very possibilities that are produced by the constraints of symbolic investiture that give performative acts their radical freedom and the *chance* to break from any and all contexts. By identifying certain forms of behavior, whether as explicit aspects of particular conventions, or tacitly, as part of the practical aspects of one's *prescribed* form of embodiment—one's individual symbolic investment—the effects of iterability are opened up at a different level, one that, as Derrida writes, is constituted in "a *dissemination* irreducible to polysemy."<sup>460</sup> In this movement, Butler locates the space for a different kind of symbolic act. In offering bodies up to the graphematic predicates, we are able to see how bodies can be loosed to explore new and previously unrecognizable possibilities, and thus new potential births of freedom.

Even in the most rigorous systems of symbolic domination, exemplified by Butler's reading of Bourdieu, the body remains incongruent with the meanings and values that are assigned to it. The body remains excessive to discourse, and has an inherent tendency to resist univocity. This tendency marks a natural limit to the power to define, demarcate, and contain. In this linguistic slippage, the body stands out and emerges as a sudden and surprising fluid symbol, defying discursive mastery by virtue of its odd, unpredictable, and malleable presence. In this, the body stands as a persistent presence of that which cannot be finally defined, as that which always—at least in part—exceeds intelligibility, always retains possibility, *always remains*

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<sup>460</sup> *LI* p. 21; *MP* p. 329 Although, as we proceed, we will see why, although dissemination may be opposed to polysemia, it may not be opposed to *polyvalence*. More to follow.

*possibility*. By shifting the model of communication to one of performative embodiment, we can see that descriptions of interlocution must be organized very differently, even at its most basic level. In a certain sense, we can see the obvious: that in a locutionary act, bodies are called to respond. In this, we can see more clearly that force is best defined in terms of a shared, mutual, response, a shared, mutual, *enactment*. In order to more fully develop this claim, we can return to a possibility that Austin did not explore and that speech act theorists have shown no interest in: the felicity conditions of *perlocution*. By focusing our attention here, we can begin to analyze the contingent conditions for perlocution's efficacy. And although this may seem unwieldy, it is no more so than understanding the contingencies associated with the achievement of *any kinds of bodily acts*, such as throwing a football, or performing a pirouette. In this, the graphematic structure of communication returns in what will prove to be an unexpected way.

### The Promise of A Return

"To breed an animal that is *permitted to promise*—isn't this precisely the paradoxical task nature has set for itself with regard to man? Isn't this the true problem of man... That this problem has been solved to a high degree must appear all the more amazing to one who can fully appreciate the force working in opposition, that of *forgetfulness*.<sup>461</sup>"

—Friedrich Nietzsche

"...metaphor seems to involve the usage of philosophical language in its entirety, nothing less than the usage of so-called natural language *in* philosophical discourse, that is, the usage of natural language *as* philosophical discourse... In sum, the question demands a book: of philosophy, of the usage or of the good use of philosophy. *And it is in our interest that the involvement promises more than it gives*.<sup>462</sup>"

—Jacques Derrida

In this development, the graphematic structure of communication returns in what is, assuredly, an unexpected way. It returns to our discourse, *perhaps* chiasmically, as the absence of an already absent presence that, up until this point has, more or less, *haunted* the future of this

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<sup>461</sup> *GM* p. 35

<sup>462</sup> *MP* p. 209

text. One might anticipate that in an essay on metaphor and speech acts, that the presence of the presence, perception, and actions of the human body would be central. Notably, however, among the thinkers we reviewed in the first few chapters of this project, the question of meaning and its connection to embodiment was never fully broached. This odd omission is among the many side-effects of treating meaning as if it were some kind of property of words and/or sentences. It should be noted that some tangential treatment of language and embodiment is implied in Davidson's general account of language, but surprisingly, in his treatment of metaphor, the body's appearance there is given as among the reasons that metaphors *cannot be meaningful*. Recall that on Davidson's account, if we could give an explanation of metaphor, it would be more like a causal explanation, one that would have some kind of physiological or psychological basis. Such an explanation, Davidson thinks, could not yield the kind of regularity and predictability that is required for a semantic analysis. This point must be challenged.

Despite Davidson's overall conclusion regarding metaphor and meaning, I will nevertheless begin with an observation concerning metaphor that resonates with part of his view. It seems to me that the analysis of metaphor will, in fact, require a kind of causal analysis. With this in mind, it seems to me to be a fairly apt description that effects of a metaphor might be something "like a joke or a bump to the head." This, however, does not in the least bit imply that metaphor demonstrates no regularity or systematicity.<sup>463</sup> Still, the burden will be on me to establish and to elaborate on what such systematicity entails. In this, I will call on the motility, organization, and performativity of the speaking body, arguing that the organization of its forms of behavior, and forms of recognition, and forms of patterned response, are the bases both for metaphor's intelligibility, and for its systematic character. In this section, I will begin to

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<sup>463</sup> All things considered, what kind of causal analysis does not imply regularity and systematicity? Imagine telling a physiologist or neuroscientist that the effects of a bump to the head demonstrated no regularity or systematicity.

elaborate on the speaking body's function in the production locutionary force, and to detail how such a position opens up space for analyzing metaphor and its function in thought.

Before returning more explicitly to metaphor, I want to continue the effort of rethinking locutionary force through the lens of embodied performativity, turning toward the work of Shoshana Felman to frame its progression. In her dynamic and original book, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, Felman attempts, among other things, to detail what she characterizes as “the *change of status* of the referent as such<sup>464</sup>” which is introduced to philosophy through Austin's work. Her suggestion is that in the performative “the referent is itself produced by language as its own *effect*.”<sup>465</sup> As such, the simple oppositions that tend to be associated with language and its referents have no place in the structure of the performative. This has the interesting consequence that:

...language makes itself part of what it refers to (without, however, being all that it refers to). Referential knowledge of language is not knowledge *about* reality (about a separate and distinct entity), but knowledge that *has to do with reality*, that acts within reality, since it is itself—at least in part—what his reality is made of. The referent is no longer simply a preexisting *substance*, but an *act*, that is, a dynamic movement of modification of reality.<sup>466</sup>

This formulation parallels what Derrida took to be the central possibility of Austin's potential.<sup>467</sup> Austin's work affords the potential for thinking through linguistic efficacy in such a way that communication can be characterized as simply one human activity among others. Thought in terms of activity, it is much easier to recognize that giving an account of language use shouldn't *necessarily* require calling upon special kinds of phenomena, whether it be in the form of some mechanism of reference or in terms of some discrete and definitive property, for its

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<sup>464</sup> *SB* p. 50

<sup>465</sup> *SB* p. 51

<sup>466</sup> *SB* p. 51

<sup>467</sup> See, again, *MP* p. 321; *LI* p. 13 “Differing from the classical assertion, from the constative utterance, the performative's referent...is not outside it, or in any case preceding it or before it. It does not describe something which exists outside and before language. It produces or transforms a situation, it operates; and if it can be said that a constative utterance also effectuates something and always transforms a situation, it cannot be said that this constitutes its internal structure, its manifest function or destination, as is the case of the performative.”

articulation.<sup>468</sup> As it is with any other human activities, it becomes entirely unnecessary to essentialize any single aspect of a linguistic performance.<sup>469</sup> The simple isolation of certain aspects of human activities are, of course, often helpful as part of pedagogical strategies, but one rarely imagines that such acts of isolation—or better, focal points of attention—are permanent and centrally definitive of the behaviors themselves. By analogy, we can isolate meaning and reference if we like, and perhaps this will yield particular insights in service to helping us to understand particular aspects of language use, but it seems odd to imagine that once we have chosen a point of view, a perspective, or a focal point, that we ought to finalize it and suppose that there should be no other ways of organizing our inquiry, especially given inevitable emergence different, and perhaps unexpected, questions and concerns.<sup>470</sup>

Language use as an act, as “acting in reality” or as “transforming a situation” or as “an operation, and the production of an effect,” puts explaining its function on the same level as that of raising one’s hand, swinging one’s leg, or moving one’s eyes from left to right very slowly, and then darting back to the left in a repetitive fashion. Importantly, there are regular causal stories to tell about any such actions. There are also often social analyses that can explain such behaviors, and can help to discover and identify if, when, and how, they are meaningful (as in

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<sup>468</sup> Unless, of course, we discover somehow that meanings really are some kinds of ghostly entities which are contained in words. I leave this as an open, although exceedingly unlikely, possibility.

<sup>469</sup> What, *exactly*, makes a slam-dunk a slam-dunk? A cartwheel a cartwheel? An uppercut an uppercut? Along these lines, it seems strange to me that there is a debate concerning act-individuation in Austin. In his essay “Perlocutions,” Steven Davis opposes Davidson to Alvin Goldman—Goldman holding the position that in frightening my interlocutor with such an utterance as “There is a spider in your lap!”, I have performed three separate actions, the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary. Davidson, on the other hand, suggests that we have performed a single act which can be described in various ways (225). My view is much closer to Davidson’s although I would formulate it in terms of effects: we have performed a single act from which we can report a certain range of its “relevant” effects (for which there could be no definitive upper limit). It should be noted that this should be true of any act whatsoever. We don’t individuate and count physical acts according to the range of their different effects (is diving one act or three [or x depending on how many features and consequences we choose to count?] if among its features and consequences is being graceful, creating a splash, and winning an Olympic medal?) so why should speech acts be any different?

<sup>470</sup> We might think of Davidson and his sense that any theory of language will be a semantic theory, and hence that metaphors are meaningless because they cannot be submitted to such a theory. What kind of bullshit is this?



when a hand is raised during a class, or when swinging one's leg brings one's foot to impact a ball which then rolls across a spray-painted line of grass during a soccer game in The World Cup, or when moving one's eyes is directed by an officer of the law as some kind of gauge of one's sobriety). Part of what I'm looking to emphasize is the discursive function of all acts whether motile, verbal, or graphematic. In this, the key point to develop is that all embodied actions are iterable; they are repeatable, they are imitable.<sup>471</sup> At the same time, the iterability of actions have important and notable limits, and *inherently* differential consequences.

In a way that *somehow* is not always obvious, and in a way that *somehow* is not *obviously redundant*, the finitude of the human body and hence human of action, is *defined by its* limitations.<sup>472</sup> This interplay between definition, limitation, and embodiment, is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the paradigmatic illocution: the promise. In most treatments of speech act theory, the promise is featured as an exemplary case of illocution.<sup>473</sup> For Felman, this is also the case, although her analysis opens up in what seems to be an entirely original way. In her treatment, what the promise indicates is not primarily about *language* and its function. Rather, promising reveals the structure of the speaking body and the structure of the presumed speaking subject. In this, it reveals, perhaps surprisingly, is an unexpected absence. Her treatment of the promise presents a dramatically different set of concerns than that of Searle's, for example.

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<sup>471</sup> And, in some measure, parody-able. This is an important point to which I will return.

<sup>472</sup> It seems to me that the very intelligibility of this sentence calls for an etymological/metaphorological analysis of the sort that my model of meaning will make available. It seems to me that anyone might reasonably respond with the following rhetorical questions: "What kind of thing's *finitude* is not *defined* by its *limits*? Isn't definition *about* setting boundaries and *limits*? Aren't limits *about* defining and *outlining*? At least unconsciously, or, better, *subliminally*?" And if we try to further read into this, we may find that other related questions emerge: "Aren't boundaries about restrictions? About binding? About tying things up? Is definition not about *tying* words to their uses, to their meanings? Doesn't the *logos* imply *binding* of some sort? Might the defined body expect to be *bound*? And *gagged*?"

<sup>473</sup> In *Speech Acts*, Searle's entire third chapter is dedicated to "The Structure of Illocutionary Acts." In it, promising is his focal point. He writes that "I shall take promising as my initial inquiry, because as illocutionary acts go, it is fairly formal and well articulated; like a mountainous terrain, it exhibits its geographical features starkly. But we shall see that it has more than local interest, and many of the lessons to be learned from it are of general application." (p. 54)

Putting their positions in conversation opens up space for a dramatic reading of the relationship between speech and acts.

If we look at Searle's treatment, the promise indicates the *possibility* of the satisfaction of felicity conditions in terms of the enacting of an anticipated and representable state of affairs that the promise, itself, *guarantees*. For Searle, the sheer fact of representability is enough to demonstrate possibility, and possibility appears to imply—at least in the structure of ideal cases—actuality. In other words, the *actuality* of the satisfaction of the conditions of the promise is built into his ideal model of the promise, and this actuality is guaranteed by the presencing function, the representational capacity, of his model of consciousness.<sup>474</sup> For Felman, on the other hand, the contingency of the guarantee of the promise is revealed *in the body's very constitution* as either capable or incapable of *living up to* the guarantee of the promise. Between these two positions, a kind of duality is signaled, one that has a long and eventful history in Western philosophy. Felman writes:

If the problem of the human act thus consists in the relation between language and the body, it is because the act is conceived...as that which problematizes at one and the same time the separation and the opposition between the two. The act, an enigmatic and problematic production of the speaking body, destroys from its inception the metaphysical dichotomy between the domain of the "mental" and the domain of the "physical," breaks down the opposition between body and spirit, between matter and language.<sup>475</sup>

But, importantly, this breakdown is not in the form of a fusion; it comes in the form of the subversion of the "mental," of the subversion, perhaps dissolution, of consciousness. In the recognition of the tenuous condition of promising, the centrality of consciousness seems to lose its place:

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<sup>474</sup> This is an important distinction, and one that also bears heavily on the different perspectives seen in Searle's and Derrida's positions. See *LI* p. 56 when Derrida writes "I must first recall that at no time does *Sec* ever invoke the *absence*, pure and simple, of intentionality. Nor is there any break, simple or radical, with intentionality. What the text questions is not the intention or intentionality but their *telos*, which orients and organizes the movement and the possibility of a fulfillment, realization, and *actualization* in a plenitude that would be *present* to and identical with itself."

<sup>475</sup> *SB* p. 65

...every promise promises the completion of incompleteness; every promise is above all the *promise of consciousness*, insofar as it postulates a noninterruption, continuity between intention and act...What the myth of the speaking body, in other words, *performs*, is the very subversion of consciousness.<sup>476</sup>

Putting Felman's position in conversation with Searle's, we might take her insight to imply that the very *ideality* of Searle's account forgets, *obliterates*, the body. This forgetting enables him to imagine that representability, *expressibility*, is enough to *determine* actuality, without even considering that *in actuality* it takes laboring bodies to bring about complex states of affairs, and, importantly, those bodies are liable to fail in various ways (a fact that may not be readily intelligible if one does not actually have to produce such states of affairs in actuality, if one gets them ready-made, so to speak).<sup>477</sup> Felman puts it in the following way, recalling the absence at the heart of the graphematic predicates: "language is inhabited by *the act of failing* through which the body is lacking to itself: the act of failing through which the body's *doing* always fails to speak itself, whereas the speaking never fails to *do*."<sup>478</sup> Read together, it becomes clear that, among other things, the various exclusions that Searle makes in service to idealization can be read as implicit denials or omissions of both the condition of the embodiment of speakers, and, perhaps more damning for his overall project, of the embodiment of the conscious subject.

This, importantly, appears to be a motivated omission and denial. Generally speaking, in service to preserving his brand of philosophy, Searle's approach to analysis has the explicitly stated general strategy of ignoring ambiguities and uncertainties. In his attempts to further clarify his treatment of consciousness he offers this as a preliminary caveat: "And to avoid muddying

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<sup>476</sup> *SB* p. 34

<sup>477</sup> Cavell eloquently captures this tendency, at a level of philosophical generality, in the following passage: "Excuses betoken, we might say, the incessant, unending vulnerability of human action, its exposure to the independence of the world and the preoccupation of the mind. I would like to say that it turns philosophy's attention patiently and thoroughly to something philosophy would love to ignore—to the fact human life is constrained to the life of the human body, to what Emerson calls the giant I always take with me. The law of the Body is the law.

"WDA" p. 53

<sup>478</sup> *SB* p. 78

the waters, let's leave out half-conscious thoughts, peripheral consciousness, nagging but suppressed conscious states and other shadowy phenomena.<sup>479</sup>” When discussing the promise as the paradigmatic illocution, as a preliminary, Searle has this to say:

In the present case, our analysis will be directed at the center of the concept of promising. I am ignoring marginal, fringe, and partially defective promises...Furthermore, in the analysis I confine my discussion to full blown explicit promises and ignore promises made by elliptical turns of phrase, hints, metaphors, etc...In short, I am going to deal only with a simple and idealized case. This method, one of constructing ideal models, is analogous to the sort of theory construction that goes on in most sciences...<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> John R. Searle, “Consciousness, Unconsciousness and Intentionality.” *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 1, Consciousness (1991), pp. 45-66 (56)

<sup>480</sup> SA p. 55-56 It is important to note that there is a crucial caveat that Searle has either forgotten or is simply ignoring for his own sake. Most sciences define their ideal models according to well controlled environments that are organized specifically in service to experimental practices. It is only when the relevant objects of study can be sorted, organized, dissected, and broken down to isolable units, *controlled*, and studied *as if they were outside of any contingent circumstances*, that ideal models can be constructed. This, as we saw in Chapter 3, “Boundary Testing,” gives the erroneous perception that one can understand objects and their appropriate concepts irrespective of context. This view has two important errors built into it: 1) It proceeds as if the process of preparing and isolating objects for theoretical study—the gaining and preparation of *controls* (in this case, to be read doubly)—is not a crucial aspect of the contexts in which these ideal models can be made intelligible, and 2) it fails to recognize that *the failed hypothesis is the most common fate of ideal models*. In other words, what constitutes *the failure of a hypothesis* is that once idealized concepts are turned around in order to explain the phenomena from which they are derived, they simply lack relevant explanatory power. This point should be powerfully emphasized: *the vast majority of ideal models in the hard sciences are failed hypotheses*.

