Aesthetics of Encounter: Variations on Translation in Deleuze

MICHAEL LEVAN
University of South Florida

ABSTRACT

Though Gilles Deleuze does not directly address practices of translation in his philosophical works, several of his concepts touch on processes of translation. In this essay, I consider several themes from Deleuze – mediation, transformation, and contact – that imply a general philosophical stance toward translation in terms of pure process. This general stance can be found in a constellation of concepts best described as an “aesthetic of encounter.” Since these themes are far ranging and overlap across several of Deleuze’s works, I approach the aesthetics of encounter in terms of variations, as an evolving critical-conceptual resonance of melodies in (and on) translation.

DELEUZE TO TRANSLATION

Deleuze writes sparingly of translation. In the few places he does address translation by name it is not in terms of translating literature or speech in the professional sense. Rather, it is discussed in terms of transformation and movement, which places it very close to some of the most fundamental themes in his work: becoming, difference, encounter, motion, creativity. For a process-oriented philosopher like Deleuze, translation should be an ideal phenomenon. The paucity of its explicit treatment in his work can perhaps be understood in terms of the implied centrality of translation processes across his oeuvre. In fact, there are many ways that translation is an apt metaphor for understanding some of Deleuze’s major themes as well as his style of doing philosophy.

In this essay I extract some concepts from Deleuze’s work (both with Guattari and on his own) that can be seen as principles for a Deleuzean approach to translation. All of the concepts I present are variations on themes in Deleuze’s philosophy that we can call the “aesthetics of encounter.” Some are very clearly applicable to
translation, even self-evidently so, while others appear more oblique. In short, I am attempting to translate Deleuze to translation. These variations are of ideas that come in both quick and slow movements, including both minor concepts that appear in just a paragraph or two, or others that are major themes across several books. As variations, they resonate with each other, providing glimpses and hints of a philosophy of translation drawn from Deleuze’s vast body of work.

**Translation and Mediators**

A first clue to a Deleuzean approach to translation can be found in his later work exploring the relationships and interactions of cultural creativity between science, art, and philosophy. Deleuze is very careful to avoid language suggesting that movements (i.e., translations) between creative systems can be processed in a mechanistic way to emerge unchanged. In place of such a transmission-conversion view of translation, Deleuze writes in terms of echoes and resonance. For example, Deleuze (1995) examines Bresson’s cinematic space resonantly in terms of Riemannian mathematical space. Deleuze’s description results in “a sort of disconnected space” that is a translation of Riemann’s mathematically defined functions without being an imitation or a metaphor (p. 124). Rather, it is an echo. Deleuze continues,

I’m not saying that cinema’s doing what Riemann did. But if one takes a space defined simply as neighborhoods joined up in an infinite number of possible ways, with visual and aural neighborhoods joined in a tactile way, then it’s Bresson’s space. Bresson isn’t Riemann, of course, but what he does in cinema is the same as what happens in mathematics, and echoes it. (1995: 124)

The relation to traditional views of translation here is quite oblique, but it is a first step in bringing Deleuze’s radical process-orientation to bear on translation.

A Deleuzean philosophy of translation would not be concerned with origins or products (i.e., with faithful representation of one language in that of another) but with a style of interaction, a fluid orientation of approach rooted in an ontology of change. Addressing the interplay between science, art, and philosophy, Deleuze (1995: 125) writes, “The way they impinge on one another depends on their own evolution.” They should be seen, he continues, “as sorts of separate melodic lines in constant interplay with each other,” keeping in mind that “the interplay between the different lines isn’t a matter of one
monitoring or reflecting another.” The creativity of science, art, and philosophy are endogenous to each cultural practice, and develop in terms of internal movements. So how does a translation-echo or resonance take place?

A discipline that set out to follow a creative movement from outside would relinquish any creative role. You’ll get nowhere by latching onto some parallel movement, you have to make a move yourself. If nobody makes a move, nobody gets anywhere. Nor is interplay an exchange: it all turns on giving and taking. (Deleuze 1995: 125)

Giving and taking: two principles at the heart of translation! If we understand translation in Deleuze’s terms as a cultural discipline, then we need to think of it foremost as a creative enterprise, and not a mechanical practice of tracing the representations of one linguistic system onto that of another.

