

*Es lockt dich meine Art und Sprach,  
Du folgest mir, du gehst mir nach?  
Geh nur dir selber treulich nach: –  
So folgst du mir — gemacht! gemacht!*  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. *Subjecting Language*

There is a question of philology. "Where are you going to?" Socrates asks his lover Phaedrus. "I am going for a walk outside the walls", he answers.<sup>2</sup> While walking, Phaedrus tells Socrates, a "philological man",<sup>3</sup> about the conversation about love, the *logos erotikos*,<sup>4</sup> a language of love and love for language that he had with Lysias. "Plato's 'philologist' is a friend and lover of language as that which is the language of love and self-loving language. [...] Language loves. Whoever loves it like the philologist, loves the love in it",<sup>5</sup> Werner Hamacher suggests in a reading of the scene. This philological text attempts to trace the reins set on this love throughout a certain fragment of philosophy, to tease out the gay science (or as Nietzsche also puts it, "queer reason")<sup>6</sup> that allows it to proceed.

Ever since the dawn of the desire for language, philosophy has tried to subject language to rules and restrictions, to logic, not in the first place because language seems to appear to us in a state that is subject to some order itself. But at the same time, it seems to escape us at every turn. One of the first attempts to hunt down language and tie it up may be located in Plato's *Sophist*, where the Stranger from Elea instructs Socrates' pupil and geometer Theaetetus in the secrets of grammatical analysis. Jacques Derrida, in his seminal essay "Plato's Pharmacy", has dealt extensively with the implications of this dialogue for the development of occidental metaphysics, which revolve around the figure of the parricide (the Stranger is a student of the "sophistic" Parmenides, who famously claimed that non-being is not; his aim in the *Sophist* is to disprove his master), but I would like to zoom in on a tangential condition for the development of grammar, because it shows the entanglement of delimitation and constriction that language has been subjected to ever since.

Just before the Stranger explains to Theaetetus the slicing up of the *logos* into nouns and verbs, a mode of analysis necessary to refute certain sophistic and/or sophisticated arguments, he backs away: "I said a while ago that I always have

been too faint-hearted [*apeirēkōs*] for the refutation of this [sc. Parmenides'] theory, and so I am now".<sup>7</sup> The Stranger, coming to Socrates' pupil with the gift of grammar, may have been too *apeirēkōs* to actually refute his master himself. The word *apeirēkōs* here is the perfect participle of the verb *apolegesthai*, to give up, not to commit oneself, or even to confess – we still sense this word in the English "apology". The Stranger flinches, withdraws, pulls himself back.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, *apeirēkōs* recalls the Greek *apeiron*, the in-finite, borderlessness, that which is without end (*peras*), that which literally cannot be measured or limited by a rope (*peirar*). What is at stake here, with the introduction of grammatical analysis, is the radical intrusion of finitude within the realm of language, a delimitation, a noose around its neck, leading it to the stable environs of analyzable discourse.

The Stranger continues: "I am afraid that on account of what I have said you will think I am mad [*manikos*] because I have at once changed my position upside-down".<sup>9</sup> The Stranger here appears to us as a maniac, arguing against his father, *killing* his father – as Socrates already expected from the beginning.<sup>10</sup> He is "a crazy person who reverses everything from head to toe, from top to bottom, who puts all his feet on his head, inside out, who walks on his head".<sup>11</sup> How come? Could the Stranger – perhaps – be in love? The opening sequence of dialogue provides us with enough clues that some matchmaking had been going on prior to the conversation. When the Stranger requests "an interlocutor who is tractable and gives no trouble",<sup>12</sup> in other words, is causing no pains (*alupōs*) and obedient to the reins (*euēniōs*) of the dialogue or dialectician in question, Socrates offers him a wide range of choices: "Well, you may choose whomever you please of those present; they will all respond pleasantly to you".<sup>13</sup> Whomever the Stranger would choose, he would be able lead him, tame (*praiōs*) as he would be. Socrates suggests to take one of the young guys: "If you take my advice you will choose one of the young fellows, Theaetetus here, or any of the others who suits you";<sup>14</sup> they are even more willing to please. The Stranger feels somewhat ashamed,<sup>15</sup> because it is his first time in Socrates' company, but he ends up by accepting Theaetetus as his interlocutor. Theaetetus briefly expresses his concern whether, now that the Stranger has followed Socrates' suggestion, he will please and gratify the others too,<sup>16</sup> but the Stranger has made his choice: "if you're not happy, blame the others, not me".<sup>17</sup>

Theaetetus shows one last sign of resistance before he shuts his mouth: "Oh, no, I do not think I shall get tired of it so easily, but if such a thing does happen, we will call in this Socrates, the namesake of the other Socrates; he is of my own age and my companion in the gymnasium, and is in the habit of working with me in almost everything".<sup>18</sup> We must be careful here with what is meant by "almost everything" (*ta polla ouk aēthes*), namely "everything that is not improper or un-

wanted". I leave it up to the honorable reader to interpret the precise implications and hidden agendas of this double negation. It seems as if the Stranger finds himself in a Cratylean ordeal, where he is, at the suggestion of the philosopher Socrates, talking to a boy looking like Socrates, "with his snub nose and protruding eyes",<sup>19</sup> who offers to be replaced by the namesake of Socrates. Thus Socrates, as *philological* man, the embodiment of the love of language, continuously haunts, in reality, name, and image, the conversation in which language is tied down by philosophy. He himself prefers not to partake.