In any event, without *having or somehow gaining control of the discursive circumstances in which promising takes place*, there would be no way to isolate the promise so that one could be certain about what range of contingent or marginal factors can be reasonably excluded. Furthermore, there would be no way to test the explanatory power of his conception of the promise in order to figure out what it was good at explaining, and what would constitute its explanatory limits. It isn't by virtue of convenience or neatness, or simply in service to the preservation a preferred vision of systematicity that scientific concepts can be reasonably maintained (although, of course, these are bad habits of “normal science”). Idealization for idealization's sake is silly; and it is fairly clear in this case that idealization makes understanding language use more difficult. For example, among the odd consequences of this kind of idealization is ignoring all that is murky, contingent, and clumsy—including the most relevant factor—the speaking organism itself! It is precisely this kind of exclusion that Derrida is attempting to expose and counteract. In “Toward an Ethic of Discussion,” he writes the following: “I try to show that the ideal purity of the distinctions proposed (by Searle, for example) is inaccessible, but also that its practice would necessitate excluding certain essential traits of what it claims to explain or describe—and yet cannot integrate into the “general theory (LI p. 117).” Imagine a chemist telling you that she is going to do a study on chemical interactions, but that in doing so that she would *simply ignore and exclude* troubling cases for the sake of systematicity. It seems odd to me that anyone, while evoking the name of science, would consider that developing an ideal model would not include a study of *the conditions in which* the phenomena under review might be isolable and exemplary. Searle thinks that he can use the ideal form of the ideal promise to evaluate marginal and partially defective promises cases. It could, of course, be possible that his position was luckily correct, but without some way to evaluate the basic model, he will simply be confirming his own biases with those thinkers who already share said biases. So while on the face of it, his model might appear to have the basic form of the hard sciences, without the methodology, and the experimental practices, it seems strange and disingenuous to want call upon the authority of scientific models. But then, why, on Earth, does he need to evoke an *authority*...?

Searle's general method is to clear away uncertainties, ambiguities, and contingencies from the scope of analysis from the very beginning, and thereby to achieve the greatest philosophical clarity.

What Felman's position shows, however, is that promising cannot be understood at all without reference to uncertainty, ambiguity, and the inevitable *risk of failure*. This is because speech is irrevocably an embodied act, and as such has all of the hazards and contingencies of embodied life as an essential part of its structure. Once the speaking body with all its complexities (whether analyzed physiologically, psychologically, sociologically, literarily, according to some overlap between vocabularies, or otherwise) is allowed to be present to the analysis of language, much of the simplicity that Searle seeks, simply won't be available or even intelligible. Felman's position powerfully exemplifies this point; and her position is nowhere more relevant, especially to a position like Searle's, than it is in her presentation of the promise. The central thesis of her position is that countenancing the body as a centrally relevant factor in the function of language, inevitably subverts the centrality of consciousness. She thus, from a very different position, emerges on the side of Derrida.<sup>481</sup>

This subversion is powerfully exemplified in contrast to Searle's position because if we can show that conscious representation is not enough to *establish* felicity conditions, then it isn't

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<sup>481</sup> It should be noted here that Derrida does not include the body as essential to linguistic efficacy. He takes the belief in the centrality of the body in models of communication to be indicative of the metaphysics of presence. In addition, he construes the focus on the body as being essential to the classical model of communication insofar as this model takes speech to be a more natural form of communication than writing (because it remains closer to the body, and emerges from it). That he is wrong about this will give me the occasion to include the body and its failing and dying nature as among the graphematic predicates, even if as a paradoxical one. Nevertheless, he still comes to the same basic conclusion about the promise, and in a way that is directly in opposition to Searle. In response to these methodological exclusions, Derrida has this to say "A corruption that is 'always possible' cannot be a mere extrinsic accident supervening on a structure that is original and pure, one that can be purged of what thus happens to it. The purportedly 'ideal' structure must necessarily be such that this corruption will be 'always possible.' This *possibility* constitutes part of the *necessary* traits of the purportedly ideal structure." *LI* p. 77

clear exactly what can.<sup>482</sup> Furthermore, it becomes harder to pinpoint what consciousness *does*, what it contributes to the locution and, most importantly, to its effects. If actual living breathing bodies have to establish felicity conditions, then it isn't obvious what particular consciousnesses could contribute to the objective, "brute," facts of some arrangement of objects, bodies, and events. Nor is it obvious, especially in the case of promising, that said facts could be idealized, as every case would inherently be "partially defective"—dependent, as they are, on the clumsy, murky, uncertainty, of embodiment. It seems, therefore, that *most* actual promises, the kinds made between those who live in a world of potential failure, the kind made by humans that may very well miss their marks, would have to be counted among the marginal cases that he explicitly ignores. Including such cases will not do for Searle, presumably because "without abstraction and idealization, there is no systematization."<sup>483</sup>

It is important to note, however, that even this claim cannot be taken at face value. Although I won't belabor this point, it is worth considering that given the stated terms of his project, this claim seems to be something of a performative subversion in itself. He explicitly claims that his work on the analysis of illocutionary act is the formulation, the explicit articulation, of an already inhabited, tacit, yet actively employed, system of rules. He writes:

We are in the position of someone who has learned to play chess without ever having the rules formulated and who wants such a formulation. We learned how to play the game of illocutionary acts, but in general it was done without explicit formulation of the rules, and the first step in getting such a formulation is to set out the conditions for the performance of a particular illocutionary act. Our inquiry will therefore serve a double philosophical purpose. By stating a set of conditions for the performance of a particular illocutionary act we shall have offered an

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<sup>482</sup> It is important to keep in mind that there is *some* connection between collective conscious representation and the status of institutional facts, although it is not particularly well worked out. See *The Construction of Social Reality*. Even this tenuous connection breaks down immediately once it becomes clear that different conscious subjects, particularly in times of conflict, would represent such facts in very different ways, and that as such it is unreasonable to imagine something like consciousness could *establish* such facts. The obvious questions which will turn on this would be "Which consciousness(es)?" "How, exactly does such an establishment take place?" It seems to me that Searle's model could be saved, to some extent, by the introduction of embodied power articulated by Bourdieu, but then, of course, the centrality of consciousness and that which it represents would be subverted.

<sup>483</sup> SA p. 56

explication of that notion and shall also have paved the way for the second step, the formulation of the rules.<sup>484</sup>

Given this statement of purpose, it seems odd to claim that without idealization there can be no systemization as he is explicitly claiming that language users are already living within a system-of-yet-to-be-idealized-rules. If he claims that all he is attempting to do is to make an already systematic situation explicit, what could his statement, as if it were some methodological absolute, even mean?

I raise this question somewhat rhetorically, although I think that this odd inconsistency—innocent though it may seem—indicates something more. Perhaps, predictably, it indicates that even on Searle’s own terms, the rules and conditions of social reality cannot depend on their being established in consciousness if we can “unconsciously” follow them irrespective of their explicit formulation as representable features of our social reality. What this shows is that representational consciousness, intentionality, is not *necessary* for the *enactment* of conditions of social reality, and that its function cannot be *essential* to the establishment of social facts. This is exemplified in his own task, in which it is made perfectly clear that the representational subject may very well come at the end of things, may very well be the last to know. This condition, according to Felman’s view (and in Nietzsche’s as well), is the reason philosophy cannot countenance the body; this is the reason that its absent presence is a scandal. She writes:

The scandal consists in the fact that the act cannot know what it is doing, that the act (of language) subverts both consciousness and knowledge (of language). The “unconscious” is the discovery, not only of the radical divorce or breach between act and knowledge, between constative and performative, but also (and in this lies the scandal of Austin’s ultimate discovery) of their undecidability and their constant interference.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> *SA* p. 55

<sup>485</sup> *SB* p. 67. We might, recalling my presentation of Derrida’s reading of Austin, add to this list the breach between regulation and risk.

We act before we learn to speak, and the complexities of our actions always exceed our ability to know, understand, or represent our reality. This condition is nowhere more evident than in the murkiness and contingencies of our own daily lives and in the uncertainties, surprises, confusions, and disappointments, that emerge in the spaces between actualities and possibilities. There is much that goes unspoken in the spaces between our intentions and the effort it takes to enact them. There can be no idealization of this condition without ignoring, omitting, or forgetting, the centrality of the *risk* of failure, the fact of contingency that besets the embodied speaker. The body's penchant for *missing* its mark is a permanent condition; it is the irrevocable condition of life and death. Any suggestion to the contrary might serve to allay one's fear of uncertainty, one's fear of the contingencies of existence as an embodied organism with no guarantees of knowledge, life, or peace. But, among some philosophers, discourse that serves primarily as a palliative, are generally refer to as illusions or as myths. Such uses of language are among those which philosophy—after a certain model—claims to oppose.

Searle's is an exemplary case of a discourse which has its satisfaction and certainty built into it. It is a hidden mythology whose narrative elements pose themselves as concepts, whose intelligibility depends on the very components of the mythical frame in which they are identified. This a mythology of the disembodied, of the safety and certainty of intention and identity that can be *created* and *enacted*. So long as one can reasonably pretend that one's embodiment is irrelevant, one is free to live within the scope of an impossible illusion—that the mind, consciousness, presides over this world with the potential for an unshakable mastery, and that by force of its own power and will, it can guarantee, dictate, and establish its own domain. It is a bodiless, bloodless, anemic, mythology; it is a white mythology.



## A Preliminary Outline

“We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn. To repeat: we can draw a boundary—for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept usable? Not at all (Except for that special purpose.)<sup>486</sup>”

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

“Ultimately there is always a police and a tribunal ready to intervene each time that a rule...is invoked in a case involving signatures, events, or contexts. This is what I meant to say. If the police is always waiting in the wings, it is because conventions are by essence violable and precarious, in themselves and by the fictionality that constitutes them, even before there has been any transgression...<sup>487</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

The questions I have posed for myself are now ready for a simpler articulation: how could such a mythology become so pervasive so as to remain unnoticed? Further, how could it remain invisible within a tradition that has long been alert to, and often preoccupied by, distinctions between the mythical and historical, the literary and the philosophical, the metaphorical and the literal? On my view, it is through the force of unconsciously employed metaphors that such mythologies can be inaugurated, and it is in their unexamined function, in the metaphors' afterlife, so to speak, that their speakers are called into a kind of yet to be recognized order. It is through the invisibility of metaphor's subtle dictates that these myths come to be *inhabited*, *lived*, *enacted*, and *embodied*. According to the standards of truth and meaning we've so far reviewed, the depth and pervasiveness of metaphors within the text of philosophy consistently represents and narrates an impossible world, one whose plausibility is largely organized by the attempt to deny its odd, deviant, and foreign origins. In the recognition of such conditions, some of the most central and important philosophical concepts begin to tremble, calling out for what might appear to be an impossible confession. Nevertheless, unbeknownst to us, we've been answering the call all along, and in ways that, perhaps, could *only* be the stuff of myth.

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<sup>486</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, no. 69

<sup>487</sup> *LI* p. 105

In this and the next sections, I will begin to draw together the three central occlusions that this project has so far identified: dead metaphor, perlocution, and the speaking body. I will be looking to establish the speaking body in its performativity as the basis for all *locutionary force* via the possibilities of perlocution. I will argue that it is precisely the contingent characteristics of perlocution (what we might call its inherently graphematic structure), and its differential effects on bodies (in their graphematic structuring) that constitutes the possibility of linguistic efficacy. I will attempt to carry out what is left to be done with Austin's position by trying to flesh out the concept of perlocution with a special attention to Derrida's conception of iterability. Beginning with perlocution as a foundation enables productive accounts of both "the metaphorical" and "the literal" that can be established without the need for anything like the foundational conceptual oppositions that have hindered so many other theories of metaphor. With this established, I will be able to respond to Derrida's account of metaphor in philosophy, providing a treatment of metaphor that does not depend on the classical model of communication and its concomitant metaphors. Furthermore, in my account, the presence and persistence of these metaphors, as catachresis, is readily intelligible. Finally this view will open up an inquiry into locutionary force in a way that calls out to the speaking body, the occluded necessary condition of any communicative acts. Once the body is drawn back into the conversation, we can begin to answer many of the most important questions concerning metaphor, its function in philosophy, and its function in a more general sense: in our everyday lives as thinking and speaking bodies. I will thus be looking to articulate the source of metaphor's efficacy and potential stability, as well as its capacity as transformative of human thought and practice. These are, of course, somewhat lofty goals, but the path is set, and there is no turning back now.

Understanding language use, so long as the body is countenanced, must be an extension of a more general understanding of human behavior and action. As stated above, in the analysis or explication of *any* particular acts we may find some advantages in attempting to isolate specific aspects of their performances for explanatory and pedagogical purposes; this will be true of gardening, dancing, drawing, parenting, acting, and presumably any other behavior in which the development of a skill can be improved upon and taught. There is nothing unique in this regard about the development and understanding of language use. In any of these cases, we may attempt to develop a distinctive vocabulary in service to maintaining the integrity of the shared patterns of recognition that go along with explanations, descriptions, inquiries, etc. We may do so in order to add nuance to our forms of recognition, in order to enhance technique through subtle variations, in order discover new ways to improve our performances, or to develop entirely new forms of performance and entirely new forms of behavior.

This process is common enough, although it is, perhaps, not quite as simple as it might seem. Part of this potential complexity is related to one of the bad habits we've seen repeated over and over again by the thinkers we've reviewed in this project, particularly those who were introduced in Chapter 1 (Searle and Davidson strike me as noteworthy culprits). These thinkers, in service to the maintenance of a certain model of philosophy, have selected certain aspects of language use as centrally defining features; so much so that said features are tacitly elevated to the status of independent entities with their own forms of causality and systems of interrelation.<sup>488</sup> As a preliminary move, I will conjecture that this very process of isolating aspects of performances as if they could, in any sense, have a distinctive, definitive, existence is

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<sup>488</sup> Of course, to repeat, both of these thinkers would vehemently deny such a charge. Nevertheless, they depend on descriptions that imply the existence of objects. Their defense is, of course, that these descriptions are metaphors, or, more to the point—dead metaphors—metaphors that, because they are unconsciously employed, do not really count as metaphors. Hopefully, by now, such a defense sounds downright silly.

itself a metaphorical process. In this, some of the concerns raised by Nietzsche and Ricoeur will return to the fore.

Concept formation is a metaphorical process. At the very least, it is in *the reification of synecdoche* that most concepts are born. Synecdoche is a descriptive process whereby we come to characterize and respond to some narrow range of factors that can be identified as notable and perhaps definitive characteristics of some complex phenomenon. We then respond to such phenomena as if these isolated characteristics were the total phenomenon: taking the part for the whole. This is a process that might appear to happen quite by accident, but this is not the case. Our perceptual receptivity and comprehension of objects, events, and phenomena are inherently limited by the range of our perception, motility, and attention spans, among other things; in short, our perceptual receptivity and comprehension is limited by the conditions of our embodiment. This is, of course, because our perception and comprehension are *enabled* by exactly the very same limitations: responding to phenomena requires that we are capable of picking out salient, relevant, aspects of our encounters, and ignoring others.<sup>489</sup> Different circumstances call for different applications of this behavior. If I am choosing fruits to eat, having the ability to identify the specific features that indicate the difference between nutritious and poisonous will be essential. In such a case specific attention to detail might be the best way to apply this capacity. If I am hunting at night, speed might be crucial: “those objects in the dark, are they bushes, a lions, or gazelles? Are they members of my hunting party?” In such a case, being able to quickly ignore irrelevant factors and select crucial identifying markers may be the difference between life and death. If I am organizing a theoretical inquiry, my task is likely to require attention to detail, although speed will probably not be essential. What is probably most

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<sup>489</sup> This process very much parallels Nietzsche’s treatment of the active force of forgetting. See *GM* p. 35

essential in this third case is that my form of recognition can be duplicated—reiterated—by myself and by others. But what, exactly, does this entail?