The giving and taking among science, art, and philosophy is fundamental to Deleuze’s view of creation, and brings us closer to a view of translation. Giving and taking requires mediators. “Creation’s all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people – for a philosopher, artists or scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists – but things too, even plants or animals” (Deleuze 1995: 125). Creative taking is grabbing hold of a mediator’s movements or “flow,” as if catching a wave in surfing or a gust of wind in hang gliding. A mediator is a figure of encounter understood in terms of movement in a series. Encounter here is both a productive process and something itself produced.

Whether they’re real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. It’s a series. If you’re not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you’re lost. I need my mediators to express myself, and they’d never express themselves without me: you’re always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own. (Deleuze 1995: 125).

By eliminating the fiction of autonomous authors/creators, Deleuze suggests that all creation requires a form of translation. But this sense of translators as mediators is still fairly vague, and requires a closer look at the processes of giving and taking that mediators provide. To this end, I’ll turn to Deleuze’s comments on falsification and style.

Falsification
Deleuze’s notion of falsification is a good model for the process of translation. In his short discussion of mediators, Deleuze constantly
shifts examples and horizons – moving effortlessly from mathematics to film to the discourse of colonial power to mundane politics to his collaborations with Félix Guattari. Along the way, he claims that one of the roles of a mediator is to falsify established ideas (truths). Deleuze sees the notion of truth as something produced within an assemblage of statements, bodies, territorial distributions, and movements. Truths will vary in domain and scope, but will always be created internal to an assemblage (such as a conversation, a colonial discourse, a network of government workers, or a novel). Any creative act for Deleuze will necessarily call an established truth into question, shaking it from the sedimented taken-for-grantedness in which it draws its power. In many ways this is the mundane task of the translator: he or she cannot help but falsify any text. A translated text is never the same as the original, but that isn’t the point. The point is that the translated text is a new assemblage capable of new truths. It had to pass through a translator, which is to say, through a population of others. Translation produces its own truth – a truth in its own right – outside the polar concerns of fidelity and freedom that are always accountable to an original.

To say that ‘truth is created’ implies that the production of truth involves a series of operations that amount to working on material – strictly speaking, a series of falsifications. When I work with Guattari each of us falsifies the other, which is to say that each of us understands in his own way notions put forward by the other. […] These capacities of falsity to produce truth, that’s what mediators are about. (Deleuze 1995: 126)

**Style**

Though style is only discussed sporadically in their work, it is one of the great orienting themes in Deleuze and Guattari’s joint projects. There are styles of space/place (smooth and striated), styles of lines/politics (supple and rigid), styles of science/invention (nomadic and royal), styles of literature/rhetoric (minor and major), and styles of organization/logic (rhizomatic and arboreal). The appearance of simple dichotomies, however, is misleading. Differences always proceed, curiously, by conjunction and intermingling – the making and unmaking of assemblages (textual, discursive, disciplinary, national, etc.). Furthermore, all of these modes of style involve “mapping” an assemblage. Because of this, Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts always mutate with each new description and analysis. And, and, and: an ontological and performative “stammering” constitutive of their style. Deleuze and Guattari produce an eccentric phenomenology of events, transformation, and encounter.
In some instances, Deleuze and Guattari understand style in terms of a manipulation of syntax; yet, the concept of syntax is itself translated (transformed) to mean of the structure of any open system. Deleuze (1997: 2) writes that, given that there are never straight lines in things – contents, expressions, places, processes, etc. – then “syntax is the set of necessary detours that are created in each case to reveal the life in things.” On this view, syntax is much more than grammatical form understood as a rigid set of codified linguistic structures. From a process-orientation, syntax is a living technê; it is a path of becoming, a trajectory. Deleuze discusses the possibilities of analyzing, for example, a syntax of medicine via pragmatic variations of symptomatology (i.e., the paths, groupings, and movements of symptoms). The understanding of “new” illnesses, then, primarily concerns innovations and transformations in the movement of medical syntax. In more explicitly linguistic terms, Deleuze (1997: 5) writes, “syntactic creation or style – this is the becoming of language.” In this passage, Deleuze is concerned with a pragmatics of concepts as a condition for the possibility of transformation and creativity. The focus on becoming (which I will take up further below) highlights the fluid, evental, and processual nature of living phenomena, which can include speech, writing, or any other mode of communication.

