

## CHAPTER 5

### **The Guardians of the Possible**

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In his book *Rome: The First Book of Foundations*, Michel Serres describes the fervent activity of termites as they construct their improbable towers. Whilst this activity demonstrates a degree of order, Serres also postulates an element of deviance and anomie. He says: “I’m sure that here and there, around, a few individuals will always continue to deposit balls on the ground while the Tower of Babel is being raised. These termites are the guardians of the possible. They sow the time of hope while laws and the repetitive are being solidified by the crystal next to them.” (2) Such a description acknowledges ‘activity at the edges’ – the kind of activity that, in the name of reason and dialectical efficiency, is too often marginalised, compressed or designed out of contemporary mediated environments and channels of communication. Such ‘deviant’ activity though, is not simply oppositional, or contrary, but is rather integral and essential to the wider landscape in so far as its relative qualities are continually in concert with other more orderly universal elements. Such activity occurs in what Serres calls the third space, occupied by those named as ‘third instructed’.<sup>1</sup>

We should seek our instruction neither from science alone, nor the sacred, nor any singular form of understanding, but should rather seek to occupy the spaces of transformation which lie between – neither one nor the other but the ‘third space’. Hence Serres ([1991] 1997b) gives the name ‘third-instructed’ (*tiers-instruit*) to him or her who is able to give up the comforts of disciplinary specialism and risk putting themselves into perpetual translation. (Brown: 12)

This perpetual translation is precipitated by the relational flow between states of being, characteristics, and their incessant instability. In order to inhabit such an unstable universe, Serres draws on multiple sources that cut cross time and space. As an example, he cites the work of Lucretius and the poetic extrapolation, through the figures of Mars and Venus, of the physical world as the source of contemporary thinking around the notions of complexity and simplicity. Lucretius positioned Mars as the master of order – presiding over atoms that are consistent and amenable to geometric calculation and the reliable laws of cause and effect. It is a world where predictions can be

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Barker outlines an excellent example of this kind of behaviour in this volume. His brilliant analysis of the ‘misuse’ of the U.S postal system shows exactly how formal practices and patterns of prescribed use can transmute into rogue practices that undermine the intended meaning and utility of the system.

made and outcomes are predetermined. However, the reign of Mars is placed under erasure by the presence of Venus who presides over a very different world. It is a world of chaos and uncertainty where prediction is far less reliable if not impossible. It is though, a world of infinite potential. It is the realm of the possible (and Venus is its guardian).

The intention of this chapter is to challenge the received wisdom of Mars that reason and logic serve to bring a coherent and natural order to chaos. The argument will proceed to suggest that what reason and logic actually do, is to impose certain very specific patterns on the world through a variety of processes of selection and rejection, mediation, translation and design, that are too often definitive and fixed. Working through Wittgenstein, Zygmunt Bauman, and Michel Serres, what follows explores self-organisation, and pattern formation as instances of *the repetition of difference through resistance*, as part of an enduring process of movement and attrition in a universe of chaos and noise, where waste and error are constant features. Repetition in this context operates as an unfolding and unstable visceral affect that is both distinct from, and central to, the critical distance of the formal intellect.<sup>2</sup> The idea of communication in this context then, always contains within it the idea of miscommunication: where there is signal there is noise. The important question is, what do we do with the shifting ratio of signal and noise, communication and miscommunication? Do we demarcate them into separate realms or recognise their necessary coexistence?

Wittgenstein understood this problem and it is expressed in his well-known statement, ‘What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.’ (89) For Wittgenstein, information that could not be said to form part of a logical structure of language, was superfluous and therefore not well disposed to knowing. It poses a potential danger – of misunderstanding or miscommunication, in so far as it stands ready to be variously interpreted. Hence it is silenced and effectively confined to a different dimension, where until such time as a common structure can be identified, there is no possibility of communication between this ‘colloquial’ form of expression and the more formal and evidently meaningful mode. But what is this silent dimension? Can it be thought of differently? Or are we bound by Wittgenstein’s configuration of it? Paradoxically it might be better understood by invoking the figure of noise. As chaotic, deviant and unruly, noise feeds back into the ordered system causing miscommunication and disrupting the clarity of logically structured language to the degree where perpetual translation is required, as Serres has pointed out. This however is not necessarily a negative incursion, as noise also constitutes an important part of the overall signal from which sensible meaning is derived. Noise, from this perspective, offers a means of describing the dense

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of *repetition of difference through resistance* draws heavily on Deleuze’s (2008) re-articulation of the concepts of difference and repetition, where the former becomes a positive expression of singular and unique attributes that maintain themselves through the repetition and endurance of that which has no equivalent and cannot be replaced. The trajectory of this energy is relative to variable instances of flow and resistance – smooth seamless continuities and sudden fissures and encounters with other objects and energy sources. In such a universe, even the most stable and predictable of elements are susceptible to unpredictable and unforeseen events.