What must be iterable, is a pattern of response which can be persistently associated with the presence of some range of recognizable features, objects, regularly occurring events. An effective concept is one that can effectively evoke a predictable response from its user, whether as a speaker, a writer, a reader, or a listener.<sup>490</sup> For the sake of illustration, I will offer a thought experiment as a preliminary account of what I mean. For this example I will pose a hypothetical community of would-be communicators, perhaps newly developing a nebulous practice that we would want to call language use. I will premise that this group has some vast range of capacities for creating different vocalizations, although it will not be obvious that there is any specifically defined—or at least recognized—relationship between vocalizations, meanings and intentions. We might imagine that each member of this community was compelled, by instinct or disposition, to try out their range of possible vocal performances. Just through the sheer volume of such performances, the community would begin to discover *if* there were particular sounds that appeared to consistently produce particular responses. If this community was human, and reasonably like ourselves, we might imagine that something like a shriek or perhaps a growl might consistently provoke fear or a fight or flight response; something like laughter might produce reciprocal laughter; something like a droning low pitched humming might produce

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<sup>490</sup> This is *not* to say that the “same concept” will yield the same system of responses irrespective of its mode of presentation. An example would be that offering a spoken explanation of the structure of a bridge and then offering a written one with equations. The modes of presentation themselves will facilitate the application different sensibilities and patterns of response in a hearer/reader. This, I will argue, is a consequence of the particular patterns of response that writing—and perhaps particularly mathematics, makes available to human behavior and attention. It is important to note that on the classical model of communication, the “same concept” can be conveyed through different media. In fact, this is one of the crucial aspects of the metaphor of theory, that the content remains the same no matter its mode of transit, and that its safe passage, irrespective of change, is what constitutes effective “communication.” This is not, at all, what I am suggesting here.

calm, and something like a moan might provoke a protective response or perhaps sexual attraction and arousal.

Initially, we might surmise that the relationship between these sounds and these responses would go unnoticed. Perhaps it would take some indeterminate number of repetitions before our proto-locutors started to notice the connections. Furthermore, with a sufficiently large and diverse community, one would imagine that some people would notice these associations sooner than others, and perhaps some people would never notice at all. In any event, to the extent that even two people began to recognize these connections, and were able to notice this talent in one another, they would thereby gain the capacity to produce said responses in one another actively and deliberately. It is plausible that in such a small community of two, that the shared recognized connection between particular vocalizations and particular responses might seem automatic, instinctive, and perhaps as naturally determined. Again, however, given a sufficiently large and diverse community, slight variations in a performer's capacity for affecting responders and variations in a responder's likelihood to enact the expected response would emerge. Provided that enough people in the community wanted to use these vocalizations for specific tasks, the impetus to regulate *how someone should respond* to the vocalizations would quickly arise.

For the sake of simplicity, we might suggest that some assessment of what was taken to be the most common responses to vocalizations should set the standard that everyone should follow. Alternatively, we might suggest that those who were the quickest to notice the associations would set the standard by initiating them. Those who were slow to respond, or who had unusual responses, would have their instinctive tendencies suppressed or occluded. Such suppression or occlusion would only be partial, as some responses might feel so natural as to be

incorrigible, or perhaps some responders may be able to generally respond according to the standard, but occasionally let slip her more instinctive, more visceral, response. In either case, this would be the birth of deviance, and with it the revelation of the boundaries of an appropriate discourse and the conditions for discursive regulation.

If the community's diversity was organized on a continuum of responses, with proportions of the population varying in different ways from the regulative standard, such deviance would *resonate* with others whose inclinations toward unusual patterns of response were similar. If such a group were so inclined to enjoy that resonance (being, as it would be, a simpler way to experience their own embodied responses), they may deliberately call upon such resonance for the sake of enjoyment and/or in service to sharing in a community that would not seek to artificially regulate or suppress their responses. From the position of the regulated norm, such cases might be interpreted as *misusing* the language and producing *unexpected* effects. To those who were naturally attuned to the norm, but could appreciate this misuse, we might say that this appreciation would be an appreciation of the odd (embodied, *aesthetic*?) effects of this misuse. The regulatory norm would be seen as primary, and the unusual effects would be seen to emerge as secondary to the norm.

If those with unusual patterns of response want to participate in the public life of the community, they will have to make their responses and vocalizations congruent with those of the norm. Likewise, to the extent that they want to express their own inclinations and sensibilities, they will have to compel others to respond in ways that better suit their patterns of response. In such cases where they are able to achieve this latter goal, we might say that they enable or develop a new congruence despite their deviant uses of vocalization.<sup>491</sup> This possibility emerges

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<sup>491</sup>In this, we see in a variation, the return of Ricoeur's model of metaphor. There is something that strikes me as correct about his model, although I have deliberately stripped it of its semantic and lexical components, emphasizing

only consequently to the function of *the regulation of vocalizations* that necessarily precedes the possibility of deviance in the use of vocalizations. Depending on the *seriousness* of regulations, the violation of them would be met with some degree of force. The repercussions of such violations would be perceived, in varying degrees, again, depending on the *seriousness* of its enforcement, as a *danger*. In such cases a vocalizer would find that there were certain *places* where her locutions could be used for the effects which were congruent with her sensibilities, and there were other *places* where her vocalizations would be met with some degree of deterrent force. These places would constitute bounded regions. Negotiating such boundaries, in *serious enough circumstances*, could mean the difference between life and death.

What I hope to have shown in this brief illustration is the ways in which certain patterns of reasoning appear to emerge concomitantly with the development of discursive communities. Most importantly, I hope to have shown how *the metaphor of metaphor is coextensive with the will to regulate discourse*. It emerges in the production of boundaries which *are* the range in which a speaker may reasonably and safely perform utterances properly, acceptably, and intelligibly. Such boundaries would be objective, so to speak. They wouldn't *necessarily* have strict dimensions.<sup>492</sup> They would, however, be quite straightforwardly *spatial*; they would mark out, spaces, regions, and perhaps saliently, *fields*. It should be noted, however, that strictly speaking, the metaphorical aspects of said boundaries would not yet qualify as metaphors, *conceptually speaking*. In fact, they precede the possibility of conceptual metaphoricity. Metaphor becomes possible only once one is able to effectively communicate deviantly—beyond the scope of one's proper field. These boundaries that constitute the metaphor of metaphor are

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the potential difference between *relexicalization* and *the development of new congruencies*, with a preference for the latter. See this essay, Chapter 2 "Of Rebirth in Death"

<sup>492</sup> Although, of course, they might. Take, for example, ritual spaces where certain words and people are strictly forbidden.



what make metaphor, in the conceptual sense, possible. These boundaries are made possible by the “metaphysical attitude” and its impetus to regulate and dominate discourse. These boundaries, the will to regulate them, and the isolation of the correct response to standard vocalizations are philosophemes.<sup>493</sup> They are fields, metaphysics, and philosophy’s unique thesis, respectively.

### Metaphor, Perlocution, and Solicitation

“It is the domination of beings that *différance* everywhere comes to solicit, in the sense that *sollicitare*, in old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety. Therefore, it is the determination of Being as presence or as beingness that is interrogated by the thought of *différance*. Such a question could not emerge and be understood unless the difference between Being and beings were somewhere to be broached. First consequence: *différance* is not. It is not a present being, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. And it is always in the name of a kingdom that one may reproach *différance* with wishing to reign, believing that one sees it aggrandize itself with a capital letter.<sup>494</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

Much of what I’ve argued throughout this project has hinged on the commitment to the denial of the necessary connections between intentions, meanings, words, and sentences.

Language use *can* be analyzed in terms of the meaningfulness of sentences and words, but an exclusive allegiance to this strategy demands the illusion—explicitly endorsed or not—that language comes ready-made and has some kind of user-independent status. It is then presumed that this status could somehow be maintained outside of the particularities of the contexts of its uses. Furthermore, this illusion inevitably compels the need to exclude an enormous array of

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<sup>493</sup> See *MP* p. 255. Derrida poses the following question “But, we were asking above, can these defining tropes that are prior to all philosophical rhetoric and that produce philosophemes still be called metaphors?...Let us be content with indicating this reading. The Supplement concerns first the violent, forced, abusive inscription of a sign, the imposition of a sign upon a meaning which did not have its own proper sign in language. So much so that there is no substitution here, no transport of proper signs, but rather the irruptive extension of a sign proper to an idea, a meaning, deprived of their signifier.”

<sup>494</sup> *MP* p. 21-22

other considerations that bear heavily on a full and robust understanding of language use. Among these exclusions, of course, is the persistent and various attempts to deny the meaning or effects of metaphor. That metaphor manages to return meaningfully and effectively, irrespective of the myriad attempts at its excision, suggests that any theory of linguistic meaning or use that calls for isolating and excluding metaphor has missed something central about language use and metaphor's function therein.

That metaphor always returns suggests that understanding its role could never really have been about sentences at all. In many ways, although for very different reasons, this is very much in line with Davidson's position. Although, unlike Davidson I am looking to extend this insight to include the claim that the meaning of the literal was never primarily about words and sentences either. This is a position that, in the broadest sense, Davidson might accept; although, as I've shown, there is an odd reversal in his point of view when it comes to *distinguishing* the literal *from* the metaphorical. Despite his minimalist approach when it comes to content, his stated position retains, in its metaphorical articulation, the sense that words and sentences are *the locus* of literal meaning. He thereby ensures the unfortunate consequence of setting the meaninglessness of metaphor in opposition to the meaningfulness concept of the literal. This is a failed strategy for several reasons. Not least of all is the fact that, this move requires the literal use of a clearly metaphorical implication complex: *the literal as a property contained in words and sentences which can be conveyed properly, so long as they are employed in their appropriate fields.*

Sidestepping this whole concept and its demonstrated hazards, it seems to me that we can do so much more if we just begin in a different locale. As I proceed, I will attempt to resituate the locus of meaning to the receptivity and patterned responses of speaking bodies, with a special

connection to perlocutionary performativity. My general position is this: meaning is the product *of*, is organized *by*, is enacted *through*, and is perhaps *contained in*, moving bodies. Beginning with the speaking human body, I will show that thinking of meaning in terms of human embodiment does not demand the extreme exclusions that we've seen in those approaches that begin with literal meaning as properties or effects of words or sentences. Furthermore, beginning with embodied response helps to make sense of the meaning of literality and of metaphoricity without recourse to the oppositions that define the metaphysical attitude. Finally, beginning here enables me to answer many of the questions that, I think, are most pressing. Not least of all among such questions is the most obvious: "what, exactly, *is* a metaphor?"

On several occasions I have alluded to the ways in which there is something right about Ricoeur's model of metaphor, as well as with Davidson's. I will therefore attempt to situate my position alongside theirs, drawing from their strengths and further refining my position by responding more fully to their limitations. In Chapter 2, in the section "Of Rebirth in Death" I noted that there is some parallel to be made in Davidson's and Ricoeur's treatments of metaphors on the basis of what *initiates* metaphoricity. For Davidson, again, it is some kind of shock to the body that compels a reflection on similarity, for Ricoeur, it is the recognition of a deviant use of a sentence that provokes confusion and thus compels a reflection concerning the resituating of the meaning of beings. In both cases, what initiates the metaphor is an effect of the use of language that is not, in their strict senses, about its meaning. In both cases, what initiates a metaphor is an effect of how a communicator does something with her words, or how an effect is produced in a respondent as she is affected by a sentence or utterance. The initiation of a metaphor for these thinkers is a product of the performative aspects of speech, and as such it

signals an analysis of locutionary force. As I will show, this initiating phase of metaphoricity is best characterized after a model of perlocution.

To revisit the concept: perlocutionary acts are the kinds of speech acts which produce effects that are not, in any explicitly definitive way, inherently linked to the components of their utterance. In other words, the meanings of the words uttered in such an act do not, in any consistent way, define or prefigure the nature of the perlocutionary effect. The effects of such an act are not thought of as necessary; they are loosely associated contingent consequences. So if a speaker seduces another by proclaiming her undying love and devotion, the fact that her interlocutor is seduced is the mark of perlocutionary force. It is important to note, however, that her interlocutor may not be seduced at all. On the contrary, she may be annoyed by the prospect of a devotee, or perhaps entirely indifferent. Perlocutionary acts are always aimed at achieving some *presumably possible* goal, but are defined more by their *actual consequences*, by their enacted effects, than they are by the details of the utterances themselves. As such, perlocutions, by definition, are just as likely to produce unintended consequences as they are to produce intended ones; this is true even in ideal cases.<sup>495</sup> Furthermore, the effects of perlocution are effects which are not explicitly tied to language use, or at least, not tied to any particular kinds of language use, as Austin himself says: “For clearly any, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without

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<sup>495</sup> If such a sense could be appropriate here. It seems to me that the ideal form of the perlocution suffers from the very same problems as that of the ideal form of the promise. In order to make it intelligible, the many contingent factors which contribute to its possibility have to be ignored and excluded. In such a case, an ideal model is entirely counterproductive, as it defines its object out of existence before it attempts an explanation. This is a problematic strategy for a number of reasons, central among them being what happens when such an ideal concept is applied. Because the concept is, in a sense, featureless, there is no way to evaluate its explanatory worth—except for the possibility of its uptake within a speech community. This last point is not meant, strictly speaking, as a criticism. As we will see, uptake is often the only measure of a concept’s efficacy (as it is with philosophical metaphors). At the same time there is an inherent danger in the kinds of uptake that can be established on the basis of featureless concepts, on the basis of ciphers—on the basis of concepts whose integrity and explanatory power cannot be tracked in terms of their practical efficacy.

calculation, *of any utterance whatsoever...*<sup>496</sup> As such, they are inevitably beset by risk, uncertainty, and the very particular circumstances of their utterances. The perlocutionary act is inherently unwieldy.

Unlike illocutions, perlocutions, strictly speaking, cannot be felicitous. Whatever can be achieved in and through perlocution does not depend on social convention, and hence does not have explicitly articulable conditions of satisfaction. Nevertheless, there is *some sense*, we might call it a *hopeful sense*, in which they are connected to a speaker's intentions or goals, and, as such, can be viewed as achievements of a sort. Nevertheless, the effect, and hence the achievement remains circumstantial, depending on many more factors than just the act itself. In an important sense, the perlocutionary effect is *untethered*. We might say, given that the effects of *illocution* are to be found in the enacting of the scripts associated with publicly recognized conventions, that successful illocutions affect conventions and the norms of public recognition themselves. By contrast, we might say that the effects of perlocution are to be found in the often unpredictable responses of listeners' bodies and in their subsequent behavior.<sup>497</sup> It is precisely this kind of effect that, I will argue, signals metaphor's essential perlocutionary component.

Metaphor, as Davidson argues, affects a hearer viscerally—like a joke or a bump to the head. It is in this aspect that metaphors are perlocutionary. What makes his position untenable is that he does not go beyond this point, surmising that this fact alone tells the relevant story about metaphor and its function. He does allude to the subsequent possibility of interpretation, but also

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<sup>496</sup> *HW* p. 110 See also p. 119 "It is characteristic of perlocutionary acts that the response achieved, or the sequel, can be achieved additionally or *entirely by non-locutionary means*: thus intimidation may be achieved by waving a stick or pointing a gun." Or perhaps, I might add, by telling a joke or bumping someone on the head. Italics mine.

<sup>497</sup> We might think of how a person who is very sensitive or, who is perhaps paranoid, may take something that is meant as a compliment as an insult. There is nothing, presumably, in the utterance that determines how the utterance is to be taken. It is, in fact, the unformulated comportment of the hearer of the utterance that initiates the effect. This position, especially with respect to unpredictability, can be sharpened in the consideration of a single person whose emotional and or psychological life might be fairly dynamic. In such circumstances, a single person, within the span of minutes, may react to the same locution with very different patterns of response.

surmises that no matter what happens on the path toward such an interpretation, its result would not, strictly speaking, yield a metaphor's meaning. In other words, such interpretations would not yield regular, discrete, definitions that would track, in a predictable way, the ways in which words are used in sentences in the production of true statements. In short, whatever is going on with metaphor, it is not systematic. It is now time to challenge this view.

Davidson thinks that metaphors cannot be systematic because he treats the systematicity of language as if it is *in the words and sentences themselves*. On his view, literality is marked by the regular effects in the employ of words, their uses in sentences, and in the inferential relationships associated with their uses in reasoning. However, if we read the tenuous character of his conception of the *effects* that words have in their literal uses, we quickly realize that such effects call for a cause which he is unable to supply.<sup>498</sup> In response to this, my argument depends on the systematicity of organisms' bodies, their forms of behavior, and the forms of causality which sustain their life functions (respiration, reproduction, metabolism, circadian rhythms, etc.). Thus, even *if* the forms of causality here mentioned were too complex for *us* to systematize (like, say, weather patterns or the emissions of solar flares), that still doesn't present a strong enough case for us to make the claim that their forms of causality are, in principle, unsystematic.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Unless, of course, he is going to say that literal meaning is causal. If he's willing to concede this point, he will be faced with two challenges: 1) He will have to delineate, or at least gesture toward, the specific form of causality which seems to apply only to the relationships between words, sentences, and inferences (a task which not only seems to exceed our normal macroscopic ontology, but one that I anticipate would strain the possibilities of inter-translation, so long as it is really *inter*-translation [are members of other speech communities going to accept this form of causality as literally meaningful, or are they going to say something like "well, sure, if you mean 'causal' metaphorically..."]). And 2) he will have to rethink the distinction between the metaphorical and the literal if he concedes that the literal, too, operates causally. In which case, he would either have to argue that the forms of causality associated with literality are different in kind from the forms of causality associated with metaphoricity, or he will have to accept that his distinction cannot be made at this level.

<sup>499</sup> We will thus find ourselves in the position that Searle claims to find himself in *Speech Acts*. We will find ourselves within the scope of an already robust systematicity, faced with the prospect of formulating, describing, and explaining it. The difference in my position is that I do not suspect that systematization depends on idealization. In fact, I *might*—if I were so inclined to be concerned with idealization—be willing to claim that it is the other way around.