Style as a phenomenon in its own right, which Deleuze (1997: 113) provocatively describes – borrowing from Proust – as “the foreign language in language,” is always futural, liberatory, directive, territorial, and transformative. In these same terms, Deleuze (1995) again approaches creativity in opposition to static or complacent applications of techniques: “We have to see creation as tracing a path between impossibilities [. . .]. Your writing has to be liquid or gaseous simply because normal perception and opinion are solid, geometric” (p. 133). Such creative labor involves the construction of curious “methods”: drunken sobriety, populous solitude, crowned anarchy, becoming-imperceptible, stationary speed, disjunctive synthesis. These “methods” attempt to enact ruptures and create possibilities for thinking differently. It is by way of variation (or more specifically, continuous variation) that Deleuze hopes to render the familiar strange and find the phenomenon of process anew with all of the wonder and awe it deserves. Deleuze (1995: 133-134) almost seems to be discussing the translator’s task in this regard: “Because you don’t get a style just by putting words together, combining phrases, using ideas. You have to open up words, break things open, to free earth’s vectors.” In other words, creativity in translation involves making and performing
determinations, drawing maps of assemblages, building new places, proceeding in terms of encounters, and taking up movement as a primary condition of existence (linguistic or otherwise). Here, style concerns undoing and redoing communicative (literary, rhetorical, discursive) assemblages. Style is a territorial movement. A task of translation can be to hitch along with this movement, to enter its flow.

From this perspective translation (or rather mistranslation) can be creative. Deleuze & Parnet (1987) see reading itself as an act of translation, and take it up in terms of the foreign language inside a language. “This is a good way to read: all mistranslations are good – always provided that they do not consist in interpretations, but relate to the use of the book, that they multiply its use, that they create yet another language inside its language” (p. 5). In other words, translation can multiply sense. Not only in terms of bringing a text or idea or social assemblage to a greater number of people, but by multiplying the potential use of what is translated. It is both a pragmatics of engagement and a style of interaction. It is a positive falsification. In short, translation mediates style, effecting transformations and creating possibilities.

**Translation and Transformation**

The most direct treatment of translation in Deleuze’s writings comes with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) during their discussion of semiotic systems, which they define as “regimes of signs,” or “any specific formalization of expression” (p. 111). For our purposes here it is significant to note that semiotic systems, for Deleuze and Guattari, are not typically or principally linguistic. They are social, cultural, literary, aesthetic, and political; they are intermingled, imbricated, and diverse. Semiology is “only one regime of signs among others, and not the most important one,” which necessitates, they argue, a “return to pragmatics” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 111). Translation appears as both an element of pragmatics and a movement between regimes of signs.

Though they claim that the number of regimes of signs is endless, Deleuze and Guattari detail four regimes, which they put to use in a dizzying and woven set of analyses of historico-cultural events (such as Judaism, Christianity, the book, psychiatry). The most familiar regime is that of the signifying semiotic, which produces semiology, disciplinary power structures (i.e., the State apparatus), logics of modern representation, and the reign of overcoding of the signifier (which privileges language). Alongside the signifying regime are three others. The presignifying semiotic operates primarily in warding off the State apparatus, and is characterized by collective enunciation and
polyvocal statements; overcoding is diffuse. The *countersignifying* semiotic is defined by numeration, creativity, movement, and a destructive tendency toward the State apparatus. The *postsignifying* semiotic operates in terms of a redundancy of consciousness and is defined by subjectification.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explore the relationality of these semiotics in terms of two complementary aspects. First, these semiotics are always concrete, yet always mixed and mingled. None are privileged in themselves, and this situation prevents there being a general semiology or universal structure of codes. Second, there is “the possibility of transforming one abstract or pure semiotic into another, by virtue of the translatability ensuing from overcoding as the special characteristic of language” (p. 136). Here is where translation is addressed as movement and transformation, of either taking one semiotic into another or of “blow[ing] apart semiotic systems” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 136). They explain the process of translation like this: “A transformational statement marks the way in which a semiotic translates for its own purposes a statement originating elsewhere, and in so doing diverts it, leaving untransformable residues and actively resisting the inverse transformation.” They continue by stating, “Translations can be creative. New pure regimes of signs are formed through transformation and translation. Again, there is no general semiology but rather a transsemiotic” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 136). The focus on regimes of signs places translation in a realm much broader than, but including, linguistic translation. Here, translation is political, social, and cultural. It can include translations effected by incorporation and encounter, such as an encounter between Christianity and colonized peoples, an encounter of Capitalism and local knowledges, an encounter of the structure of nationalism with that of globalization, not to mention the fundamental practices of encounter in the work of ethnography and history. Translation in each of these cases involves the creation of power structures, material conditions, and styles of interaction that “effectively take place without being performed by a ‘translator’ in the role of pure knower” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 136). Such a view stretches the possibilities of translation and translation studies, including a potentially rich model of translation as a mode of analysis or critique:

It is not simply linguistic, lexical, or even syntactic transformations that determine the importance of a true semiotic translation but the opposite. Crazy talk is not enough. In each case we must judge whether what we see is an adaptation of an old semiotic, a new variety of a particular mixed
semiotic, or the process of creation of an as yet unknown regime. For example, it is relatively easy to stop saying ‘I,’ but that does not mean that you have gotten away from the regime of subjectification; conversely, you can keep on saying ‘I,’ just for kicks, and already be in another regime in which personal pronouns function only as fiction. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 138)

A translation analysis of semiotic systems (including but not limited to language) would be directed toward what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the transformational component of pragmatics, which “makes maps of transformations” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 139).

A good example of translation as transformation is found in an essay by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1984). In ‘Found in Translation,’ Geertz considers the translation of social imagination in terms of both literary criticism (a historical translation) and ethnography (a cultural one). “The truth of the doctrine of cultural (or historical – it is the same thing) relativism,” writes Geertz,

is that we can never apprehend another people’s or another period’s imagination neatly, as though it were our own. The falsity of it is that we can therefore never genuinely apprehend it at all. We can apprehend it well enough, at least as well as we apprehend anything else not properly ours; but we do so not by looking behind the interfering glosses that connect us to it but through them. [. . .] life is translation, and we are lost in it. (1984: 44)

Yet it is through translation from one regime of signs to another that we find the imaginative life of cultures, of historical scenes, of haecceities of life Deleuze and Guattari call assemblages or events. I will turn now to their concept of assemblage to further explore the transformative role of translation as an aesthetic of encounter addressing the social composition of bodies, discourse, place, and movement.

Assemblages

“The minimum real unit is not the word, the idea, the concept or the signifier, but the assemblage. [. . .] The utterance is the product of an assemblage – which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events” (Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 51). An assemblage is a complex structure that anchors or mediates a phenomenon. It is context-specific and place-specific. It is contingent, undergoing constant alteration, and always constructed concretely with its own internal logic. There is no limit to the number or kinds of assemblages possible. In this sense, the assemblage suggests a concrete model of
communication as an endogenous production of order out of a field of flows. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) formulate the concept of assemblage within a tetravalent structure composed of two double-sided axes. The first axis is composed of discursive and nondiscursive features: of content and expression. This axis is described in terms of horizontality. On the one hand, this axis describes a process of endogenous production in terms of “bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another” (Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 88). On the other hand, it describes the performativity of communicative acts in terms of “acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies” (Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 88). The latter is termed a “collective assemblage of enunciation,” while the former is termed a “machinic assemblage” (Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 88). This first axis, therefore, describes the open system of discourses and practices that reside fragmentarily and historicized within cultures, contexts, situations, and other places.

The second axis is vertical and involves territorial processes of inhabitation and movement. On this vertical axis, “the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away” (Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 88). On this axis we find simultaneous tendencies toward sedimentation and change. The territorial component is the component of constituted place. It is the component in which sense congeals and takes hold of itself. However temporary it may actually be, a territory – as a process of territorialization or reterritorialization – has a propensity toward stasis.1 Deterritorialization and reterritorialization are developed by Deleuze and Guattari to help describe their process-oriented ontology of metamorphosis, mutation, and change. This suggests a model of translation as a sort of geographic phenomenon and a mode of habitation. Deterritorialization is the constitutive component of movement, transformation, and translation. It is the movement away from a territory, a “line of flight.” It is the mode by which, as Paul Patton (2000) explains, “the assemblage breaks down or becomes transformed into something else” (p. 44). Reterritorialization, then, is the process by which a movement of flight is taken up in a new milieu and reconstituted within a new assemblage. It is the extraction of one fragment of a milieu and its (re)placement in another. What should be clear in terms of this territorial axis is that territorialization is a spatial process of translation expressed as geographic movements and trajectories.