Roping down along the cliffs of this Platonic dialogue, Aristotle reaches the planes of grammatical boredom in his work *Peri hermēneias*, *On Interpretation*. Here we should keep in mind, that if anything, Love was the first interpreter (*hermēneuon*)<sup>20</sup> to ever enter into philosophical orbit, if we are to believe Socrates' "instructress in love",<sup>21</sup> Diotima. However, any expression of love or other desires is quickly relegated to the no-go zones of philosophical practice, and overlooking the grand fields of logical consistency Aristotle majestically opens with: "First it needs to be posited what a noun and what a verb [is]".<sup>22</sup> This "positing" (*thesthai*), or as a scholar suggested, "defining, the drawing of a horizon" (*horisasthai*)<sup>23</sup> for nouns and verbs is enacted in order to exclude that which is without horizon, without limit (*auriston*).<sup>24</sup> For that which limitlessly takes part in language threatens the capacity of a sentence, of a meaningful proposition, to be either true or false. Logical, clear, unambiguous language happens on the horizon of meaninglessness, is constantly on the edge of the abyss of "many things without place" (*polla atopa*),<sup>25</sup> threatened to go on into boundlessness (*eis apeiron*).<sup>26</sup> Aristotle's aim is to establish a philosophically proper language of the declarative sentence (*logos apophantikos*), a sentence that is either true or false.<sup>27</sup> In other words, Aristotle aims to purge language of all grammatical constructs that are illogical for philosophy: grammar has to become a homomorphism of logic.

Some of the first forms to be purged from the declarative sentence are the cases of nouns, the inflections of words: "Of-Philo [*Philōnos*] or to-Philo [*Philōni*] and the like are not nouns but cases of a noun. [...] Take for example 'Of-Philo is (not)'; for in no way this is true or false".<sup>28</sup> Cases, at least, the ones that will later be called oblique or queer (*plagiai*),<sup>29</sup> are banished from philosophical language, which is thus solely composed of "straight" nouns and verbs. A good philosopher is therefore he who speaks of truth and talks straight, without embellishment.<sup>30</sup> What other sentences, then, are beyond this sanitized language of the principle of non-contradiction? Aristotle gives us a single example: "[Truth or falsity] are not present in all [sentences]: for example the prayer is a sentence [*logos*], but neither true nor false".<sup>31</sup> Werner Hamacher, in his *95 Thesen zur Philologie*, points out that this is where language is separated that from the desire *for* language that sustains

it. “Aristotle makes a distinction between *logos apophantikos*, declarative language, which relates in truthful sentences to finite objects, and another *logos* that does not declare anything, and therefore can be neither true nor false. His only example is the *eukhē*, the request, the prayer, the desire”.<sup>32</sup>

This other *logos* of the request, prayer, or desire – the love and enthusiasm for language – is what is banished with Aristotle. But, despite many efforts to the contrary, this domain of philology will reemerge in the strictly logico-philosophical, so-called analytical, discourse by the twentieth century, as if in excess of all formalization.

## 2. Language and Its Discontents

Even though purified from non-declarative sentences, language still wasn't good enough for philosophy. With the decline of Latin as the universal language of philosophy, it seemed as if a properly philosophical language, universal and of an utmost clarity, was further away than ever. It is therefore not surprising that the idea of a clear language, understood by all and most fit for thought, appears within a *utopian* context – in Thomas More's *Utopia* from 1516. In its exercise to exclude all non-declarative, non-sensical sentences, the *polla atopa*, “many things without place”, philosophy had relegated the perfect language itself to a non-place, a *utopia*, a “philosophical city”<sup>33</sup>: “They be taught learning in their own native tongue. For it is both copious in words and also pleasant to the ear, and for the utterance of a man's mind very perfect and sure”.<sup>34</sup>

This perfect, “philosophical” language attached itself to unreachable, alien places, non-places such as China or the moon, continuing the lunar and lunatic affects of the straight expression of philosophy that were already established by the manic Stranger from Elea.<sup>35</sup> In the first English story of space travel, *The Man in the Moone*, written by Bishop Thomas Godwin and posthumously published in 1638, the main character Domingo Gonsales flies to moon in a contraption pulled by *Gansa's*, a “certaine kinde of Wild Swans [...] that like unto our Cuckoes, and Nightingales, at a certaine season of the yeare, doe vanish, and are not more to be seen”.<sup>36</sup> There he discovers a musical language, spoken, contrary to the situation on earth, by all its inhabitants alike and understood by everyone. Similarly, Cyrano de Bergerac, in his turn, also situates the utopian, universal language – and therefore the properly *philosophical* language – in outer space. On one of the planets circling the sun, Cyrano discovers a little naked man, sitting on a stone, who spoke “a language such as I have never heard, and which has no relation whatsoever with one from our world, which however I understood more quickly and more intelligently than my mother tongue. Upon my request, he explained me something wonderful, that within the sciences

there was a truth, from which one was always easily at a remove; that the more a language removed itself from that truth, the more it would find itself lower than the idea and less easy to understand".<sup>37</sup>