Furthermore, given Davidson's other stated positions, we could argue—according to his own views—that the stable literal vocabularies that we employ in the descriptions of our normal, macroscopic, world, describe the same world in which the literal meaning of truth functional semantics can be tracked. Therefore, the vocabularies associated with biochemistry and physiology are partial descriptions of the—at most—*one world* in which we all live and move. It would follow from this that, with the right bridge principles (or meta-language), we should be able to translate anything that we say about the world at this the microscopic scales of biochemistry into our familiar literal discourse. As such, the descriptive vocabularies of causal mechanisms which describe how organisms are systematized at the level of biochemistry and physiology should be intertranslatable. With this in mind, the claim that metaphors function according to some (yet to be determined) causal mechanism is not at all reason to suspect that they are not systematic. On the contrary, their plausible systematicity, and their causal mechanisms would already have ready-made vocabularies into which they should be readily translatable.

Of course, in support of Davidson, one might argue (as I might, for example) that it isn't obvious that the best scale at which to assess the causal mechanisms of metaphor would be at, say, the biochemical or perhaps neurophysiological level (although, of course, it *might be*). Under normal circumstances, this would seem like a perfectly reasonable beginning for a counter argument (as it would be a skeptical question that I, myself, would raise). But, given Davidson's position on the inter-translatability of frames of reference, the scale at which we begin should be irrelevant. If the claims being made are meaningful on one scale, to the extent that they can be translated, they should be meaningful on any other scale as well. As such, Davidson's position on metaphor will have to give up at least one of these two factors if he is to be consistent with his

overall conceptions of meaning and ontology: 1) That metaphors are not systematic, or 2) that metaphors operate “causally.”

It seems to me that 1) is the one that will *have* to be eschewed, even if we try to stay strictly consistent with Davidson’s own terms. This is because, to the extent that he claims that metaphor is causally determined, he necessarily presupposes some measure of systematicity. Aside from this fact, the prevalence of implication complexes of the type articulated by Black’s position clearly function according to some kind of system, and the importantly unconscious register of their organization is something that it would be hard to deny.<sup>500</sup> Although it seems to me that 2) is precisely where my position and Davidson’s could possibly dovetail, it also seems to me that on his own view the suggestion that metaphor operates causally puts it a good bit of pressure on his uses of causal vocabularies. This view is essential to my own position, and will be continually developed throughout the rest of this project. Nevertheless, I take the advantage of my position to reveal a serious problem in Davidson’s, i.e., that for my model to work, I do not have to call upon two systems or kinds of causality.<sup>501</sup> In this, the seeming emptiness of his claim about the “effects” that words have on sentences takes on a more pressing tone. Into which other stable vocabulary regarding causality could such a claim be translated?

If we simply stick with the ontology of normal macroscopic objects and relations, and try to think of the causal mechanism of metaphor from within this range, we can begin to draw out some important distinctions that will help to better define my position. I will now look to

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<sup>500</sup> Even if one wants to deny them “meaning” in some technical sense, their unconscious systematic function has been demonstrated in this essay a number of times. (Chapter 1 “Kill the Messenger,” “The Locus of Meaning,” and “No Longer of Account as Coins.”) Not to mention the classical model of communication and philosophy’s unique thesis, which, if we trust Derrida, has organized a long unconscious historical narrative of philosophy as the unfolding and refolding of the particular implication complexes associated with the metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory.

<sup>501</sup> Something that Davidson would assuredly deny about his own position, although his only recourse would be to claim that one of these forms of causality—that which he attributes to literal language and its effects—was meant metaphorically.



evaluate a passing comment that I have been emphasizing by responding to Davidson's claim that metaphors are like jokes or bumps to the head. I will begin with an assessment of this claim suggesting that metaphors might very well be like jokes in a number of interesting ways, but that their similarity to bumps on the head is limited to the initiatory phase of metaphoricity.<sup>502</sup> Bumps to the head are largely private experiences and are, of course, quite specifically located.

Metaphors, on the other hand, are always, to some extent, public, or, at the very least, their use always implies the potential process of their becoming public.<sup>503</sup> Hence, there is always some measure of sociality implied by the use of metaphor, and its effective use can be defined only within the scope of some shared social practice. Unlike a bump to the head, the locus of metaphorical meaning, although explicitly centered on bodies, is not, strictly speaking, isolable to a specific space. This is because of the structure of a metaphor's social function; metaphors operate in terms of a *call and response*.<sup>504</sup> This feature signals the connection to Ricoeur's model and a re-visitation of his claim that "The metaphor is not the enigma but the solution of the enigma."<sup>505</sup>

Now one might argue, of course, that it is possible that a bump to the head or perhaps multiple bumps to the head (happening to multiple people) may form the basis of a shared or sharable social experience (perhaps a shared reflection concerning walking in the woods at night, or about the lives of boxers or football players). The difference between such a possibility and the function of metaphor is the specificity of the metaphor's conditions of response. Taking my bearings from Ricoeur and Black, it seems to me that a crucial question to consider is *why*

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<sup>502</sup> Metaphors are like bumps on the head in what is perhaps just one step beyond the trivial case where "everything is like everything else in some manner or another."

<sup>503</sup> Public, by the way, does *not* mean conscious, as the pervasive use of dead metaphors exemplifies.

<sup>504</sup> It should be noted that Davidson opens "What Metaphors Mean" with some general comments that suggest a similar picture. The major difference between his treatment and mine, in this regard, is that Davidson doesn't suspect that this call and response can be organized according to any regular, definable, *meaningful*, relation.

<sup>505</sup> Ricoeur, *On Metaphor*, p. 144 final italics mine.

anyone attempts to communicate metaphorically. Metaphors, on our views, are employed when a speaker is faced with explaining, thinking about, or designating, something about which they lack general familiarity, or about which there is active uncertainty or confusion.<sup>506</sup> The use of a metaphor “solves” the confusion.<sup>507</sup> With this in mind, we might ask: “What kinds of confusions, problems, enigmas, etc., could I convince myself that I’ve solved by giving myself a bump to the head?” Although, of course, it isn’t implausible that delivering a bump to one’s own head might help solve some kind of confusion or help someone to better understand something, but what is important is *how* metaphors achieve this goal. Metaphors function through the initiation of embodied responses that designate the enacting of forms of perception and motility. A bump to the head might compel a response, but nothing in its occurrence designates the range, locus, or conditions of response. It is the designation of response which makes it possible that, through metaphor, one could enter into a shared practice of enacting an organized behavior. It is on this basis that metaphors can sustain *practices of perception and response* that can facilitate discovery and new behavioral practices.

The limitation of the comparison to bumps to the head signals some of the very important ways in which metaphors *are* like jokes. By posing these open questions to the ways in which

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<sup>506</sup> Although Black appears to suggest that this is primarily the case with catachrestic metaphors, which fill the gaps in a vocabulary.

<sup>507</sup> Perhaps we might say that the use of a metaphor *salves* the confusion... It seems to me to be far too hopeful to imagine that metaphors are *solutions* to enigmas. This is an important insight because it seems to me that metaphors can convince us that we have solved problems when no such thing has taken place at all. A metaphor may very well quell our confusion, by giving us something more familiar and easier to reflect upon, but in that very same move, the metaphor can thereby mask the problem, giving us unhelpful solutions—solutions that are more about self-satisfaction than about developing productive vocabularies. This is, in fact, most frequently the case. It might seem odd that I articulate this danger in this way, as it seems to mirror many of the concerns articulated by the history of philosophy that much of this work is set against. The difference with my position is that this fact does not warrant the belief that metaphors are, in any way, inherently problematic or secondary. Metaphors often *do* offer important solutions, but their success and failure in this regard is dependent on a range of mostly unpredictable factors. And furthermore, the efficacy of metaphors in general, seems to me to be no more or less likely to be successful than literal utterances or “more properly philosophical or scientific concepts.” We need only recall that the most common fate of a scientific hypothesis is being totally forgotten.

jokes function, I hope to better situate some of the important aspects of how metaphors function. The first important way in which jokes are like metaphors is that they signal an occasion to evaluate one's perceptions and experiences of familiar phenomena and familiar circumstances in a novel way.<sup>508</sup> Second, they reveal the excess of signification in the possibility of regular bodily responses. In the case of the joke, hilarity and laughter ensue, although, of course this is a contingent fact (as it is in case of all perlocutionary effects).<sup>509</sup> In the case of metaphors, they call upon embodied responses, at the time and place of their recognition, that depend on provoking specifically embodied, motile, and/or perceptual capacities. And third, as discursive, they imply a kind of sociality.

Metaphors *call out to the bodies* and solicit them in as many ways as is possible. Sometimes they hit their mark, but they mostly miss.<sup>510</sup> Each metaphorical locution is an attempt to call the body to order, to call upon the body's order, to call upon the resources of an interlocutor's body to establish congruence. The goal is a shared form of reaction, recognition, receptivity and orientation that can identify common ground in spaces of uncertainty, or that can fill in the gaps of intelligible experience. The scandal of metaphor is the scandal of the speaking body, only multiplied. Metaphor calls out not only to my interlocutor's body, but to my own body. It calls *us* to order, and in a certain sense, it calls us into contiguity, into proximity. We might say that the new congruence achieved in an apt metaphor is a congruence of bodies, calling out to themselves and to one another, to explore their sensibilities, and to discover the ways in which they can be shared. Importantly, this work is done surreptitiously. Not just

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<sup>508</sup> See Richard Rorty, "Unfamiliar Noises I—Hesse and Davidson on Metaphor" *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes, vol. 61 (1987) pp. 283-296

<sup>509</sup> This is related to Davidson's odd claim that there are no unfunny jokes. *ITI* p. 245

<sup>510</sup> This "mostly missing its mark" would be the condition indicated by the proliferation of poetic metaphors, but the relative scarcity, and *odd unity of catachrestic* (dead) metaphors. Jorge Luis Borges, *The Art of Fiction* No. 39 Interviewed by Ronald Christ <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4331/the-art-of-fiction-no-39-jorge-luis-borges>

everyone (anyone?), for example, would abide a detailed request, or a well-articulated argument as a *reason* to develop such congruence, to come into such proximity, at least not if they knew what they were doing. Not to mention the fact that it's not obvious that any form of language which is in the business of stating the facts (constatives, the literal), even has the resources to call the body to order, willingly.

### A Post-Liminary Outline

“a sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an eternal verity, eternally thought and spoken in the proximity of a present logos. The paradox to which attention must be paid is this: natural and universal writing, intelligible and nontemporal writing, is thus named metaphor.<sup>511</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

An effective metaphor draws the body into the interstice between illocution and perlocution. On one hand, its effects are entirely dependent on an interpreter's response.<sup>512</sup> On the other hand, once it has come into broad usage and has achieved uptake within a speech community, a conventional range of appropriate responses can become features of that community's public and institutional practices. As points of contrast, it is worth noting that an effective metaphor is unlike perlocution to the extent that metaphors do announce the conditions—or perhaps loci—of response; although we might just as easily say, conditions or loci of satisfaction. *Metaphors call out to specific sensibilities, patterns of embodied activity and response, and even specific body parts, as the conditions of perlocutionary satisfaction.* But unlike illocutions, the conditions of metaphorical satisfaction ultimately precede any possible conventionality.<sup>513</sup> Metaphors can serve as a foundation of conventionality because they draw on

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<sup>511</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. p. 15

<sup>512</sup> It is important to note that the speaker of the metaphor is importantly among the hearers and respondents.

<sup>513</sup> There is a level of complexity here that is worth noting but, I think, not worth expanding upon here. I say “ultimately” to signal that many sensibilities and embodied responses are dependent on conventions of various sorts.

the organizing structure of speaking bodies. On the front end, the conditions of metaphorical efficacy are the same as they are with all perlocution: the results will be uncertain and unpredictable, and the explicit concerns of their announcement will not *preside* over the consequences of their employ. However, this is not to say that *nothing* will preside over their efficacy.

Here, it will be the limits, capacities, and the conditions of sociality—in terms of the social training and recognizable habits of bodies—that will preside over the success and failure of particular metaphors. While this is somewhat vague, it is important to note that this is no different than the conditions of success and failure of most other forms of embodied behavior (whether dancing, gardening, fist-fighting, seducing, or bow-hunting). For as many different bodies as there are, there are differing potentials and capacities for the performances of any tasks and of any actions. Organizing one's perceptions and bodily comportments in service to responding effectively and efficiently to one's environment is a fairly common aspect of the development of skillful embodied behavior. Such a goal is most salient, perhaps, in athletic training. To the extent that meaning is embodied, this connection should not come as a surprise. Furthermore, to the extent that athletic training is the training of both perceptions and forms of motility, it shares a parallel function with metaphors: metaphors are about getting the body into shape, so to speak.

This shaping of embodied response consists in a dynamic, if mostly unconscious, proprioceptive conventionality. We might approach this unconscious conventionality by

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Furthermore, at times such sensibilities and responses are *produced by* social conventions. Despite this fact, my argument depends on recognizing the limits and finitude of embodied acts. Such limits work both ways: bodies have a broad but limited range of possible sensibilities and responses, and there is therefore a limit to which such conventions may shape embodied responses. Detailing such limits go beyond the scope of this paper, and is ultimately an empirical matter. Nevertheless, I maintain that identifying this range is possible in principle, even if not in fact, currently.

reference to the thought experiment I posed in a previous section.<sup>514</sup> In response to the possible repercussions of the use of deviant vocalization, our proto-locutor was compelled to recognize the spaces in which her natural sensibilities could be safely expressed, as well as the spaces in which she would be unfree to vocalize. In this, her body and perceptions are called into a certain range of operation, a certain shape of vocal freedom. I want to emphasize here that this “shape” is not metaphorical, and also to emphasize that this denial of metaphoricity can be read on multiple levels. The first level is that even if the space of our proto-locutor’s vocal freedom is amorphous, perhaps immeasurable, and perhaps not specifically determinable, it is still spatial. To the extent that these spaces are enforced, these are boundaries that we have no reason to designate as metaphorical. Furthermore—and perhaps more interestingly—as I alluded to before, the possibility of referring to such shapes as metaphorical depends firstly on the *codification* of enforceable discursive boundaries, and secondly on the possibility of effectively employing particular terms within the scope of *other* enforceable codified discursive spaces. As it stands, the shape of a speaker’s embodiment precedes, and as we will see, *enables* the possibility of articulating metaphoricity. This shape, therefore, is not a metaphor. This shape is what Derrida calls a philosopheme.

Metaphors redirect and reorganize the communicating body’s always already present shape by virtue of calling on aspects of its always already present order and organization. But, to repeat, most such calls yield nebulous responses. Such metaphorical use we call poetic. Poetic metaphors affect us, and they do so by virtue of their capacity to call out to our bodies, to provoke the enactment of some embodied sensibility. The metaphors that I am most interested in, what I’ve been calling “effective” metaphors, philosophical metaphors, dead metaphors, and

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<sup>514</sup> “A Preliminary Outline.” The section begins on p. 306, above, and the thought experiment begins on p. 310.

catachrestic metaphors operate on the same basis, but through them, something distinctive is achieved: the development and maintenance of publicly recognized and enacted forms of embodied response.

In light of this, it seems to me that Derrida's suggestion, in "White Mythology," that the metaphor is like a failed promise, always promising more than it can give, might stand in need of some revision.<sup>515</sup> There is an extent to which most metaphors will be subject to such a description. Most metaphors remain poetic. They thus call out to bodies, provoking in them a call to action, but it is a call that ultimately leads nowhere—or at least nowhere specific—at least for now.<sup>516</sup> We may thus think of the poetic in terms of the failed promise, or, perhaps better, as a promise in suspension or in deferral. The live, poetic, metaphor solicits the body, but may or may not yield a return in the form of consummation. It may nudge us into attending to possible relations, or into noticing something vague, without provoking an intelligible response or a recognizable and shareable sensibility.

Catachrestic, "dead," metaphors, on the other hand, are those that have consummated a practice. They can be thought of in terms of metaphors that can or have delivered on their promise—even if they don't deliver *exactly what* they seem to promise.<sup>517</sup> Catachrestic, "dead,"

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<sup>515</sup> See *MP* p. 209

<sup>516</sup> It is important to remember that the distinction between a poetic and a philosophical/catachrestic metaphor is an entirely functional distinction. There is nothing to prevent a poetic metaphor that currently leads us nowhere from becoming surprisingly effective in some unexpected way in the future.

<sup>517</sup> According to Derrida, they promise the full presence of knowledge in the form of the concept. I agree that, read this way, any metaphor would fail to live up to its promise. Although given Derrida's response to Searle's conception of the promise, we might wonder whether the promise of the full presence of knowledge in the form of the concept can reasonably be taken as a promise. It seems to me that this would be more of a threat.