It is important to notice that the tetravalent structure of assemblages implies that any change of composition of any of the parts is the bringing forth of a new assemblage. All translation engenders a
new territory. In addition, every assemblage also participates in countless relations to other assemblages. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage is basically, then, a respecification or an extension of the phenomenological notion of intentionality that takes account of bodies, speech, places, and movements of all kinds simultaneously. The key is that each assemblage exists eventally and performatively – as concrete, contingent, cultured, and contextualized – even if it tries to escape each of these territorializations. Furthermore, assemblages are intertwined and operating within shifting horizontal limits. Deleuze & Guattari (1986), for example, speak of social assemblages, familial assemblages, feudal assemblages, assemblages of desire, artistic assemblages, revolutionary assemblages, and fascist assemblages, to name just a few. They claim that there are endless types and interrelations of assemblages. They outline several forms of stratification and segmentarity (i.e., modes of sedimentation or modes of territoriality) in the territorial pole, and discuss several dangers of unbalanced movements of deterritorialization. They caution, for example, that a line of flight is given in the mode of risk – that a movement of deterritorialization can always turn into a line a death. In other words, translation has no guarantees, no pre-ordained telos, and often is susceptible to failure. In this sense, translation (or critique) is not an end in itself, but a risky and necessary mode for the possibility of the constitution of the new social arrangements. Implied here is a cautious utopianism from the point of view of process.

This territorial pole has implications for translation. Stratification and segmentarity have to do with modes of partitioning and ordering phenomena and experiences, something a translator must always be attuned to. We can see this plainly in our experiential tendency to divide, distribute, and partition things, ideas, and places. As Deleuze & Guattari (1987) write, “We are segmented from all around and in every direction. [. . .] Dwelling, getting around, working, playing: life is spatially and socially segmented” (p. 208). Segmentation expresses processes that are binary, circular (i.e., concentric embeddedness), and linear. Deleuze and Guattari go further to distinguish between lines of rigid and supple segmentarity. The notion of “lines” seeks to evoke movements and processes (instead of the static structures endemic to a logic of “points”). Extended analyses of the components of assemblages is not necessary for the current task. The important point is that an assemblage is an intertwining of bodies, discourse, place, and movement, which places it directly in the midst of any communicative situation like translation. From this perspective, translation is fundamentally a process of movement, change, and transformation. It is a living practice transforming a living system by bringing things together and enacting contact.
The notion of contact covers several themes in Deleuze’s work that can be applied to translation. Contact aligns with Deleuze’s aesthetic theory, and in this section I will develop some variations on the aesthetics of encounter internal to a process philosophy of translation. In its most straightforward sense, contact is a point of connection or conjunction, the where and how of an encounter. At the very least, all modes of translation involve contact: the intermingling of linguistic materiality in simultaneous translation, adapting a novel for the cinema, colonizing a people, being interpellated as a subject, or learning a discipline. In Jakobson’s terms, contact enacts the phatic function of language, making it a condition for the possibility of interaction, interplay, intermingling – and thus of encounter, transformation, translation itself. Ricoeur’s (2006) understanding of translation as linguistic hospitality has just such a sense of material contact as its basic condition, effecting both giving and taking, “where the pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one’s own welcoming house” (p. 10). Though Ricoeur’s contact is described in an ethical register, it resonates with the appearance of contact in Deleuze’s writings. Deleuze’s perspective differs from that of Ricoeur in that contact does not imply a merging or incorporation, but something new emerging between two people, things, texts, or ideas.

Importantly, contact is always haptic. It always involves a touch. Translators know this, of course, but often forget it when the task is overwhelmed by an anxious concern with meaning and representation. It is easy to lose the touch and feel of words by looking beyond them to their representations. The point of contact, of touching, is the first aesthetic moment of an encounter. In his theory of painting, Deleuze (2002) discusses haptic vision as a close space of contact with sensation. This haptic space is the space of colors in his logic of sensation. Painting, for Deleuze, is an art of contact in which sensations (affects and percepts) are produced in a space of color and form. In the context of language, a haptic view of translation would consider words and sentences as blocks of color filling our eyes, and speech as a tactile space filling our mouths. Of principle concern would be the feel of the words that resonate the aesthetic space of contact. This kind of close-perception, an encounter at the level of sensation, can allow one to orient to movement and rhythm in the materiality of language.