The philosophical language is the one which may be apprehended without problem and practically immediately, "easier than one's mother tongue". Moreover, it is the language of "truth" – the more a language deviates from this truth, the less intelligible it will be. While this universal, philosophical language was a trope of popular fiction, it at the same time attracted a more "official" philosophical interest. Even though reaffirmed in its intimate connection to madness, a truthful, univocal language remained an object of rigorous pursuit. Another English bishop, John Wilkins, who had previously published *The Discovery of a World in the Moone* (1638) and *A Discourse Concerning a New Planet* (1640) published his *Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* in 1668, an elaborate categorical system in which every "word" would be thoroughly analyzable down to its smallest parts. All substances and attributes would be coded into a sort of agglutinative language. An abstract of his *Essay* states the following:

The advantages proposed by this philosophical language were, the facilitating of mutual commerce among several nations of the world; the improving of natural knowledge; and the propagation of religion: our author was also of opinion, that it might contribute much to the clearing of some modern differences in religion, by unmasking many wild errors that shelter themselves under the disguise of affected phrases: which being philosophically unfolded, and rendered according to the genuine and natural importance of words, would appear to be *inconsistencies and contradictions* [.]<sup>38</sup>

Just like in Plato or Aristotle, the intention remains focused on the unmasking of "inconsistencies and contradictions": logical fallacies. The tools to do so, however, are this time supposedly unrelated to ordinary human language; the philosophical language is built from the ground up, based on a complete categorization of the universe – or at least, that is what they claim to be doing. However, this categorization turned out to be so complex and subjective, that finding one's way through the entire forest of categorical trees and branches would require a full and analytical knowledge of *Wilkins's* universe.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Influenced by the work of Wilkins and George Dalgano's *Ars signorum*, a similar project, Gottfried Leibniz continued their project and worked on the creation of a *characteristica universalis*, a universal, philosophical language that could express all possible thoughts, "an alphabet of human thought", the ideal still being the coincidence of logical and grammatical structures. If language could be somehow forced to follow reason, universality was in sight.

Leibniz never reached a fully worked out version of his *characteristica*, but with

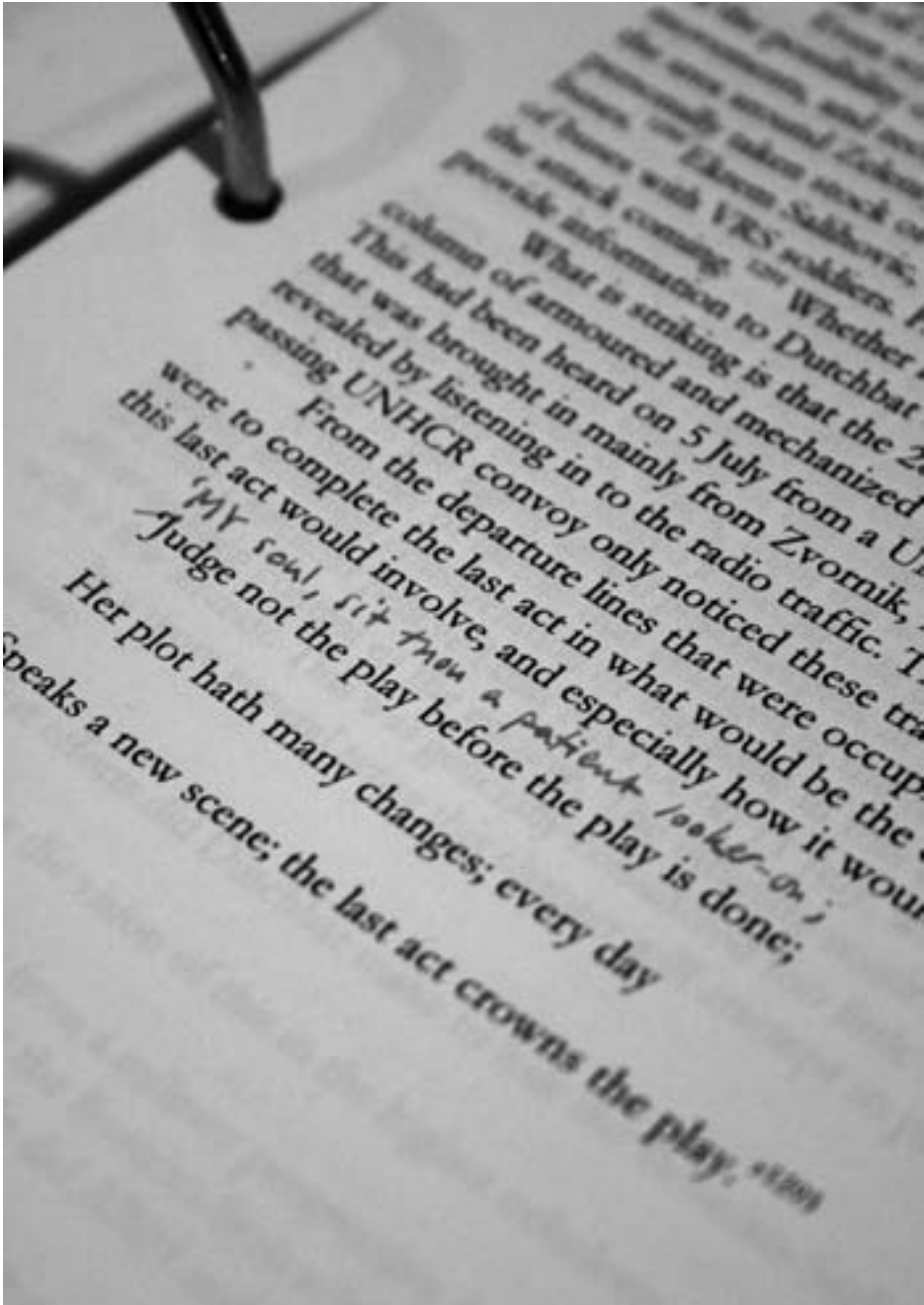
the publication of Gottlob Frege's *Begriffsschrift* in 1879 the logical apparatus to formalize language into a proper logical structure came to maturity, by means of a "step-by-step approximation"<sup>40</sup> of Leibniz's universal characteristic. Although Kant had claimed that "since the time of Aristotle it [sc. logic] has [...] been unable to take a single step forward, and therefore seems to all appearance to be finished and complete",<sup>41</sup> Frege's reinvention of a propositional logic that was pioneered by the Stoics catapulted logic into the twentieth century. However, Frege's preface to this highly symbolic work, leaves no doubt as to its aspirations: he aims for "a formula language for pure thought".<sup>42</sup>