Beyond this, to the extent that what a metaphor can deliver is a pattern of perception and response, those that can consummate a practice might seem to be preferable in some definitive sense. This is not the case. There is no guarantee, for example, that a catachrestic metaphor facilitates a valuable practice. Although it is ultimately an empirical question, I would expect that many such metaphors can enable a shared practice simply because they provoke an enjoyable pattern of response. This, by itself, is not problematic, but it is likely to be at odds with the efforts of those who are motivated by the pursuit of literal or objective truth. This is not to say that metaphors cannot bear literal or objective truth, it is just to say that it would be due to a stroke of luck, and not one of rigor, that such a metaphor would come to function literally or objectively.

metaphors call out to the body and call our bodies to order in such a way that, perhaps unexpectedly, enables the possibility of shared sensibilities by compelling forms of recognition and response which—serendipitously—enable new practices by virtue of the application of one’s embodied responses in unexpected, yet productive, ways. It is for this reason that the moniker “dead” metaphor strikes me as so particularly inept. As Searle, in his treatment of dead metaphor observes, “to speak oxymoronically, dead metaphors have lived on.<sup>518</sup>” But the case is stronger still—“dead” metaphors live on *in* and *as* our bodies. Dead metaphors live on as the forms and figures of our holds on the world, of our openings into the world. “Dead” metaphors animate our lives by animating and retracing our bodies, by guiding our movements and our perceptions, and thereby shaping our minds.

### Poetry and Seduction, Life and Death

“...because we cannot specify any *one* bodily action which we call pointing to the shape (as opposed, for example, to the colour), we say that a *spiritual* [mental, intellectual] activity corresponds to these words. Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a *spirit*.<sup>519</sup>”

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

“...the horror some readers feel in reading Derrida, which is in the end the same horror that the same readers feel in reading Nietzsche, stems from the fact that Derrida, like Nietzsche, invokes the threat of a self lacking in the inviolable nucleus of rational deliberation which according to the rationalist model constitutes the unity of the self.<sup>520</sup>”

—Bernard Harrison

It is doubtlessly worth investigating how we’ve been called to order, and what such shaping has produced. We must therefore begin to consider the orders, the structures, and the figures, into which *we’ve* been called. The clues we must interrogate in service to such an inquiry are the catachrestic metaphors that, in spite of the vast and persistent effort at their neutralization,

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<sup>518</sup> *Metaphor and Thought* “Searle ‘79” p. 88

<sup>519</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* §36 p. 18e

<sup>520</sup> Bernard Harrison, “‘White Mythology’ Revisited: Derrida and his Critics on Reason and Rhetoric.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1999) p. 527-8.



still animate, activate, and permeate the life of the mind. Catachrestic metaphors are the dead metaphors which live on, and do so silently, lingering in the shadow of the very discourse that has so very often harbored the watchmen, guarding against such intrusions. In this broad, preliminary, exploration of the possible field of metaphorology, the persistence of the catachrestic metaphor of metaphor, and its pair, the metaphor of theory, have been emphasized as central. Still, there are other figures that prefigure and subtly guide the movement of philosophy, defining its limits and its purviews, its deaths and its wellsprings. I've been motivated, in part, by the aims of ordinary language philosophy, and the goal of drawing philosophy away from the extraordinary excesses of metaphysics. The hope is to return thought to the ambit of the everyday and mundane. What we find, however, is that the the ordinary is yet revealed as extraordinary, as a mythic depth, as an illusion that nevertheless reflects in the mirror of nature. Try as we might to escape, it appears that speaking bodies are accidental artists, inevitably caught in a web of our own verse.

Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* is, among other things, an inquiry into the emergence and development of *our* shared moral sensibilities.<sup>521</sup> In it, in a move that is nothing less than Austinian, he organizes his inquiry into the meaning of responsibility by reference to the structure of the promise. He surmises that it is as promise makers, as human bodies engaged in the act of promising and coping with the extant consequences of such an act, that the sense of subjectivity as a singular, discrete, identity was born. The promising body finds itself *bound* to a future, organized, *shaped*, and *constrained* by the dictates of its utterances.<sup>522</sup> And in this, we find

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<sup>521</sup> The speech community in which we are involved. Presumably one can ask the policers, the enforcers, who they would include, allow, to be in such a community. I'm satisfied to simply engage with those who call their own names.

<sup>522</sup> Although, of course, some promises aren't exactly uttered *by individuals*. In most cases, the biggest promises that one has to live up to are the product of a long lineage of inheritance.

an entryway to a fairly dramatic insight concerning the paradigmatic case of the illocution.

Shoshanna Felman tells us that the promise of the speaking body reveals the subversion of consciousness, and it does so because it demonstrates that consciousness cannot secure its own status even when the nature of the locution, the nature of the promise, implies its necessity.

Nietzsche provides us with something of a parallel vision, although from a different direction. He tells us that

Precisely this is the long history of the origins of *responsibility*. As we have already grasped, the task of breeding an animal that is permitted to promise includes, as condition and preparation, the more specific task of first making man to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular, and accordingly predictable...however much hardness, tyranny, mindlessness, and idiocy may be inherent in it: with the help of the morality of custom and the social straightjacket man was *made* truly calculable.<sup>523</sup>

First-personal responsibility is a product of the promise, and of the necessary training that enables human beings to live according to the dictates that promising demands. It is the product of calling the body to a more or less predictable order. As such, it depends on *the kinds of bodies that can approximate that order*, on the kinds of bodies *that can live up to the promise*. As it is with every capacity of embodied action, some bodies are more and some bodies are less capable of rising to the call of their own promises. Living up to the promise is the basis for a kind of moral training and subjectification that reinforces the belief in the integrity of its supposed origin.

In recounting this process, Nietzsche is revealing the ways in which means and ends have gotten confused. We speak and live as if the subject were the guarantor of the promise, as if the subject were the condition of last appeal and authority, when the subject is actually a product of the promise, and a contingent one, at that. What we read as subversion in Felman, is best read as a subversion by contrast: it is the subversion of the *presupposed* belief in a sovereign subject.

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<sup>523</sup> GM p. 36

What we see in Nietzsche, however, is *the emergence of a contingent subject which aims to be sovereign, yet portrays itself as if this were an essential feature of its nature*. In either case, in the revelation of the promise we find a dissolution of the presumed integrity of consciousness; although in Nietzsche's case it may be more to the point to say that we find the conditions of subjective identity's unstable emergence and persistence.

In Nietzsche's presentation, the structure of consciousness reveals its catachrestic constitution. To the extent that the regulation of speech can create safe and unsafe spaces for forms of discursivity, the contours of such spaces are *mirrored* in the shaping of our bodies. The human body is constrained as it is trained to operate within the publicly established ambit of morality. There is no obvious limit to the range of such constraints, and the conditions of such constraints are reiterated in every utterance where the recognition of propriety is called for. As such constraints proliferate, these limiting forces become an increasingly persistent and productive features of discursive agency. He writes:

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn themselves inwards*—this is what I call the *internalizing* of man: thus first grows in man that which he later calls his "soul." The entire inner world, originally thin as if inserted between two skins, has spread and unfolded, has taken on depth, breadth, and height to the same extent that man's outward discharging has been *obstructed*.<sup>524</sup>

As the body enacts its designated range of motion, coping simultaneously with the boundaries of its safe spaces for locution, the recognition emerges that one is free to narrate one's private experiences as instinctively and dynamically as one likes, so long as one keeps one's locutions to oneself. This is a description of the birth and development of the *interior* monologue; it is a description of the birth of the model of the subject that organizes consciousness as if it were some kind of interior space which is presided over by a self whose primary access to the truth of the world is in terms of *inner vision*, in terms of that which can be *seen, reflected upon*, and

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<sup>524</sup> GM II 16 p. 57

*represented*. This is a space in which the risks and uncertainties of the world can be laid to rest, if one is clever enough. It is a space in which one can claim mastery over the world, so long as one has mastery over thoughts. This model, as we've seen, marks out a fairly persistent ideal for philosophy, and it does so catachrestically. Recall that as Ricoeur reports on philosophy's role in general, *vis a vis* metaphor's role in philosophy, he has this to say:

The ordered equivocalness of being and poetic equivocalness move on radically distinct levels. *Philosophical discourse sets itself as the vigilant watchman overseeing the ordered extensions of meaning*; against this background, the *unfettered* extensions of meaning in poetic discourse spring free.<sup>525</sup>

As it is with the components of the metaphor of metaphor, this model is of a piece with, and descriptive of, forms of behavior that are conditioned by particular forms of regulation; it is exemplary of the regulatory effects of the obligations which are entailed by promising. Its organizational structure is already in development with the very first act of regulation insofar restrictions *produce* the presumed discursive agent as the putative *source* of deviance.<sup>526</sup> Subsequently, this product is taken to be *the locus of responsibility*, as the evident ideal source of the failed promise, and, just as importantly, as the evident ideal source of the promise kept.<sup>527</sup> This model of subjectivity has proven to be quite a prized possession, what Nietzsche refers to as

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<sup>525</sup>TRM p. 308 italics mine.

<sup>526</sup> Even though, of course, it is the will to regulate that produces the *boundaries* according to which deviance becomes a possibility.

<sup>527</sup> This is also, for Nietzsche, the source of the possibility of thinking of the human being in terms of a kind of self-congratulatory rationally autonomous *sovereign*. "If, on the other hand, we place ourselves at the end of the enormous process, where the tree finally produces its fruit, where society and its morality of custom finally brings to light that *to which* it was only the means: then we will find as the ripest fruit on its tree the *sovereign individual*, the individual resembling only himself, free again from the morality of custom, autonomous and supermoral (for "autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive), in short, the human being with his own independent long will, the human being who *is permitted to promise*—and in him a proud consciousness, twitching in all his muscles, of what has finally been achieved and become flesh in him, a true consciousness of power and freedom, a feeling of the completion of man himself. This being who has become free, who is really permitted to promise, this lord of the free will, this sovereign—how could he not know what superiority he thus has over all else that is not permitted to promise and vouch for itself, how much trust, how much fear, how much reverence he awakens—he "*earns*" all three—and how much this mastery over himself also necessarily brings with it mastery over circumstances, over nature and all lesser-willed and more unreliable creatures." *GM* p. 36-7

“the best article of faith on earth.<sup>528</sup>” It represents a well-ordered existence and hence the possibility of a well ordered form of knowledge which can, in some measure, take hold of, comprehend, that order. It represents the possibility of univocity in the development of a well-regulated form of discourse which can maintain the integrity of its own boundaries, and thereby preserve the appropriate pathways for meaningful communication. It represents the centerpiece of the metaphor of theory, and, perhaps with good reason, it is the aspect of this metaphor that will be the least likely to be relinquished.

The interior subjective agent and that which it organizes is so crucial to our day to day lives that to relinquish it, or to demonstrate its absence, is likely to be met with confusion, fear, or powerful opposition. The preservation of its integrity is generally assumed<sup>529</sup> and its staying power is a function of that which preserves the status of all catachrestic metaphors: that it calls out to the human body, compelling its figure and form, by virtue of a familiar script, for the acting out and reenacting of a recognizable practice. This is the case with all catachrestic metaphors. What is commonly referred to as a dead metaphor is best understood an abbreviated and often unconscious convention. Such metaphors are abbreviated and often unconscious—yet codified—rituals, organized in connection to the reenacting of forms of embodiment and behavior that have come to be productive in unrecognized and unpredictable ways.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> *GM* p.26

<sup>529</sup> Reinforced, doubtlessly, by vestiges of the elaborate narratives that have come to be associated with its centrality.

<sup>530</sup> Importantly, this is no different than the way any other mark functions. Marks are simply the occasion for the possibility of agreement. Agreement can be expressed in many ways, whether it be through enacting some set of embodied rules or rituals, or through verbally responding in ways that have become familiar and expected. Literal meaning is, in principle, no different. What sets literal meaning apart is not the language, sentences, words, or communicative acts. Literality is about the kinds of agreement that are sought, and the ways in which agreements are reinforced—and enforced—as a precondition for further agreement. An exemplary occasion for literal communication occurs when agreements are passed on, established, and inherited. Such agreements then become marks themselves. The literal then prefigures the set of implied agreements that set the ground rules for further agreement. There is value in enforcing the literal because challenging the implied and inherited agreements also challenges the possibility of agreements, both prior and future—beyond that, those who challenge shared and familiar agreements are signaled as outsiders, and as potential threats. The metaphor of theory and the metaphor of metaphor reinforce implied and inherited agreements by giving them a symbolic form to which one may give an

That these metaphors are productive, and that they have become essential to organizing aspects of our social lives, however, does not mean that we can take them for granted, nor does it mean that their theoretical integrity—no matter their practical efficacy—can be justified. And with this insight, we will return again to Derrida and Austin, revisiting what might be the least understood aspect of “Signature, Event, Context.” Considering the development of some of my intervening arguments, we can restate what Derrida wanted of Austin a bit more precisely. There are two crucial aspects of what Derrida wants of Austin: Derrida wants a consistent, non-semantic, non-logocentric, conception of locutionary force from Austin, and he thinks that this cannot be achieved so long as Austin clings to the metaphors of metaphor and the metaphor of theory. The second aspect of what Derrida wants of Austin is the recognition that carrying out what speech-act theory implies requires abandoning the classical subject as the guarantor and ordering authority.

At the very least, speech act theory calls for a fleshing out of the Austinian subject. This is especially the case if the source of the subject’s authority is not identifiable as an “inward or spiritual act.” Shoshana Felman’s treatment of the embodied performative goes a long way toward this end, meanwhile drawing Derrida’s questions and Austin’s potential into very tight proximity. Though primarily focused on Austin, her treatment of the performative opens onto the graphematic predicates that Derrida underscores in his treatment of iterability. To repeat, what

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embodied response. The advantage of such metaphors is that they seem “objective” insofar as they are object-like in description. The second advantage they have is that they compel agreements about the shape and trajectory of inheritance and lineage—in that sense, they create a positive feedback loop with the inherited agreements by marking out the appropriate boundaries, directions, and paths, according to which knowledge and truth can mobilize. Literal vocabularies can be enforced and reinforced with more and less justification: we might compare, for example, the difference between contemporary chemistry and pan-Islamism. Although there are vast differences in the levels of regulation and enforcement that these different vocabularies require, the demand for regulation in the broadest sense is the target. Derrida is not arguing that such enforcement is inherently problematic (and neither am I). He is simply demonstrating that such enforcement is an essential feature of philosophy, and of any stable vocabulary, despite the fact that philosophers are often at pains to suggest otherwise.

Felman's subject reveals is *the inevitability of the body's failure, the inevitability of the body's absence*. She reveals that the essence of the embodied subject is in its *inability* to vouch for the order of things, in the revelation of the *impossibility* of a guarantor, and in the *subversion* of the integrity of consciousness.<sup>531</sup> In this conception of the embodied speaking subject, we get a conception of the *source* of locution (even if not yet the source of locutionary force) that does, in fact, treat infelicity as an essential predicate or law.

What I add to Derrida's wish-list, and what I see as an extension of Felman's work, is the need to develop a more thorough conception of the risks associated with locutionary force. This, in turn, calls for a broader treatment of perlocution. And where Derrida wants to redefine force in terms of the graphematic predicates, my strategy is to define locutionary force in terms of perlocution and patterned embodied response. Identifying force in this way enables me to answer Derrida, his critics, and his contemporaries, concerning the questions of meaning, structure, and the efficacy of language, all while establishing a basis for the systematic comprehension of the conditions for the intelligibility, the congruity, and the meaning of metaphors. What a focus on perlocution enables is the recognition that metaphors operate in

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<sup>531</sup> We might think of Felman's subversion of consciousness and Nietzsche's emergence of consciousness as two ends of a narrative that can be nicely tied together with Derrida's conception of writing: "as writing, communication, if we retain that word, is not the means of the transference of meaning, the exchange of intentions and meanings [vouloir-dire], discourse and the 'communication of consciousnesses.' We are witnessing not an end of writing that would restore, in accord with McLuhan's ideological representation, a transparency or an immediacy to social relations; but rather the increasingly powerful historical expansion of a general writing, of which the system of speech, *consciousness and meaning*, presence, truth, etc. would only be an *effect*, and should be analyzed as such." *LI* p. 20; *MP* p. 329 It seems to me that in Searle's work we may see an accidental connection here, although I surmise that it is the product of a kind of contradiction. These are the final lines of "Reiterating the Differences": "Iterability—both as exemplified by the repeated use of the same word type and as exemplified by the recursive character of syntactical rules—is not as Derrida seems to think something that is in conflict with the intentionality of linguistic acts, spoken or written, it is necessary presupposition of the forms which intentionality takes." P. 208 Written in this way, it seems to suggest that the intentionality of consciousness depends on, presupposes, the structure of language. Also the quote that "*a meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act*" seems to, in a less direct way, imply the same. Both statements seem to contradict the general formulation of the intentionality of language which, according to Searle, *is derived from, and transferred to* language from consciousness. See *Consciousness and Language* p. 77

service to the facilitation of *intimacy* by compelling contiguous, congruent, *and shared bodily compartments*. This contiguity, this congruence of bodies I will call *mimesis*. This term imposes itself here as a measure of both the proximity and the distance between Derrida's position and mine. In "White Mythology," Derrida calls upon this term as an exemplary component of Aristotle's treatment of metaphor. *Mimesis*, imitation, we are told, is what is natural, proper, to man. Through it, nature (*physis*), in general is revealed. Derrida writes:

*Physis* is revealed in *mimesis*, or in the poetry which is a species of *mimesis*, by virtue of the hardly apparent structure which constrains *mimesis* from carrying to the exterior the fold of its redoubling. It belongs to *physis*, or, if you will, *physis* includes its own exteriority and its double. In this sense, *mimesis* is therefore a "natural" movement...naturalness in general says itself, resembles itself, knows itself, appears to itself, reflects itself, and "mimics" itself par excellence and in truth in human nature. *Mimesis* is proper to man. Only man imitates properly. Man alone takes pleasure in imitating, man alone learns to imitate, man alone learns by imitation. The power of truth, as the unveiling of nature (*physis*) by *mimesis*, congenitally belongs to the physics of man, to anthropophysics. Such is the natural origin of poetry, and such is the natural origin of metaphor...<sup>532</sup>

*Mimesis* is representation. It is proper imitation. Such representation is what is proper to man. It is the measure of human nature, *of a human's nature*, to represent that which is natural within ourselves; to reflect, imitate, and represent what is natural in the human is what separates *us* from the beasts. It is the gift of human genius, of generosity, bestowed upon us through nature.