When faced with a blank canvas, a painter is faced with an overabundance, an excess, an exuberance of clichés. The task of the painter is to eliminate the clichés and to claw his or her way out – to create. The translator faces a similar task of wrestling an abundant void in the moment of contact/encounter. The text being translated means
anything, and everything. The key is to inhabit the space of contact in order to find the way out of it. In terms of painting, Deleuze (2003) says the painter has to enter the canvas. For the art of translation, a text will be inhabited. “He enters into it precisely because he knows what he wants to do, but what saves him is the fact that he does not know how to get there, he does not know how to do what he wants to do. He will only get there by getting out of the canvas” (p. 78). Contact assumes a risk, a positive risk of chance occurrences, of an accident that will allow the new to emerge. The translator will go into the text, which is already an overabundance of meaning. In this space of contact, the performance of translation, like that of painting, will be “constantly oscillating between a beforehand and an afterward” (Deleuze 2003: 80). Happy accidents will set the tone and light the way.

Perhaps the most important appearance of contact in Deleuze, however, is in his recurring theme of becoming. As a concept-of-concepts, becoming expresses the very animation of concepts themselves, the effectuation and affectivity of continuous variation. Becoming is expressed variously in Deleuze’s mutating philosophical system as event, machine, movement, milieu, creativity, multiplicity, process, difference, intensity, haecceity, encounter, and transformation. In each of these terms there is further proposed a primordiality of movement, place, and alteration. Becomings are lines of flight—"fuite": escape, flight, leakage, swift passage, and a vanishing point. The task of translation as a becoming is to foster an encounter, to engender the intensities in an event. Deleuze & Guattari (1994) distinguish two ways of orienting to events, and so inspire two different ways that translators can orient to their task:

One consists in going over the course of the event, in recording its effectuation in history, its conditioning and deterioration in history. But the other consists in reassembling the event, installing oneself in it as in a becoming, becoming young again and aging in it, both at the same time, going through all its components or singularities. It may be that nothing changes or seems to change in history, but everything changes, and we change, in the event. (p. 111)

The distinction between these two orientations is much like other famous distinctions in Deleuze’s philosophical work, such as striated and smooth space or root and rhizomatic organization. The first seeks to interpret, the second to “experiment”: “to think is to experiment, but experimentation is always that which is in the process of coming about—the new, remarkable, and interesting that replace the appearance of truth and are more demanding than it is” (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 111). The first seeks fidelity in translation (tracing the original text’s
roots and branches), the other to map the intensities of an assemblage in order to unleash its power and see what it can do (i.e., “pragmatics”).

To use Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, translation can be approached as an *abstract machine*. “Abstract” here should be approached with caution. It is one of several terms adopted by Deleuze and Guattari that carries connotations contrary to their own goals. The sense of abstract utilized in the notion of an “abstract machine” is not the opposite of concrete; rather, it is used to indicate the *form of a process* (which is something that is articulated only in the concrete). In short, “abstract” is used to indicate concrete processes animating assemblages while “concrete” is used to indicate specific articulations effectuated by assemblages. Deleuze & Guattari (1987) write, “We define the abstract machine as the aspect or moment at which nothing but functions and matter remains” (p. 141). We can see, however, that nothing is actually more concrete than functions and matter: an intermingling of forces and haecceities. In this sense, an abstract machine is a concept of pure process. It is doing in the process of doing and performing in the process of performing – the “just before” and the “just missed” of constitution constituting. It is the very doing, the performance, of translation.

From a “machinic” perspective, translation is an act of creation:

The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality. Thus when it constitutes points of creation or potentiality it does not stand outside of history but is instead always ‘prior to’ history. Everything escapes, everything creates – never alone, but through an abstract machine that produces continuums of intensity, effects conjugations of deterritorialization, and extracts expressions and contents. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 142)

This describes a phenomenology of pure process or becoming. It describes phenomena and systems of phenomena that are self-organizing, open and creative. This level is prior to sedimentation, prior to stratification, prior to anything we could call a product.