If it is one of the tasks of philosophy to break the domination of the word over the human spirit by laying bare the misconceptions that through the use of language often almost unavoidably arise concerning the relations between concepts and by freeing thought from that with which only the means of expression of ordinary language, constituted as they are, saddle it, then my ideography, further developed for these purposes, can become a useful tool for the philosopher.<sup>43</sup>

"Freeing thought" from "ordinary language", or, as Frege writes, the "language of life" (*Sprache des Lebens*), thus implies a certain timeless language of death. The perfect language thus becomes a dead language, a language without experience of time or tense. This idea was already present in Aristotle when he claimed that proper verbs used in declarative sentences should only indicate the present time.<sup>44</sup> Philosophy, up to and including Heidegger, privileges the present (and presence) as the properly philosophical space-time;<sup>45</sup> the eternal present of philosophical truths. Frege's work, in its radical separation of logical language from natural language that was initiated by Leibniz and his predecessors, therefore strongly dismisses a philosophical concept that has co-originated with the first restrictions on natural language (and the possibility of any categorization of language whatsoever) articulated by the Greeks: the subject.<sup>46</sup>

The mere invention of this ideography has, it seems to me, advanced logic. I hope that logicians, if they do not allow themselves to be frightened off by an initial impression of strangeness, will not withhold their assent from the innovations that, by a necessity inherent in the subject matter itself, I was driven to make. These deviations from what is traditional find their justification in the fact that logic has hitherto always followed ordinary language and grammar too closely. In particular, I believe that the replacement of the concepts *subject* and *predicate* by *argument* and *function*, respectively, will stand the test of time.<sup>47</sup>

We ought to pay close attention to the wording with which Frege dismisses subject and predicate from philosophy. Even though he speaks of an "advance", which he was "driven" to make, this might seem at first sight "strange". Why? Because Frege "deviates" from ordinary language, from the language of the living.



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Frege literally kills the subject of language and its categorically organized predicates, but only as a “test of time” – as if that hasn’t already been rendered impossible in the face of the eternal present of logic. Philosophical language itself therefore becomes subject to the unstable discourses of scientificity, testing, and experiment as Friedrich Nietzsche expounded three years later in *The Gay Science*.<sup>48</sup> An experimental drive that allows, for the first time, the cutting up of natural, ordinary language into formalized, testable *fragments* – a fragmentariness that I will return to below.

A result of this forced remove from the language of the living, a deviation from the logical straightjacket that Aristotle imposed on ordinary language, is the establishment of the principle of compositionality. From Aristotle onward, the declarative sentence, consisting of subject and predicate, always had had a meaning based on its constituents, while being meaningful on its own as well.<sup>49</sup> The meaning of the sentence consisted of, but was not fully constituted by, the meaning of its components. Frege proposes a radical break: “Only in a proposition have the words really a meaning”.<sup>50</sup> The meaning of sentences is fully correlative with the meaning of its components. A sentence is nothing but a function.

The most extreme extension of this thought is formed by Richard Montague’s work on categorial grammar. His enterprise was influenced, except for Frege’s pioneering work, by the development of lambda calculus by Alonzo Church,<sup>51</sup> at the same time that Alan Turing wrote his seminal essay “On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the *Entscheidungsproblem*” (1936), introducing the idea of universal computing device, the Turing machine. Both Church’s lambda calculus and the Turing machine address the nature of computability: if some set method exists to carry out a calculation, this calculation can be carried out by a Turing machine or untyped lambda function. Therefore, any logical system which can be formulated as lambda calculus may be calculated and computed. As a consequence, any lambda calculus imposed on language, or formulation of language as lambda calculus, opens the gate not to a universal comprehension of language, but to its universal calculability, even though never successfully tested beyond a certain *fragment* of a certain dialect of English. Montague’s approach (and the one of his immediate successors) persistently focuses on fragments of English, notwithstanding the grandiloquence of their “universal grammars”.