*Mimesis*, thus, implies a kind of unbroken circuit. *Physis* as origin, as nature, is that from which human nature arises. As such, a true understanding of *mimesis* reveals that nature imitates itself, shows itself from itself, in the proper movement of representation. It is the prospect of such a self-showing, an original, natural, univocal, and foundational meaning that organizes Derrida's response to much of the history of philosophy. Thus, his strategy is focused on demonstrating that all such origins hide, all such circuits spiral off, in unforeseen ways; there is always one more twist, always one more turn. Such inevitable twisting and turning is inherent to representation. Thus, on his view, there can be no fixed origin and no fixed destination which

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<sup>532</sup> *MP* p. 237



could support the integrity, the meaning, or the content of a mark. His recourse to iterability signals what remains of the efficacy of the mark once it is loosed of the burdens of the untenable conceptions of communication and truth which pervade philosophical discourse.<sup>533</sup>

I call on *mimesis* because, unlike Derrida, it seems to me that that the minimum formal and ideal structure of iterability cannot be reduced to the mark *itself*. On my view, marks are employed, and thus, *enacted*. Inscription is an irreducibly embodied behavior. More to the point, inscription is an *expansively* embodied behavior. Bodies, their limits, and their finitude, are the condition for graphematics in general. We can make this argument, in a certain sense, as a radicalization of Derrida's treatment of the graphematic predicates. It is in the body's capacity for imitation, as mimetic; as adequating and as revealing; as recognizing and as repeating; as proprioceptive and as receptive; as attempting, as succeeding, and as failing; as absencing in the subversion of conscious intention—as iterable—that makes writing, as such, possible. In this, we can answer a generally neglected set of questions, perhaps too often taken *rhetorically*. In “Signature, Event, Context,” Derrida poses these enigmatic and revealing questions: “What would be a mark that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost along the way?”<sup>534</sup>

If we limit our concerns to marks as inscriptions on a page, then it seems that we must concede Derrida's point: that it is iterability that constitutes the possible—if minimal—integrity of the mark, and that iterability implies the loss of any origin, an inherent lack of originality that precedes the possibility of origins. If, on the other hand, we recognize the irreducible locus of

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<sup>533</sup> Aside from, but importantly related to, the thinkers I've directly addressed in this essay, it is important to note, from a different perspective, the two conceptions of truth that more directly occupy his attention. On one hand, there is *mimesis* as representational truth, as an adequation between words and things, concepts and objects. And on the other, *mimesis* as the “inscription on the soul,” the self-showing phenomenological receptivity to truth exemplified in Husserl's intuitionism and in Heidegger's treatment of *aletheia*, as revealed truth (See Christopher Norris' *Derrida*, pp. 46-62) My conception, here, is meant to draw on both conceptions without drawing on the primacy of the conscious representational subject that underwrites *mimesis* as adequation and, at least Husserl's intuitive intentionality.

<sup>534</sup> *MP* p. 321; *LI* p 12

embodiment in the efficacy of discourse, these two questions come apart at their roots. The body as mark, will always run the risk of losing its origins, but what would it mean to “cite” a body? A body can, of course, be imitated, but owing to the body’s inherent capacity for failure, its inherent absencing, there is no minimum integrity which can be maintained through citation. It is the body’s radical limitations—its capacity for death—that renders it non-iterable. It is for this very reason that, although it may lose its own origins, it can nevertheless become a kind of origin in itself.

It seems to me that Derrida may have begun to find what he was looking for in Austin had either of them given a more thorough consideration of meaning and function of perlocution. In “Signature, Event, Context,” perlocution is never given any direct consideration. This limits the scope of Derrida’s analysis because the structure of linguistic efficacy, as iterability is only suitable for contending with illocution. The function of iterability that he describes is one that requires the *conventionality*, the *recognizable* iterability, of the mark. Perlocution, on the other hand, can only be identified on the basis of the unpredictable, affective, emotional, and above all *nonconventional*, bodily responses that one may have to any possible locution; and importantly, *such responses may very well be equally suited to non locutionary events and stimuli*—responses which may be equally suited to no specific locution, responses which may be equally suited to silence, to absence. This possibility is one which actually reinforces Derrida’s broad claims about what cannot be constrained by the concept of communication: the unpredictability and the potentially *absent source* of force is definitive of perlocutionary acts. The structure of perlocution and the embodiment of speaking subjects, in their capacity for failure and death, should be central among what Derrida would call graphematic in general.

This insight fairly dramatically alters how we should interpret the meaning and role of the signatures that are meant to serve as a proxy for Austin's subject as guarantor. Reading the bodily presence of the speaker as the final, yet inherently failing, source, and reading the signature as the perfect reproduction of the absencing presence of that source, as a restoration of the pure event of the production of the original act, would no longer be possible. So when Derrida writes "For the attachment to the source to occur, the absolute singularity of an event of the signature and of a form of the signature must be retained: the pure reproducibility of a pure event."<sup>535</sup> This treatment may appear reasonable to the extent that we retain the position of the classical disembodied subject, but the same cannot be said for the presence of the speaker, *so long as the speaker is embodied*. Thus, if we look to Derrida's argument against Austin's "justification of last appeal," we see that his position can be satisfied by the embodied subject. The subject as the speaking body *cannot guarantee the signature*, because the speaking body can guarantee nothing. Considered in the widest possible context, any such guarantee must be recognized as, at best, a hopeful fiction, a bit of play acting, that could not, strictly speaking, be meant *seriously*. But, of course, there *are* signatures, and as Derrida readily agrees, their effects "are the most ordinary thing in the world."<sup>536</sup> What is interesting is how the ordinariness of the signature enables the persistence of the theatric ritualistic, catachrestic, internal space which is inhabited by the mythical signatory—and vice versa.

What we see here are two aspects of the subject, what we might call the ordinary and the extraordinary. If one were so inclined, one might read into this a kind of proxy for the ordinary and the metaphysical. This would not be entirely wrong. The specific difference that I hope to convey is that the extraordinary, the metaphysical, is "the most ordinary thing in the world." The

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<sup>535</sup> *MP* p. 328

<sup>536</sup> *MP* p. 328

mythical subject<sup>537</sup>, with its *internalized and reflected cognitive content*, and its *representational images* of the world is far more common than even the “devastating banality<sup>538</sup>” of the fact of the existence and efficacy of signatures. What we see in this, though, are the beginnings of an articulation of how we’ve come to imagine that there might be a central distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, between thought and language, between the literal and the metaphorical. What we see here is dual, but it is perfectly mundane. These two aspects of the subject, the ordinary and the extraordinary, track different ways of calling out to bodies, and the different scripts according to which bodies are compelled to respond.

More directly, the subject of the signature functions by virtue of a conventional, publicly recognizable, illocutionary call. In this, it calls the body to order within the scope of shared conventions of responsibility. It is organized by the codified, *written*, authority of the legal and social apparatus, ultimately enforced by the executors of its code, by the enforcers of its boundaries. These features, however extant, make up the possibility of such an illocution’s context, its stability, and its felicity conditions. This is the reason that, for Derrida, theorizing only the conditions of felicity would inevitably fail to account for locutionary force. This strategy fails because it fails to account for the effort that must necessarily go into organizing and establishing its conditions. It thereby fails to acknowledge the reason for this effort: the inevitability of loss. Without watchmen and enforcers, there would be no locutionary force.

The mythical, metaphorical, catachrestic, subject functions, in part, by virtue of a perlocutionary call. It calls the body to order according to its shaping, according to the possibilities of its training, and according to its capacities for response. In other words, the catachrestic subject functions according to *whether* it can answer to the perlocutionary call. As it

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<sup>537</sup> Along with the ghostly semantic contents and their supposed vehicles.

<sup>538</sup> From Cavell’s description of the import of Austin’s treatment of the signature, “WDA” p. 60.

always is with perlocution, there is a certain amount of chance at play in the possibility of answering such calls; but, as I mentioned before, success, in this regard, is not *simple* luck. Metaphors call out to the body in unconventional, but specifiable, ways. They call out to the body in terms of proprioception, and in terms of our forms behavior and motility. It is in this way, again, that we might characterize metaphors as the kinds of perlocutions that *do* announce their conditions of satisfaction. The key to the efficacy and staying power (some would call it the *death*) of catachrestic metaphors is that they consistently prove to call bodies into forms of order that enable familiar and publicly recognizable social practices, even when that to which we respond is forgotten, or is lived as a myth, or as a fantasy.

Although both the ordinary and the extraordinary are, on my account, perfectly ordinary, there are important differences that still bear heavily on their function. For example, the illocutionary subject is only as stable as the conventions through which it can be enacted. This is for the simple reason that the illocutionary subject *is part of the convention*; frequently enough, subjects have to be ritually inaugurated into the convention—they have to be *appropriately inscribed*, or prepared, in order to be successful participants. In some cases, being so inscribed is central to the possible felicity conditions of some convention. Likewise, participants will be differently bound to the convention by virtue of the roles that they play, by virtue of the part they play in the convention's script. The catachrestic subject, on the other hand, is only as stable as her embodiment enables; this can only be defined in terms of her affective and effective responses to particular perlocutionary calls. In order to clarify this point, it might be helpful to return to a question posed by Ricoeur but also probably generally implied by any study of metaphor in philosophy.

We return again to the question of the difference between poetic and philosophical metaphors. Poetic metaphors are those which call out to the body but fail to achieve a stable, recognizable, and publicly sharable embodied response. Such a failure could be attributed to the call, as in cases where the sensibility which may be provoked by the call is simply not particularly salient for a potential responder. Such a failure might be attributed to the narrow range of possible response i.e. that the pattern of response which is provoked is too subtle to be effectively enacted in a publicly recognizable way, or that could only be enacted in very particular circumstances. In any event, poetic metaphors are very local and transient in their effects. They might, in part, fit Davidson's model, but I think that they may be best described in terms of Ricoeur's: poetic metaphors are deviant but do not achieve new congruencies.<sup>539</sup>

Philosophical metaphors are types of catachrestic metaphors that function primarily on the basis of the efficacy of congruence, *mimesis*, itself. In other words, philosophical metaphors facilitate a range of shared responses to some phenomenon that prove to be *agreeable*, so to speak. For example (although this will have to remain somewhat oversimplified) that we have fairly broad history of philosophy that can share in the belief that communication is something like taking the contents from one's mind, putting those contents into the right kinds of words, and then sending those contents to a recipient, *happens* to be an intuitive model of communication and one that, because of some shared set of sensibilities, proves to be intransigent. For what we might call aesthetic reasons (although I prefer *proprioceptive* reasons), the metaphor of theory *just works* for us.<sup>540</sup> To further clarify, we might consider scientific metaphors to form a continuum with the philosophical and the poetic, suggesting that

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<sup>539</sup> This, again, is another reason that I find the live/dead metaphor to be badly employed. It seems to me that poetic metaphors might be best described as still-born if we stay within that frame...no one wants that.

<sup>540</sup> The metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory "work" for us because they enable the proprioceptive tendencies associated with mastery and authority.

generally speaking, in their basic function, or perhaps in terms of their origins, scientific metaphors and philosophical ones are similarly composed. The important differences would be the kinds of behaviors that such metaphors come to facilitate, and hence the conditions of their staying power and transformation.<sup>541</sup>

What is important is that thinking through metaphor in terms of perlocutionary force reveals quite a lot about our relationships with, in, and through, our own language use. What is solicited from speech communities are conventions, norms of recognition, embodied positions, and shared sensibilities. Once we hit upon figures that facilitate congruent responses, we come to try to enact the space of discourse that is implied by the various ways in which we are called to order. Along with the metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory, we find ourselves enacting these metaphorical dictates by trying to state our intentions with specificity and within the appropriate boundaries which we take to be an essential, irrevocable, aspect of the effort to communicate. Doing so becomes part of our *responsibility*, as appropriate discourse implies the presence of our consciousness and a certain kind of fidelity between its presence, that in it which can be represented, and that which can be said. Thus, speaking with such correlations in mind have become, *to a certain kind of thinker*, part of the promise of truth-speaking and reasoning. Such thinkers have been seduced into forgetting about the contingencies of embodied existence, the fickle desires, the need for proximity, and the need to touch and connect with others. They thus ignore, mask, exile, and finally *pretend to kill* the unshakable evidence of its inevitable presence. But they will not succeed. They will not succeed because their own speaking

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<sup>541</sup> The kinds of behaviors to which I'm referring in the sciences are experimental practices. Because such practices tend to require high degrees of precision, it is easier to identify the practical import and value of such metaphors. It is therefore easier to know when such a description is effective and when it is not. A good scientific metaphor enables one to effectively organize experiments and to articulate useful hypotheses. Because scientific methodology is, in part, organized around attempting to falsify its models and narratives, scientists are more receptive to revision and revolution in their metaphors than are philosophers.

bodies are announced, precariously called into being, and ordered, by the force of the very metaphors that they have, with a suspicious persistence, proclaimed dead.



## Chapter VI

# A Break from a Life in the Fields: Dead Metaphor, Social Death, and the Metaphors of Mastery

### Outline of *The Metaphor of Metaphor: An Analogy*

“Now, a ‘genealogical’ manner of questioning philosophers has emerged, thanks principally to Nietzsche, which does not limit itself to collecting *declared intentions but holds them in suspicion and seeks the motives and self-interests behind their reasons*. An entirely different sort of implication between philosophy and metaphor comes to light, which *links them at the level of their hidden presuppositions rather than at the level of their stated intentions*. It is not only the order of the terms that is inverted, philosophy preceding metaphor; but the mode of implication is itself reversed, the ‘un-thought’ of philosophy anticipating the ‘un-said’ of metaphor.<sup>542</sup>”

—Paul Ricoeur

“Metaphor, then, always carries its death within itself. And this death, surely, is also the death of philosophy. But the genitive is double. It is sometimes the death of philosophy, death of a genre belonging to philosophy which is thought and summarized within it, recognizing and fulfilling itself within philosophy; and sometimes the death of a philosophy which does not see itself die and is no longer to be refound within philosophy.<sup>543</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

I’ve identified and explored the odd and surprising role that metaphor has played in organizing a communicative tradition. To this point, I have largely emphasized the features of this role, and the ways in which a specific set of metaphors coordinate the organization of this tradition’s field. This field’s organization is centrally defined by the classical model of communication, its stage-setting, its actors, and its scripts. This model construes communication as having clear univocal features, such as the conscious speaking subject (the bearer of the signature), the singular and original act of meaningful communication and its direct transmission (the event), and the clear boundaries that regulate the meanings and effects of communication (the contexts). This model and its implications are features of the metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory. I hope to have shown that, despite the clear persistence this set of identifiable metaphors at the heart of this tradition, there has been an equally persistent effort to carefully regulate and minimize the role that metaphors should play within disciplined, codified,

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<sup>542</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *TRM*, p. 331 italics mine.

<sup>543</sup> *MP* p. 271

and authorized fields of discourse. The discipline of a certain kind of philosophy appears to demand this regulation and minimization.

I've argued, along with Nietzsche and Derrida, that this demand for regulation cannot be satisfied. I've argued further that interrogating the nature of this seemingly insatiable demand enables us to better describe a set of discursive behaviors and practices that, following Derrida, I broadly refer to as metaphysics. The effort to define metaphor and establish how metaphors work in philosophy is an exemplary case of the activity of metaphysics. What we've seen is that despite the clear centrality and systematicity of metaphors in philosophical discourse, many philosophers have gone to unusual lengths to deny that these centrally guiding features of this tradition are, in fact, metaphors. As I've shown, this denial is coupled with the claim that central ideas that are apparently mistaken for metaphors are, in fact, literal descriptions of actual phenomena. All this is stated with a cool confidence, despite the fact that this tradition has provided no consistent definition of literality.

We are thus left with a bit of a conundrum. It seems implausible, with so many able thinkers interrogating the structure, logic, grammar, and histories of discourse, that an idea as central as literality would remain so nebulous and/or contradictory. Beyond this, with so many careful thinkers keeping watch over the order of things, it seems highly unlikely that such a concept could be applied so confidently, consistently, and, as I've shown, paradoxically. Still, the primacy of the undefined literal is in ample evidence in the long tradition of theories of communication and meaning. The effort to excise metaphor or treat it as some secondary feature of language, while promoting the centrality of the still yet to be defined literal is so common that it often merits little critical attention. Despite this fact, even to this day, and to those for whom its role is so central, literality appears to be a fiction. But it is not just any fiction; it is a fiction

which is valued for its apparent centrality as a tool for preserving truth, eliminating falsehood and thereby holding together an entire universe of meaning. Maintaining the integrity of such universes, no matter the cost, is the key feature of the practice of metaphysics.