The concept of becoming is a relay or intermezzo between internal and external notions of difference. Here is a place that really hits home for an implied philosophy of translation in Deleuze’s work. From the perspective of becoming, translations are always “between” – they are both encounter and performance, both process and passage. Becomings are thus relational and affective – between body and body, between text and text, between culture and culture, between place and place. This is why Deleuze and Guattari insist that becomings are geographical instead of historical. Becomings, thus, have to do with “transversal”
movements. What “movement” means here is not a simple change in position from one location to another, as in a grid or in terms of geometrical Cartesian coordinates. The movement of becomings, rather, has to do with the *repetition of difference*, the emergence of a new movement. The movement of becomings, as Constantin Boundas (1996) writes,

>affects both space and the bodies moving through it. To move is not to go through a trajectory which can be decomposed and recombined in quantitative terms; it is to become other than itself, in a sense that makes movement a qualitative change. [ . . . ] movement cannot be reduced to what is static (p. 84, author’s emphasis).

This sense of movement and becoming expresses a logic of the new and is irreducible from the notion of an abstract machine discussed above. Becomings are prior to manifestation, prior to history, and prior to the organization of bodies and the stratification of places. Becomings are never about the static connection of points to each other (as in the transposing of a word from one language into another). Becomings, rather, pass between points and come up “through the middle.” A line or trajectory of becoming “has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination. [. . .] A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is a fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement” (Boundas 1996: 293). This is the sense in which Deleuze and Guattari understand becomings as *intensities, forces, and affects*: speeds and slowness, constellations of affectivity, haptic spaces, and so on. To translate intensities, or rather to translate from the point of view of intensive encounters, is what Deleuze’s pre-personal process-orientation philosophy offers for translation.

One of the most provocative ways that Deleuze describes becoming is in terms of *capture* and *theft*. In the becoming of translation, “it is not one term which becomes the other, but each encounters the other, a single becoming which is not common to the two. [. . .] To encounter is to find, to capture, to steal, but there is no method for finding other than a long preparation” (Deleuze & Parnet 1987: 7). Continuing, they write, “Stealing is the opposite of plagiarizing, copying, imitating, or doing like. Capture is always a double-capture, theft a double-theft, and it is that which creates not something mutual, but an asymmetrical block, an a-parallel evolution, nuptials, always ‘outside’ and ‘between’” (p. 7). An example of the double capture of the becoming of translation can be found in Mary Louise Pratt’s (1992) work on writing and transculturation in the spaces of ongoing colonial encounters that she calls “contact zones.” A double capture or double theft occurs between
colonizers and colonized people most clearly in her notion of “autoethnographic expressions,” which she defines as “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms” (p. 7). In effect, they translate themselves as both not-themselves and not-not-themselves by stealing the terms of the colonizer. They produce representations that are neither their own nor the colonizers, but rather are in-between as a movement of becoming-colonial. This is a hostile hospitality, to be sure, but the inhabitation of the other and the other’s language is doubled in translation, producing the transformation of contact.

DELEUZE AND TRANSLATION

Though Deleuze does not treat translation directly as a philosophical topic, a fluid process of translation appears in several of his major and minor themes: mediators, assemblages, style, transformation, becoming, pragmatics, encounter, and sensation. In this short essay I have tried to translate some of these concepts to translation. The difficulty of translating Deleuze’s thought is in the continual variation of his concepts, which effectuate a performance of the very movements and flows that he attempts to describe. I have tried to translate Deleuze’s style and to perform variations of his concepts that can resonate for translation studies. In the rich expanses of Deleuze’s mutating works is a sober and meticulous attempt to find process qua process prior to interpretation and meaning. From his notion of mediators, philosophy is itself a type of translation, and all translation presupposes its own becoming-philosophy. I have suggested that Deleuze offers both a close-vision perspective of process for translation, directing attention to what happens before language is reterritorialized on meaning and representation. Yet Deleuze also offers resources for a model of translation as critical analysis, especially in an “abstract machine” of translation that can be described in social, cultural, and political assemblages. Translation is an act of transformation produced through a violence (or a caress – is there really much of a difference?) of contact. It produces territories and sensations, an aesthetic of encounter. It gives while it takes. It falsifies. It populates. It creates.

NOTES

1. *Stasis* should be understood here in several senses: first, as a state of equilibrium; second, as “standing,” which can both refer to a cessation of movement (thus, congelation or sedimentation) and to the occupation of a position; and finally, as a place of dispute or disagreement on an issue.
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DR. MICHAEL LEVAN
INSTRUCTOR,
DEPT. OF COMMUNICATION,
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA.
E-MAIL: <MLEVAN@CAS.USF.EDU>