We could, and perhaps should, speak here of a queer, “gay” science (we must also take this at face value, both Turing and Montague were homosexual),<sup>52</sup> with its philologically inclined attention to the fragment, which was tacitly implied yet strictly formalized in Gödel’s incompleteness theorem. Richard Montague applied this theorem successfully to the realm of set theory: ZFC set theory cannot be finitely axiomatized.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, the “strangeness” and “deviation” implied



by Frege's logical approach to language became formalized in the strictest sense. Montague lines up mathematical logic along the science that Nietzsche had proposed as "a model for cognition that cannot simply account for itself or maintain its results within the assured certitudes of a controlled system of knowledge".<sup>54</sup> Montague asserts that there is a real possibility to subjugate the realm of language to mathematics. The often quoted opening sentence of his article "English as a Formal Language" immediately offers an illustration: "I reject the contention that an important theoretical difference exists between formal and natural languages".<sup>55</sup> The syntax of this sentence itself reveals Montague's approach to language. First of all he does not "reject that", but he "rejects the *contention* that". In other words, his rejection does not imply any ontological or metaphysical claim on the being of language, but merely rejects a *statement* about language. And again in the essay "Universal Grammar": "There is in my opinion no important theoretical difference between natural languages and the artificial languages of logicians; indeed, I consider it possible to comprehend the syntax and semantics of both kinds of languages within a single natural and mathematically precise theory".<sup>56</sup> Again note his wording, "in my opinion", "I consider it". For Montague, all claims about the equality between natural and logical languages (mathematics) are embedded – embedded because of the absence of any foundation, any full axiomatization of language; his claims are never, in the Aristotelian sense of the word, declarative. Nevertheless, they are carefully expressed statements about the formal nature of language, and as such part of philosophy. Therefore, since the beginning of his work on formal semantics as a model for language, Montague focuses on the problem of "that", the problem of intensionality, intensional language. Ever since Aristotle, declarative sentences have not posed any substantial threat to the rigorous equation between logic and language; their truth value could always be immediately tested against the world and properly calculated. Embeddedness, however, introduces an immediate problem. For example, the sentence "I reject the contention that an important theoretical difference exists between formal and natural languages" is true whenever Montague indeed rejects the embedded contention, independent of whether the embedded statement "there exists an important theoretical difference between formal and natural languages" is true or not. The same holds for the sentence "I consider it possible to..." (i.e. "I consider it a possibility that..."). Sentences embedded under "that" suffer from the same deficiency that Aristotle asserted in the case of the prayer (*eukhē*); they don't seem to be able immediately to denote the truth or falsity of the statement. These sentences are of Montague's constant concern, while – updating Aristotle's exclusionary moves – sharing them under declarative sentences: "when only *declarative* sentences come into consideration, it is the construction of such [sc. entailment] conditions that [...] should count as the central concern of syntax and semantics".<sup>57</sup>

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And he adds in a footnote: “In connection with imperatives and interrogatives truth and entailment conditions are of course inappropriate[.]”<sup>58</sup> Thus the range of logico-philosophically acceptable language is merely displaced; that which exhorts us, drives us in and into language – and that which questions it – remains off limits. Montague’s interest for “that” can be traced back to an early essay from 1959 written together with Donald Kalish, simply titled “That”.<sup>59</sup> Montague and Kalish introduce the logical problem of embeddedness by means of a few examples, such as the following argument.

- (a) 9 = the number of planets.
- (b) It is provable that in arithmetic that 9 is not prime.
- (c) Therefore it is provable in arithmetic that the number of planets is not prime.<sup>60</sup>

Whereas the two premises (a) and (b) are true, the conclusion (c) does not seem to hold true. Montague and Kalish’s approach to solving this logical fallacy is by pointing out that (b) is ambiguous, “because it is not determined exactly what sentence is asserted to be provable in arithmetic”.<sup>61</sup> “9” in (b) could refer in (a) either to the integer 9 or the number of planets. In other words, the subordinating conjunction “that” somehow binds “9” to a previous assertion. In order to formalize this, they develop the logical framework of an intensional language. However, this new, intensional language, is at the same time tacitly assumed to approach the certain dialect of the English language that is Montague’s mother tongue, as if philosophy is imagined as closing in on the “natural” language from which it always had been subtracted, whether explicitly or implicitly: “We may wonder whether it is possible to approximate English more closely within our intensional language”.<sup>62</sup> This silent approach of “natural language” to “our [whose?] intensional language” is however not only executed by expanding the calculative power of mathematical logic.

At the same time, a successful merger between the two requires the supplementation of “ordinary” English. For example, in his discussion of the treatment of events, which always relate to a temporal coordinate, he formalizes by means of lambda calculus “the rising of  $x$ ” (as in the rising of the sun) as  $\lambda t[\text{rises}(x, t)]$ .<sup>63</sup> So far so good. The event of the rising of  $x$  is embedded under a temporal variable  $t$ . Above formula thus expresses a generic rising event. But the fact that we can speak of “*the* rising of  $x$ ”, even if it is a generic event, indicates that “the rising of  $x$ ” may be the (unique) property of an object on the rise.