The case is stranger still, since many thinkers have been at least partially aware of this problem. Even if not consciously, there is nevertheless at least a tacit awareness of *some* problem, the evidence of which is the broadly shared solution. This solution, however, clearly requires an evident breach of disciplinary protocols by taking a leap into the imaginative, the metaphorical, and the mythical in order to make its case for the literal. In the rigor and seriousness demanded by the discipline, the problem of literality is solved by redrawing the lines between the true and the false, between the literal and the metaphorical, and perhaps most interestingly, enigmatically, and perhaps mythically, between the living and the dead. It is only by virtue of the silencing, the deactivation, the ignorance, and the disavowal of the force of “dead” metaphors that the integrity and authorized boundaries of the discipline can be taken seriously. The metaphors do all of the heavy lifting, and “the literal” gets all of the credit.

I hope to have shown how this leads to an odd, productive, and perhaps seductive, twist: that the concept of the dead metaphor haunts the boundaries of the literal, in clear defiance of the dictates of reason. This creates a kind of mythic zone where well-respected philosophers would rather surmise “spiritual” sources of meaning and truth, than to concede to what might otherwise seem obvious: that metaphors are central to human life, to human languages, and hence, to every aspect of our attempts to communicate. No amount of rigor, discipline, or seriousness can change this. Thus, despite how many complications this may entail, metaphors will be central to any systematic theories of meaning or communication. When given a careful analysis, the effort to

say otherwise begins to look like a lot of smoke and mirrors—like a deliberate cover-up. But what could motivate such an approach?

And we shouldn't forget that questioning this tradition draws us toward another figure which has been silently haunting the same spectral region that marks the limit of the discipline's hold on intelligibility and meaning. Here, it is the simple, mundane, living, breathing, speaking, human body that appears as an ordinary solution to the extraordinary problem of trying to identify the locus of meaning. As with metaphor, we have to confront the circumstances in which the human body is alienated from its obvious role. It seems totally implausible that the human body would, not only fail to be an obvious candidate for the locus of meaning, but that it would also be actively excluded from such inquiries. What would motivate such exclusions and denials of the obvious? What could motivate such masks and retreats?

The model of metaphor that I've forwarded suggests a method for beginning to answer such questions. Drawing on human bodies and behaviors as the condition for the responsivity and enactment of perlocutionary force enables us, and ultimately requires us, to look a bit more deeply into the behaviors that are solicited by, and enacted through, the classical model of communication. In other words, my model compels us to ask and answer what, exactly, is *embodied* in the classical model of communication. It is one thing to think of these metaphors as words, but another to think of them as acts. So far, the behaviors which are implied by the metaphors that characterize the classical model compose the following narrative: 1) a single, originating, consciousness, prepares intelligible content 2) in the internal space of the mind which is to be 3) transferred to, then transported in and by, carefully chosen carriers, which will then 4) move along authorized paths within carefully regulated boundaries, and 5) be carefully watched over so as to ensure that the dictates of the original consciousness are preserved, and

that the carrier reaches the prescribed destination intact. 6) Metaphors would be those instances when the carriers break from their designated paths and boundaries, and are therefore no longer under the authority of the originator, or under the purview of the watchman. 7) The originator and the watchman are motivated to either exclude or deny responsibility for these metaphors, or to try to return them to their originally designated pathways in order to preserve the integrity of the regulated boundaries, and the authority of original intent. 7) If an adequate return cannot be arranged, the message and intent may be lost, and the carrier—if noticed—is put to work in a new field, and declared dead.

My model implies that this system of metaphors would surreptitiously and systematically shape the behaviors and perceptions of those who were under its influence.<sup>544</sup> It also implies that the intelligibility of said metaphors would depend on, and/or produce, forms of behavior that define the community of speakers who were so influenced. If my model is correct, we should be able to propose a general hypothesis about the origins or uses of this system. Further, at the very least, we should be able to begin to identify evidence for its efficacy, intelligibility, and value. In closing, I will therefore attempt to answer the following questions: What would motivate the persistent exclusion or debasement of metaphor in the discipline of philosophy? What would motivate the persistent exclusion or denial of the human body in philosophy? Which forms of behavior are implied by the intelligibility of this set of interlocked metaphors? What values and behaviors are enacted in the metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory?

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<sup>544</sup> Carefully defining what it would mean to be under the influence of such metaphors will be an important project for the future. For now, I will define this in the following way: a person or a community is “under the influence” of those metaphors that they cannot acknowledge as being metaphors. One is under the influence of metaphors that one uses unconsciously. One is under the influence more deeply to the extent that they are not able to recognize that there could be alternative descriptions of the phenomena under review, and further still to the extent that they resist the idea that there even could be alternative descriptions, and further still when no such alternative description could be given—because some set of important phenomena which are taken to be independent are entirely metaphorical.

*The Death of Metaphor; A Metaphor of Death*

“Metaphysics—the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason... White mythology—metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest.<sup>545</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

“Each time polysemy is irreducible, when no unity of meaning is even promised to it, one is outside language. And consequently, outside humanity.<sup>546</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

The answer to these questions portends a peculiar parallel that none of the theories of metaphor that we’ve reviewed in this project could even begin to comprehend or explain. The forms of behavior which are implied by these metaphors are the behaviors of a particular kind of mastery. When thought in terms of forms of behavior, the basic attitude which is implied in the metaphors of theory and of metaphor has mastery as an origin, as a goal, and as a guarantor. Conscious deliberation, a capacity for evaluation, and the freedom to dictate and elucidate some aspect of the order of things are all presupposed in the classical model. The conscious agent perceives and grasps the order of the world, she then re-creates, represents, and reconstructs the truth out of tools of her own choosing, enabling her interlocutors to engage and encounter phenomena in a new and hopefully illuminating way. What mastery enables the truth-speaker to share is the product of her own labor of grasping, coordination, and conveyance.

When we follow the logic and narrative structure of such mastery, we find a noteworthy set of consequences. Among them is the propensity toward the elimination of the free movement of meaning.<sup>547</sup> In practical terms, this entails denial of the contributions to meaning of one’s

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<sup>545</sup> *MP* p. 213

<sup>546</sup> *MP* p. 248

<sup>547</sup> I have addressed this in many areas of this essay. The most direct treatment of this tendency is spelled out in the second section of Chapter 4. *Risk and Regulation*.

utterances that go beyond the master's intentions, including all that is contributed by the presence and value of the human body. Another consequence is the odd, looming, declaration of death that the master deploys when confronted with discovery of the kind of deviance which surreptitiously defies his intentions. The behaviors of mastery are responses to uncertainty and threat of the un-mastered body, and to any movement which could pose a threat to the recognized and enforced order of the world. If we look to forms of life and forms of behavior from which such a pattern of mastery could be drawn, we find that threats that are implied here implied are nowhere more dramatically exemplified than *in the figure of the slave*. Once this connection is made, further parallels emerge. Here we find yet another strange and impossible figure, and one that is, put to work in a highly regulated field, disavowed, devalued, and declared dead. My model enables us to interrogate this counterintuitive and startling parallel, and it enables us to see, with a surprising degree of order and regularity, the range and effects of this undeniable metaphorical organization.

This chain of reasoning brings us to yet another surprising parallel which is to be found in the central and shocking claim of Orlando Patterson's transformative text, *Slavery and Social Death*. Patterson argues that the worldwide and pervasive practice of slavery can be shown, in virtually every case, to be underwritten by the symbol of social death. His work records a discursive history of a powerful set of symbolic investments which demonstrate the ways in which discourse, and particularly metaphorical discourse, can come to order, define, and direct human bodies, human lives, and human civilization. Drawing on his insights enables us to see, with an arresting lucidity, the ways in which these metaphors have functioned to produce our sense of identity, our social roles, and some of the persistent the contours of our world. We are also able to see the ways in which these metaphors have come to shape bodies and minds.

Further, we are able to see why mastery over a domain of discourse seems to be saddled with an irrational need to hide or kill that which exceeds its authority.

In his essay, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” Vincent Brown offers the following characterization of the structure of slavery as social death, he writes: “slaveholders annihilated people socially by first extracting them from meaningful relationships that defined personal status and belonging, communal memory and collective aspiration and then incorporating these socially dead persons into the master’s world.<sup>548</sup>” In what I am presenting as far more than a simple coincidence, we might have recourse to a parallel description that Derrida gives regarding the methodological tendencies of the efforts to form a systematic and conceptual categorization of metaphor in philosophical discourse. He writes that:

One then would have to acknowledge the importation into so-called philosophical discourse of exogenous metaphors, or that of significations that become metaphorical in being transported out of their own habitat...this classification, which supposes an indigenous population and a migration, is usually adopted...*these taxonomical principles do not derive from a particular problem of method. They are governed by the concept of metaphor and by its system...*<sup>549</sup>

The concept of metaphor and its system, as I’ve shown, are organized by the vigilance of the authorizing subject, whose status demands mastery over her field. It is organized by the employ of metaphors whose status, function, and ties to their “original habitats” must be stripped and negated as they are incorporated into the established and authorized order of things.

Philosophical metaphors are no longer metaphors; they have lost what enables meaningfulness in its proper sense: access to what ties them to their origins, to their right of birth. Alienation from one’s natural origin inevitably breaks one’s ties with the living. Being incorporated into the master’s system guarantees a peculiar path in life. Such is the life of the socially dead. Such is the life of the dead metaphor.

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<sup>548</sup> P. 1233 *American Historical Review*, Dec. 2009

<sup>549</sup> *MP* p. 220



But just how far can we carry this analogy? My model implies that the congruence only has to go as far as the human body will allow. In other words, the congruence is carried into embodied behaviors. The specific parallels in embodied behaviors are not as complex as the discourse might seem to suggest. While disentangling the discourse can be quite complex,<sup>550</sup> the terms under review and the structure of their relationships are not. Likewise, the congruence in behaviors will be relatively basic and easy to identify. What we will be looking for are parallel actions, justifications, rationalizations, explanations, and the intelligible features of structured relationships. These parallels will be supported by patterns of perception, receptivity, reactivity, recognition, and response, which will be coordinated by shared perlocutionary calls.

Social death is the dominant symbol<sup>551</sup> guiding slavery's global and historical presence. It has a central organizing logic that guides the descriptions, explanations, and rationalizations that enable its public intelligibility. In this, it sets the terms for the patterns of perception, receptivity, and response that are recognizable to those who are expected to act in accordance with its logic, patterns of behavior, and rituals. Just as we saw with dead metaphors, social death emerges as the paradox in which such expulsion means inclusion, and being put to death means retaining life, in a peculiar sense. The slave's symbolic death enables the comprehension and perception of the (non)status conferred on an individual who has no rights, and no standing in a society. She is excluded from the public realm of meaning and social transaction. She is denied access to the terms of public recognition and the exchanges by which social value is created. So defined, it can

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<sup>550</sup> This is owed more to the fact that the unconscious use of metaphor also has unconsciously employed chains of reasoning, implication complexes, and unchallenged assumptions that can make analysis especially difficult. These difficulties are largely the consequence of failures to recognize the patterns and/or willful, but unconscious, ignorance.

<sup>551</sup> Patterson credits Victor Turner with the coinage of this concept. He describes it thus: "Mythic and ritual processes by nature are multivocal, ambiguous, diffuse, and sometimes downright incomprehensible. Within a given cultural domain, however, a dominant symbol—a major mythic theme, a key ritual act—stands out as pivotal. By its emergence it makes possible an internal interpretation of the symbolic process on both the intellectual and the social level." p. 37

easily be rationalized that her existence is characterized by the permanent condition of being subject to death at the arbitrary whim of the master's hands.

Nevertheless, she *appears*. She appears as an existing non-entity, as a visible, yet absent, presence. This, as we've seen, does not imply total exclusion. What it does imply is an active usage coupled with a disavowal of value and meaning. Much as we saw in the case of dead metaphor, the socially dead haunt the borders of relevance and intelligibility. This marginal status is what Patterson refers to as "liminal incorporation."<sup>552</sup> This describes the fact that the disavowed status of the socially dead entails an exaggerated, if paradoxical, *inclusion*. This exaggeration, likewise, requires the obscuring and effacement of the agency and efficacy of the slave. At the same time, this exaggeration enlarges her presence, necessity, and employ. Despite overt claims, the existence of the exaggerated non-entity plays an essentially constitutive role in the symbolic order as well. Although she may generate wealth, order, stability, and honor for the master, all of this must be denied, and denied to her, if the integrity of the symbolic order, is to be maintained. Beyond this, her liminal position establishes the locus of the boundaries of the order. The border, and the possibility of going beyond its limits, creates and then reinforces what is recognized as central and valuable. Patterson writes that:

The marginal person, while a threat to the moral and social order, was often also essential for its survival. In cultural terms the very anomaly of the slave emphasized what was most important and stable...<sup>553</sup>

It is on the basis of this kind of logic that the function of sharply defined oppositions, which may seem benign and quite arbitrary, can become dangerous and divisive. The boundary establishes the basis upon which an essential division can be made. Such divisions define those who belong to the order and those who are deviant. This division mirrors the permanent

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<sup>552</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982 p. 45, hereafter, *SSD*

<sup>553</sup>*SSD* p. 46

distinction between life and death. Once the border is clearly defined, established, and essentialized, it is defended as a natural, and perhaps even as a divine, law. Transgression can lead to the most serious of consequences; as it is seen, the whole world-order is at stake. The socially dead are therefore interpreted as enemies of the social order whose very presence threatens the integrity of that order, all the while enabling its maintenance. As such, they are always kept under the watchful eye, the vigilance, of the authorities—lest they slip away with the world they've made.

### The Subject of Mastery

“...what is it that gives their speech acts this limitless capacity for communication? The answer is that the speakers and hearers are masters of the sets of rules we call the rules of language, and these rules are recursive. They allow for the repeated application of the same rule.<sup>554</sup>”

—John Searle

...Man calls himself man only by drawing limits excluding his other from the play of supplementarity: the purity of nature, of animality, primitivism, childhood, madness, divinity. The approach to these limits is at once feared as a threat of death, and desired as access to life without difference. The history of man calling himself man is the articulation of all these limits along themselves. All concepts determining a non-supplementarity (nature animality, primitivism, childhood, madness, divinity, etc.) have evidently no truth-value. They belong—moreover, with the idea of truth itself—to an epoch of supplementarity. They have meaning only within a closure of the game.<sup>555</sup>”

—Jacques Derrida

With the order of the world at stake, the slave must continue to be interpreted as an outsider, as a constant threat to familiarity and order. Under the watchman's gaze, the slave is prevented to speak from out of her origins. She cannot, in the proper sense, speak literally as there is no authorized public in which her discourse can be registered. As Patterson puts it, slavery, on the level of interpersonal relations, is universally defined by “the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons.<sup>556</sup>” Natal alienation is one of

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<sup>554</sup> “RD” p. 208

<sup>555</sup> p. 245

<sup>556</sup> SSD p. 13

the centrally defining features of slavery, common to all of the slave societies which are reviewed in Patterson's study.<sup>557</sup> The slave is separated from any and all of the historical and social ties which enable the development and retention of anything like an autonomous identity.

Patterson writes:

Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forbears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory. That they reached back for the past, as they reached out for the related living, there can be no doubt. Unlike other persons, doing so meant struggling with and penetrating the iron curtain of the master.<sup>558</sup>

The status of the slave is such that any of the ties that generally make life meaningful are denied to her essence. Thus, whatever meanings might be attributable to her origins must be negated, and her publicly recognized definition must inevitably be devoid of content. The slave thus embodies no publicly recognizable intentions of her own, although her embodiment is a necessary feature of that which she is denied. On my view, the way to interpret the natal alienation of the slave, is to say that the slave's body can never be appropriately inscribed as the director, the organizer, the invoker, the active agent of a convention's performance. The slave's body can, of course, be a crucial symbolic component of a convention,<sup>559</sup> but only as an object. She can never be the subject, origin, or producer of authorized force. Publicly, the slave is embodied such that her voice cannot carry illocutionary force.

Despite this condition, the nature of the perlocutionary remains available. The perlocutionary precedes any arbitrary or conventional conceptions or claims of truth and falsity.

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<sup>557</sup> 186 societies in total, 66 of which were designated "genuine slave societies."

<sup>558</sup> SSD p. 5

<sup>559</sup> As in cases where slaves are designated, because they were already dead, to handle the tools and weapons of the recently deceased. Because of their status, they had a unique access to the spiritual world and were generally thought to be either resistant or immune to the risks and dangers of deal with the unpredictable spirits. Patterson writes, "The essence of slavery is that the slave, in his social death, lives on the margin between community and chaos, life and death, the sacred and the secular. Already dead, he lives outside the mana of the gods and can cross the boundaries with social and supernatural impunity." SSD p. 51

This is because the perlocutionary functions with or without authority, and its effects proceed with or without justification. From the master's perspective, this is an uncanny power. This is force without the possibility of appeal. This force stands as the open possibility that the slave may indeed break away from her designated field. Any such possibility must be masked, regulated, and ultimately proscribed. In this way the watchman works to prevent the slave from participating in the generation and reinforcing of her own force or meaning. She thus must respond to the ways she can be made intelligible, to the ways she "fits" into what can be publicly recognized in the order.