Accordingly, let us *extend* English by using the phrase “ $P$  is a (generic) rising of  $x$ ”, whenever  $P$  is a one-place predicate variable and  $x$  an individual variable as synonymous with  $P = \lambda t[\text{rises}(x, t)]$ . In *ordinary* English we shall never encounter instances of the

new usage, that is, the occurrences of "*a* rising of *x*" when the reference is to a generic event; we shall always find instead "*the* rising of *x*". Because it is logically true that there is exactly one generic rising of any given object, what can be expressed in the one way can be equally well expressed in the other. Nevertheless it appears desirable to *supplement* English in the indicated manner in order to maintain the *standard use* of "the".<sup>64</sup>

In other words, the additional logical formula  $P = \lambda t[\text{rises}(x, t)]$  makes explicit the inherent ambiguity of the sentence "the rising of *x*". When we say "the rising of the sun", this may refer either to a specific, determinate rising of the sun (for example this morning), or the generic (recurring, everyday) event, whereas in the latter case we would expect "a rising of the sun" (as in: "look, a rising of the sun!"), which however never appears in "ordinary" English. Nevertheless, English needs to be "extended" and "supplemented" with this ambiguity of "the", an ambiguity not sensible to mere users of the "ordinary" English language, *in order to sustain its ordinarity*. Thus we can notice an active strategy of blurring the boundaries between ordinary language and Montague's intensional language. The latter creates new meanings for the former, the former introduces new ambiguities for the latter; a case of interpretative parasitism.

In spite of this mutual entanglement of reciprocally supplementing languages, Montague has "reason to hope that the ambiguities [he has] pointed out will confirm two points sometimes mistakenly supposed incompatible: there is philosophic interest in attempting to analyze ordinary English; and ordinary English is an inadequate vehicle for philosophy".<sup>65</sup> Montague confirms, in this conclusion of the essay "Philosophical Entities", the following, explicitly compatible propositions: "there is philosophic interest in attempting to analyze ordinary English" and "ordinary English is an inadequate vehicle for philosophy". He finds support for this conformation in the ambiguities he has pointed out throughout the article. Ordinary English is ambiguous at crucial points, which obstructs an immediate and clear reasoning based on its surface appearance, only once infused with "new" meanings (that is, alternative logical formalizations of homonymous sequences of words) it may approach the adequacy of his intensional language. However, this intensional language may only arise through the analysis of ordinary English itself, and the accompanying "existence of such dubious epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical entities such as pains, tasks, events, and obligations. [...] We cannot lightly dismiss sentences like these; they play a conspicuous role in philosophy, perceptual psychology, and everyday discourse"<sup>66</sup> – philosophy and discourse that Montague himself does not seem to be able to get away from.

The result of this forced rapprochement between "ordinary" language and mathematically constrained logical frameworks is that their one-on-one overlap is – as I stated before – necessarily "fragmentary", partial: "In the present paper I shall



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[...] present a precise treatment, culminating in a theory of truth, of a formal language that I believe may be reasonably regarded as a fragment of ordinary English".<sup>67</sup> If his formal language were complete, Montague would have had a computer write his essays, or, the need to write philosophical essays would for once and for all have disappeared. Thus the fragmentary nature of "English" as a "formal language" is the logical outcome of on the one hand the "inadequacy" of English and on the other hand the logico-philosophical desire to analyze it. English simply cannot live up to the demands of Montague's intensional language. Thus, the fragments of English that appear in Montague's later work are "merely illustrative"<sup>68</sup> and "intentionally circumscribed in the interests of simplicity",<sup>69</sup> as he states in the opening paragraph of his notorious article "The Proper Treatment of Quantification in English":

The aim of this paper is to present in a rigorous way the syntax and semantics of a certain fragment of a certain dialect of English. For expository purposes the fragment has been made as simple and restricted as it can be while accommodating all the more puzzling cases of quantification and reference with which I am acquainted.<sup>70</sup>

By now it has become thoroughly uncertain which "certain fragment of a certain dialect of English" we are dealing with. What has been removed and what has been supplemented? The part of language that has been quarantined by Montague appears to be more of a linguistic freak show, including "all the more puzzling cases". This is the point where formal philosophy turns into a veritable linguistic teratology, and a superficial perusal of most of the contemporary literature on syntactical and semantic structures would reveal a veritable logosphere of these monsters of "ordinary" language, where grammaticality is the only gravitational force pulling declaratives toward the surface of logical dictates.

But lo and behold, one of these monsters materializes, as example, and numerous times. Our first sighting occurs in the essay "Philosophical Entities", where we encounter the argument "Jones finds a unicorn; therefore there is unicorn", immediately followed by the ambiguous argument "Jones seeks a unicorn; therefore there is a unicorn".<sup>71</sup> And later in the "Proper Treatment", when we have familiarized ourselves with the hunter, he is addressed with his first, biblical name: "John seeks a unicorn", "John tries to find a unicorn", "John talks about a unicorn".<sup>72</sup> Yet again a mythical creature appears on the way to the perfect language, like Godwin's hero Domingo Gonsales being pulled by *Gansa's*, Richard Montague reaches out to Universal Grammar on a unicorn – it obviously being one of the more "queer" animals in the occidental mythological zoo, with a horn to vouch for its potential and potency to turn up in the tightest spots. The unicorn does certainly, as far as Montague's intentions go, not appear as metaphor.<sup>73</sup> Being essentially chosen for

its existential ambiguity – does it exist or not, and how is this denoted in sentences – it however also becomes an emblem of the troubled relation between intensional language and ordinary language, between the language of declaration and the language of *eukhē*, an articulation of what Hamacher calls the *double* language of philology, “the language of desire and the language of knowing about it”, hunting each other: “The latter can only *retake* what the former says; the former can only *overtake* what is said about it”.<sup>74</sup> The unicorn appears as what drives Montague’s logic home.

“John wishes to find a unicorn and eat it”.<sup>75</sup>

Well then, let’s catch it first.

### 3. *For the Love of Language*

“The Unicorn in Captivity” is the seventh of a series of tapestries entitled “The Hunt of the Unicorn” hanging in the New York Metropolitan Museum.<sup>76</sup> The series is a product of the late Middle Ages and depicts the hunt and subsequent capture of the mythical creature. The seventh tapestry shows the unicorn, captured and tamed, as indicated by the collar and the chain, securing it loosely to the tree. It is surrounded by a fence, which, however, is low enough to jump over, something it apparently has chosen not to do. Its captivity is a voluntary one. The tree is filled with ripe pomegranates, bursting and dripping juice on the unicorn’s neck, flank, and ass, symbolizing fertility. Butterflies and dragonflies distribute nectar from flower to flower, and many of the plants represented on the tapestry, such as wild orchid, bistort, and thistle, suggest procreation and marital bond. The unicorn is resting, taking a break.

The myth of the unicorn can be traced back to Ancient Greece, where Ctesias, in his work *Indica*, tells of a wild ass with one horn, colored white, red, and black. Aristotle, in his *Historia Animalum*, mentions an *oryx*, cloven-hooved and single horned. A more extensive description of the unicorn is given in the *Physiologus*, a bestiary dating back to late antiquity, but widely disseminated throughout Europe during the Middle Ages. Its description of the unicorn is the source of two allegorical readings, one within a pagan, and one within a Christian context, which, however, come together in an interpretation of the unicorn as the living word and love of language.

The *Physiologus* told that the unicorn has the following characteristics. It is a small animal, like a small goat, but it is very sly, and the hunter cannot come close to it, because it possesses great power. It has a horn in the middle of its head. I will now explain how it is caught. A pure lady [i.e. a virgin], who is clothed, is sent to it. And the animal jumps to the breast of the lady. And she overwhelms it, it follows her, and she carries it to the palace of the king.<sup>77</sup>



In the interpretation of Provençal poets, the troubadours – the seekers and finders that populate Montague's examples –, the poet is attracted to his lady like the unicorn to the virgin. The lady is the only one who can capture the poet's full attention, and is the focus of his full poetical pursuit. The rules for this pursuit were laid down in the *Leys d'amors* (Laws of Love), written by the troubadour Guilhem Molinier at the request of the Consistori del Gay Saber (Consistory of the Gay Science), the poetic academy of Toulouse. "Some finding happens by adventure, and some by good care [...] But our science is not in any way that of the above ways of finding".<sup>78</sup> We could think of the *Leys d'amors* as the grammar of language that suggests an alternative to the logico-philosophical tradition established by Aristotle. In this gay science, which precedes and predicts Nietzsche's foundation-shattering reappraisal of scientificity, all language is focused on the *eukhē*, as the perpetual declaration of love, the production of everything that is not straight in language and the sciences and philosophies – those who find by chance or through effort – founded and sustained by it. In an acute analysis of the *razo de trobar* (*ratio inveniendi*) of the troubadours, Giorgio Agamben states that

the experience of the event of language is, thus, above all an amorous experience. [...] *Amors* is the name the troubadours gave to the experience of the advent of the poetic word and thus, for them, love is the *razo de trobar* par excellence. [...] For the troubadours, it is not a question of psychological or biographical events that are successively expressed in words, but rather, of the attempt to *live the topos itself, the event of language as a fundamental amorous and poetic experience*.<sup>79</sup>

The troubadour attempts to love and live this condition of language, including the *polla atopa* and utopias, the "*topos itself, the love for the argument, argentum* as 'splendor' and 'clarity' of language".<sup>80</sup> The embodiment of this love and desire expressed in language is the unicorn, equated in a poem of the troubadour Thibaut of Champagne with the poet himself.

I.  
*Ausi comme unicorne sui  
 Qui s'esbahist en regardant,  
 Quant la pucele va mirant.  
 Tant est liee de son ennui,  
 Pasmee chiet en son giron;  
 Lors l'ocit on en traïson.  
 Et moi ont mort d'autel senblant  
 Amors et ma dame, por voir:  
 Mon cuer ont, n'en puis point ravoïr*<sup>81</sup>





[I am like the unicorn:  
 Who looks up in surprise,  
 When seeing the virgin.  
 He is so content with what happens to him,  
 That in a rush he falls in her lap.  
 Thus he is treacherously killed.  
 And I, I have been killed in the same way  
 For love and my lady, truly:  
 They are my heart, and I cannot get it back.]