Conveniently, she fits as forgotten, as obliterated, and as the repository for the imagination of the authorized, to be used for whatever purposes authorization demands. We thus come to what mastery entails more specifically. Mastery is the capacity to establish an ordered environment of priorities and meaning in such a way so as to define ones' own perspective and intentions as both central and valued. The behaviors of mastery are those that reinforce the centrality of one's perspectives and intentions. In mastery, authorization demands only evidence of authorization. In this, the primary role for which the slave is employed is to shore up the master's sense of agency, centrality, honor, and authorization. Counter to what we may have come to expect based on knowledge of slavery in antebellum U.S. South, Patterson tells us that:

as the comparative data will show, in a great many slave holding societies masters were not interested in what their slaves produced. Indeed, in many of the most important slaveholding societies, especially those of the Islamic world, slaves produced nothing and were economically dependent on their masters or their master's nonslave dependents...*what was universal in the master-slave relationship was the strong sense of honor the experience of mastership generated, and conversely, the dishonoring of the slave condition. Many masters, especially among primitives, acquired slaves solely for this purpose.*<sup>560</sup>

The status of mastery transformed the worldview of those who were so defined, and transformed the publicly recognized narrative in which the slave was defined. These effects were far

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<sup>560</sup> SSD p.11

reaching, and in exploring the consequences of this discourse, we consistently see evidence of the systematic nature of these surprising descriptive and behavioral parallels.

Among the many compelling insights that guide Patterson's study is that the status of slaves is not best defined in terms of their being owned as property. Surprisingly, his study reveals that the concept of property, itself, *has been importantly defined by slavery*. In the Roman legal concept of *dominium*, Patterson identifies the development of an entirely new relation: the absolute private ownership over things. Among other things, the legal concept of *dominium* enabled a kind of private ownership that was established in law and law alone, needing no support from other areas of culture:

The Roman *dominium*, the legal norm safeguarding to the individual the absolute unfettered control over a tangible thing, tallied precisely with the economic and social function of property...Legal and economic property coincided: the notion of ownership applied to, and was the corollary of, a functional microcosm, an *universitas rerum*.<sup>561</sup>

It was the sheer unwieldiness of the slave system, coupled with the fact that one's slaves could, irrespective of the master's intentions, leave their prescribed fields, domains, and pathways, that called for this new power. Since such a possibility could yield unpredictable, unwanted, and perhaps, uncontrollable effects, it called for a robust and definitive legal vocabulary that circumscribed and regulated the slaves' actions, and reinforced and augmented the master's authority and responsibility *vis a vis* the agentless extensions of his will. In the face of such difficulties, a new conception of property was born. Patterson writes:

More than just a relation between a person and a thing, *dominium* was absolute power. And this absolute power involved not simply the capacity to derive the full economic value of a thing, to use (*usus*) and enjoy its fruits (*fructus*), as well as to "use it up" (*ab-usus*), to alienate it, but perhaps most significantly, as the Danish legal historian C.W. Westrup notes, it has the psychological meaning "*of inner power over a thing beyond mere control.*"<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>561</sup> *The Institutions of Private Law and Their Social Functions*. pp. 24-5

<sup>562</sup> *SSD* p. 31

This absolute ownership thus excludes and invalidates any intentions or motives, or conditions that do not arise and originate from the master's will. Symbolically, this is achieved by making property a power which comes from the master, which is then transferred to the interiority of the slave. Thereafter, the slave's legal status is only relevant to the extent that she is a vehicle for the master's agency.

In this, the odd status of the slave is codified, and the status of the slave's social death finds its most ingenious and binding expression. Through this power, the slave finally becomes merely a thing, merely a body:

The slave was a dominated thing, an animated instrument, a body with natural movements, but without its own reason, an existence entirely absorbed in another. The proprietor of this thing, the mover of this instrument, the soul and the reason of this body, the source of this life, was the master.<sup>563</sup>

In this move, the body of the slave loses any status as meaningful in public discourse. She becomes one object among others, defined within the field of the master's gaze. The body thereby becomes secondary to the law, and the law becomes a feature of the master's interiority that is publically recognized, authorized and honored. *Dominium* creates a justification of last appeal which coincides with the master's subjection to the law which confers a mythic and spiritual status upon his intentions.

### A Message Thus Conveyed

"...the original problem is needlessly doubled, for then we would have to imagine the mind, with its ordinary categories, operating with a language with its organizing structure. Under the circumstances we would certainly want to ask who is to be master?<sup>564</sup>"

—Donald Davidson

There's the hum. Young man, where you from?  
Brooklyn, number one.  
Native son, speaking in the native tongue.

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<sup>563</sup> *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquite* (Paris: Hachette, 1897), p. 408 quoted in SSD p.4

<sup>564</sup> *ITI* p. 184

I got my eyes on tomorrow (there it is).  
While you still try to follow where it is,  
I'm on the Ave. where it *lives*  
and *dies*.

Violently, silently,  
Shine so vibrantly that eyes squint to catch a glimpse—  
Embrace the bass with my dark ink fingertips.  
I used to speak the King's Enga-lish,  
But caught a *rash* on my lips.  
So now my chat JUS' LIKE DIS!<sup>565</sup>  
—Mos Def

The denial of metaphor and the denial of the speaking body are drawn from the same wellspring. Both are threats to the status of mastery. Reframing their status as secondary, and then as dead, are means for elevating the master's status, for granting him authority over prescribed fields, and of ensuring that his image of the world will be enforced and reinforced. Read in this way, the motivation for masks here is clear: if one is to believe in the methods and goals of the classical model of communication, the status of mastery must be preserved. The will to put the unruly messenger to death, so as to preserve this status, is the lingering reminder that force comes from enforcers. Such reminders cannot register in authorized discourse, or at least not fully. This is because the language of mastery is drawn from a real world idiom of power. As Patterson puts it, such idioms are necessary, as “Human beings have always found naked force or coercion a rather messy, if not downright ugly business, however necessary.<sup>566</sup>” That this idiom has come to define the classical model of communication is one more sign that the will to mastery has something to hide.

If we follow Patterson's framing, there are two basic strategies employed in the negotiations of a society's power relations. The first he calls the personalistic idiom. This idiom

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<sup>565</sup> Mos Def, “Hip-Hop” *Black on Both Sides*, (Rawkus Records, 1999)

<sup>566</sup> *SSD* p. 18



characterizes the kinds of societies whose power relations are directly interpersonal. In such societies, obligations are defined by communal relations and have simple, transparent, standards whose conditions are easily and publicly recognizable. He writes “There is translation, but little concealment. Although power relations are not mystified, they are humanized; and here the principle of kinship plays a crucial role.<sup>567</sup>” In such power relations the social dynamics are clear, and no one loses sight of the ways in which living, breathing, embodied people create meaning and the means of organizing and controlling other people. The second idiom of power, Patterson refers to as the materialistic idiom. This, he tells us is a strategy which masks true conditions of interpersonal power relations by mediating them through the exchange of property. The differential power relations, then, are understood in terms of the property itself; the role that persons play in the dynamic is made secondary or invisible in light of the presumed autonomy and inherent value of the *property* which is exchanged.

In explaining these idioms as a pattern of development, Patterson offers a telling quote, writing that the transformation of the recognized sources of power from a personalistic idiom to a materialistic idiom is a transition from a system of power relations in which ““a right to things [is] realized through a hold on persons’ to one in which ‘a hold on persons [is] realized through a right to things.’<sup>568</sup>” What we see in the classical model of communication is an embodiment of the materialistic idiom of power. It masks its power relations by creating a sense that it is simply through the acquisition and transfer of discrete exchangeable properties that one acquires access to, and some measure of control over, the world. As we’ve seen, the most central and salient occlusion which facilitates the masking of these power relations is in the negation of bodies, both

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<sup>567</sup> SSD p. 19

<sup>568</sup> SSD p. 28 quoted from Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London: Tavistok Publications, 1974), pp. 92-93

speaking bodies and the bodies of enforcers.<sup>569</sup> Masking and hiding the body is motivated by the need to mask power relations.

Despite this, perlocution and metaphor persistently announce that the body can never be entirely dominated through the dictates of an authorized discourse. *The threat of perlocution is also a promise*. There is some evidence, even in the powerful discourse of the Roman law of *dominium*, that bodies remain indomitable. Patterson tells us that often the contradictory character of the slave, the need for her presence and the need for her disavowal, would inevitably emerge into public discourse as contradictions that must be resolved. He writes:

On the institutional level the modes of recruitment, enslavement, and manumission were all intimately interrelated. The desocialized new slave somehow had to be incorporated; but the process of incorporation created new contradictions, which *usually made necessary* the process of manumission.<sup>570</sup>

In the case of *dominium*, it was the conversion of the slave to a thing, that “The slave was above all a *res*, the only human *res*,<sup>571</sup>” that rendered her status problematic. The legal discourse that surrounded her purchase and sale could account for the transfer of the slave’s body; likewise, it could account for her and as receptacle of the master’s will. The legal principle according to which such transactions occurred is, notably, *conveyance*. In conveyance the seller/sender and the buyer/recipient negotiate terms for the transfer of some well-defined thing.<sup>572</sup> The buyer receives the very same thing that the seller sends.

The logic of conveyance revealed the absurdity of the system in cases where the slave’s voice had to be acknowledged even as a *possible* subject of a publicly recognizable claim. As such, manumission revealed the latent surplus which remained unconstrained and strictly undefinable by the authorized force of legal discourse. In cases where it may be said that a slave

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<sup>569</sup> Frequently, of course, these are the same bodies.

<sup>570</sup> *SSD* p. 13 italics mine.

<sup>571</sup> *SSD* p. 32

<sup>572</sup> *SSD* p. 210

may “buy her freedom,” the transaction could not be publicly recognized as such, at least not in the relevant, authorized, discourse. Publicly, what could be registered is that the master may sell the slave’s body, which can be given to a possible *dominus* for some negotiated amount. The slave, however, as a thing, cannot be legally recognized as the subject of property, and thus cannot be recognized as the recipient in such a transaction.

More importantly, the notion of conveyance fails here because what was transferred from the master to the slave was not the same thing. What the master, the *dominus*, owned in the slave, was not simply the slave’s body; *dominium* went deeper than that because, again, the master was responsible for the “inner power” which animated that body as well. That inner power, of course, was the master’s own intentions and will. That inner power, both publicly and privately, in terms of both law and honor, was precisely what defined *dominus* as *dominus*; it was essential. It therefore could not be bought or sold. It was of inestimable value. Its very possibility was a birthright. The interesting consequence of this is that manumission was inevitably interpreted as the master freely, of his own will, giving *the gift of will to the slave*. This was an act which entailed a creation of sorts; it was the creation of the possibility of an entirely new will invested in a person who was formerly considered to be merely a thing. This was the creation, *ex nihilo*, of the recognizable subjective space of the slave. What the master gave was presented as gift of immeasurable worth, and was hence given to be of impossible value. Thus the slave could be taken to remain indefinitely indebted to the master, even in cases where she has “paid” for her freedom.<sup>573</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising to note that the broad array of implication complexes

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<sup>573</sup> A consideration that proves to add to the interpretive difficulty, as technically the slave can’t pay for anything, as the master owns all that a slave may be said to have “earned.” Thus, on two fronts the master’s gesture comes to be regarded as a gift. See *SSD* pp. 210-212

surrounding such transactions compose a narrative of birth and rebirth, salvation and redemption, death and resurrection.

When taken to its conclusion, the lesson of this parallel is as follows: the classical model of communication and the metaphors that sustain it grant those who master its system the illusion of an inner authority over a language and field that nevertheless exceeds their grasp. It enables one to enact the honored position of *dominus*, in the form of the authorized subject; and it enables one to ignore the speech of the non-masters, as the bearers of a voices which carry little weight, and little force. Of course, one does not need to identify the function of surreptitious metaphors in order to detect the snobbery of the belief that one has mastered a language by virtue of one's participation in a relatively obscure communicative tradition. Still, one could just as easily imagine other forms of linguistic style and skill as more exemplary cases of "mastery."<sup>574</sup>

Of course, it is reasonable to suspect that hat the language of "linguistic mastery" is simply a way to describe the development of a skill. While that interpretation, of course, seems far more plausible at first glance, and it is assuredly the case that many people employ the term with masterful and skilled use mind, these facts do not change the readily available records of the contours of our uses of language. The associated implication complexes that are employed in connection with this mastery simply do not mark out a parallel to any form of mastery as skill. Of course, we can identify such metaphors and implications, but they are few, not very well-developed, and have certainly not formed the basis of a world-historical disciplinary practice. It is common, for example, to talk about words as tools for building bridges, connections, etc. Further, one who is skilled in these areas may be referred to as a wordsmith, or one may comment on how an effective communicator weaves tales, ideas, and worlds together, etc. What

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<sup>574</sup> One could imagine, for example, linguistic mastery being associated with the virtuosity of a freestyle emcee, or a standup comedian.

is noteworthy about these metaphors is that there are few who would not acknowledge them *as* metaphors. What is importantly absent from the “linguistic mastery as skill” perspective is any need to neutralize these metaphors, to consider them dead, or to consider them to be literal. Thus, there are few who would object to employing different descriptions of the skillful use of language. So little is at stake.

More directly, in the metaphors of skill, there are simply no implied commitments to maintaining the centrality of the master, his intentions, and/or the regulative mechanisms that can preserve the priority of both. There is no need to reinforce or guarantee the basis for the effects of linguistic skill, any more than there would be for skills of other sorts. Skillful behavior has effects on its own, and does not need to be authorized in order to produce said effects. By contrast, as it is construed in the classical model, preserving the integrity and authority of the conscious intentions of the mastering subject is the *sine qua non* of communication.

If the mastery that we’ve seen described in the philosophical study of language were primarily about skill, then why so much concern for the loss of authority? When Davidson questions, “Who is to be master?” he is not seeking an answer for who has the most skill. He is asking about where control really lies. When Searle assures us that metaphorical sentences are always constrained and regulated by literal ones, he is not reassuring us of the presence of any particular skill. He is reminding us that we are in control. When Ricoeur posits that the role of philosophical discourse is that of the watchman, he calls upon the full array of the implications in the metaphor of metaphor and the metaphor of theory. Further, his insightful use of the implications of these metaphors opens directly into the role of the *dominus*, as one who is authorized to maintain the boundaries of prescribed fields. Further still, the nature of the relationship between what is controlled and ordered by the watchman, and that which exceeds

his purview eloquently restates the parallel I have presented, with no extra help from me. Recall, he tells us that: “Philosophical discourse sets itself as the *vigilant watchman overseeing the ordered* extensions of meaning; against this background, the *unfettered* extensions of meaning in poetic discourse spring *free*.”<sup>575</sup> Likewise, when Paul de Man discusses what is at stake in the mastery pursued by philosophers, he jokingly tells us that philosophers “could at least learn to *control figuration by keeping it, so to speak, in its place, by delimiting the boundaries of its influence and thus restricting the epistemological damage that it may cause.*”<sup>576</sup>”

That these thinkers are not aware of these parallels and implications is certain. That those who endorse their positions and similar views cannot be made aware is owed to an unconscious design. This lacuna will remain so long as the features of language which enable such performative arrangements to go unnoticed are treated as secondary, unsystematic, nonserious, or non-philosophical. The effects of metaphors are anything but, and it has taken an unusual, persistent, and self-interested counter-narrative to mask this fact.

The metaphors of theory and of metaphor are drawn from, reinforced by, and enacted through, the behaviors of mastery as authority, mastery as control, and mastery as *dominium*. This kind of mastery enables and implies the deeper myth of minds over bodies, minds in control of bodies that it can always guide, can always send wherever it likes, for whatever purposes it designates. Bodies, of course, are unruly. There is always the threat that they can escape their designated fields, and that they can thwart the master’s intentions. The penalty for such transgression, as we’ve seen, is a verdict of death. The body can obey, that is, she can lose her heritage, lose her natality, be forgotten to history, be worn out (*usure, usus, ab-usus*) in the disavowal of her function; or she can pay the price of mastery, that is, she can show up in the

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<sup>575</sup>TRM p. 308 italics mine.

<sup>576</sup> *On Metaphor* p. 11

public space and in the public imagination in the only way that the master can tolerate: as a corpse that defines and marks the limits of reason, as a body that appears in order to disappear, leaving everything neat and orderly, as it has always been.

The “death” of metaphors and the willful ignorance of their unconscious functioning gives the authorized speaker an out. If no one among us can detect the roles that we’ve come to inhabit (because we bear no conscious intentions of domination, and because such effects would be secondary or nonserious, at best, even if detected), then we deprive ourselves of the tools that would be necessary for breaking the grip of our own privileged comprehension. By doing so, we may innocently and happily retain the locus and function of yet another dead metaphor: the internal reflective space of the intentional consciousness—the very last source of appeal, the final arbiter of our self-justification. This is convenient: for if there are dead left in the wake of this pursuit of mastery, it is we, the authorized, who have earned the right to say that they were found that way. The dead are simply dead. No one is responsible for what has transpired here.

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