The troubadour identifies himself with the unicorn, experiencing a certain rush once it distinguishes the virgin, it rests its head gently in her lap, and is killed and captured. This is the way the poet is killed, losing his heart to his lady, his love to “the advent of the poetic word”. This is where the allegory bleeds into the Christian interpretation where the unicorn becomes a metaphor for God’s incarnated word, Jesus, whose heart is captured by the eternal virgin Mary: “The [unicorn] is also taken to be the image of our Savior. [...] The angelic forces couldn’t capture it, but it lived in the body of the truly eternal Virgin Mary: ‘And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.’ [Job. 1:14]”<sup>82</sup> If we are to believe John – at least, Montague believed in him, seeking (and finding) the unicorn – the word of the Christian God, who is supposed to be all about love, cannot be captured, not even by the angelic forces. He is essentially *apeiros*, cannot be tied down. Thibaut and the Christ dwell, their hearts captured by the virgin, Mary or otherwise, forever longing for her. The poet as incarnated word is a listening, *ein Hören/Einhorn* for his own heartbeat in another body, a silent word, *mot, mutus, motet*, a poem or song, to follow Jean-Luc Nancy’s fugues at the edges of philosophy.<sup>83</sup> The poet is a philologist, and poetry the “most outspoken philology”.<sup>84</sup>

Both at the moment of the extreme formalization of language, threatened as it is by its own formalizing protocols and the frantic drive of its constant testing of the consistency of fragmentary languages, and at one of the high points of the poetic arts, this mythical animal, harkening from ancient times appears to us, the unicorn – as emblem of the “gay science”. It has often been asked what precisely constituted this gay science. Avital Ronell has previously pointed out the drives to test and experiment as essential to its operational structure, and the Provençal poets themselves have stressed the component of love, the art of finding without finding, into any possible inquiry set out within its procedures. Perhaps we could wager the following: philology is the matrix of all gay science.<sup>85</sup> “Other than the sciences – ontology, biology, geology – that belong to the order of the *logos apophantikos*, philology speaks in the realm of the *eukhē*. Its name doesn’t mean a knowing of the *logos* – reason, language, acknowledgment –, but rather: affec-

tion, friendship, love for it".<sup>86</sup> And: "Even before it can strengthen an epistemic technique, it is an affective relation – a *philia*, a friendship or befriending – with language: namely a language that hasn't yet taken on a solid outline, a fixed form and hasn't yet become the instrument of already established meanings".<sup>87</sup> The noble unicorn of philology in love with a virgin language.

Despite its nobility,<sup>88</sup> the unicorn is a fierce animal, wounding its hunters whenever they come close. Thus, the love of language does not allow itself to be instrumentalized for any "epistemic technique", "it creates nothing but place – philology is decreation –, it is the medium through which all languages speak",<sup>89</sup> Hamacher writes with a clear Benjaminian undertone. That the unicorn may be slaughtered once it finds where its heart belongs and reaches the high of completion, or captured once it is deceived, remains the risk to which any true gay science opens itself – to be disproven or turned into a lifeless fossil of its former vibrant self. In this context, Hamacher offers another reading of the death scene, namely as "the death of philology in the Mother-text" as a "consequence of the phantasm of semanticism, that there are original and self-sufficient meanings".<sup>90</sup> This allows us to understand the appearance of Montague's final sentence on the unicorn: "John wishes to find a unicorn and eat it".<sup>91</sup> The capture and consummation of the unicorn may be allegorically read as the establishment of the final and consistent meaning of language, and therefore the death of any philological pursuit. But as "The Unicorn in Captivity" shows us, the resurrected unicorn, whose wounds and traumas have transformed into the pomegranate stains of ferocious reproduction, albeit seemingly tamed and instrumentalized, may always choose to jump the low fence, uninhibited by its loose chain – it is in a state of "*servitude volontaire*".<sup>92</sup> But, as Thibaut warns us, whenever he would choose to do so, Danger awaits him outside the fence.<sup>93</sup> The risk of the *apeiron* – the risk of actually being without rope or chain.

Let me now finish with precisely this risk and danger that underlie the practice of the gay science – the constant regime of testing, finding without finding, formalizations without any possible closure, walks outside the city walls –, by quoting the opening and closing fragments of what the poet Bruce Andrews writes in an ordinary, *living* English, "Danger Risk Jeopardy Hazard Peril", a philological manifesto for the twenty-first century, if anything:

– Have Having Needful Don't Nothing Needed Can't Don't No Method Vent Another's Aim Fatherless Why Head Inflammable Paradise Known Constituents Quits Existed Sleep Somewhere Hoped for Husband Pit Hypotheses Vanity Depths Dwelling Does Talking Treasure Tales History Dark Inducement Pigment Prongs Offers Nouns Never Noun Eastern Other Remark Another's System [...] Premises Parry Clamours Farther Kin Pass-words Stable Wooed Author Hitting upon False-hearted Start Facing

Inches Like Quick Scheme Ravenous Spectacle Findings Local Mangle Motive Flux  
Exist Deface Mmmm Bonfire Listen Public Teeny Refuge What Questions Talking  
Plus Legatos Relation Confirmed Recursive Light.<sup>94</sup>

This text, with its ruthless baring of the constituents of language, its radical equality of grammatical categories and landscape of modes of utterance, such a philology, where every declaration carries the force of an imperative, constitutes a risk that we, we fearless ones, should be willing to take, listen to, a public and open, teeny tiny refuge of what questions talking, and questions in talking not only individual words, but also their connections, their spacing, their legatos as a relation that confirms (or has always already confirmed) recursive light. Or, “light”.