plenum in which language subsists and out of which it forms, and reforms, responding to the infinite options made manifest by the guardians of the possible. As Cary Wolf states in his introduction to *The Parasite* (2007): noise should be understood “... not as the other or opposite of content, but as content’s very fiber.” (xiii)<sup>3</sup>

Turning silence into sound and noise in this way reclaims what is lost to Wittgenstein, without losing Wittgenstein himself. He was, after all, correct. The world is formed of repeating patterns that can largely be identified and modelled. Yet it also retains the potential to surprise. Whilst Wittgenstein demonstrates the common structure to great effect, in doing so he silences the colloquial nuances, individual utterances, performances, ‘unnecessary’ flourishes, and waste products, that language is also capable of producing. For him such communicative ‘excesses’ simply get in the way. They are exiled until such time as they can be formally accommodated. For Wittgenstein such an accommodation presupposes the possibility of translation between realms that combine to produce an end product, the common structure, from the raw material of language. Translating from one language to another – or between systems/modes of language, created a dichotomy for him, of formal commonality and superfluous material (waste) which in turn established two distinct spaces – the real and the mystical. “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. *They make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.” (89) They exist but do not form what comes to be understood as the common structure. For Serres on the other hand there is no end product and the process of translation is always ongoing. Waste is not partitioned, but is always present in the process, present and active as noise. In his book *Angels: A Modern Myth* (1995), Serres makes this point with specific reference to noise and music: “The messages carried by our voices are made up of various components: a basis consisting of background noise; then a musicality of sounds accompanied by phonemes, varying according to the language that is being spoken; and finally meaning...” (Serres, 1995: 79). He goes on to say: “Music is so called because it is the sum of all the muses: it adds to every art – no art excels without it. As an acoustic support and a precondition of meaning, music is a constant vibrating presence beneath our dialogs” (84). Noise, music and meaning should be understood then, as changeable states that bind together to form a single sonic economy that is characterised by virtual potentialities as much as actual trajectories.

The ideas of sound, silence, noise and music are foremost in terms of the argument being developed here, and Wittgenstein himself drew on them to fortify his argument and to present a clear account of how language, mediated in a range of different technological forms, marginalises unnecessary data or information, compressing it in the service of reliable and effective communication. His working through of the relationship between gramophone recording and musical notation, serves to underpin

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Sutherland gives a much fuller account in this volume.

his explanation and identification of a common structure present in language and can also be read as preceding contemporary practices in relation to algorithmic compression of data. Susan G Sterrett unpicks Wittgenstein's references to sound recording, mediation and representation in her article *Pictures of Sounds: Wittgenstein on Gramophone Records and the Logic of Depiction* (2005). Sterrett sets out the significant technological advances that Wittgenstein would have been aware of during his lifetime, notably, in the year before his birth (1889), a wax cylinder recording of Brahms playing the piano. This recording was later transferred to a gramophone disc and then more recently to an MP3 file. The significance of this will be returned to shortly. Wittgenstein was born into a world of recording, exactly at a time when liveness and the experience of listening were in the throes of separation. But recordings, as they were in the 1890's were of a very uncertain quality, and even as Edison's cylinders gave way to Berliner's superior gramophone discs, there remained the situation where, in a recording, what was being said was recognisable, but who was speaking was less certain. Though the quality would rapidly improve in the ensuing years, to the point of near exact replication, this seemed to be of little significance to Wittgenstein. The invention of recording was interesting for him at a conceptual level rather than a technical one: he was intrigued by the fact that music could be embedded within grooves on a disc from which sound could be reproduced by the motion of a needle, but even more so in the extent to which this was comparable to a written score consisting of marks on paper. Ultimately these two modes or models, like all forms of language, would have to possess common features that would allow for the translation of each into the other in order for their common structure to be identified.

The common logical structure present in such models was a kind of compressed signal, where identifiable meaningful communication, whether written language, musical notes, or the gramophone recording, was present always, unaffected by limitation or interference. It demonstrated an economy of expenditure – excluding miscommunication, or noise, or the always present potential for interpretation by the reader/musician, or the mechanical playback related to equipment and the condition of the disc. What was not immediately present and translatable in these forms of representation then, was effectively silenced, designated as colloquial, or set to the margins of the virtual or the possible not yet manifest, or manifest only in the mystical sense.<sup>4</sup> The wrong note, mistiming, or the scratch, were inconsequential. The point for Wittgenstein was not one of accuracy or perfect replication, but the presence of a common structure that could guarantee recognition regardless of the nuances of reproductive quality. A recording of a certain quality could undoubtedly capture more detail than a score generally does, but that was not the point. The point was that the common structure applied only to the minimum amount of information required to ensure meaningful

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<sup>4</sup> Dyson in her description of 'a quivering marginalia' (AQM) explores and exposes the infringement of the recordist, and highlights the significance of returning to the recording, that which had originally not been intended for audible perception.

communication. This minimum amount is what is present underneath the interference and the unnecessary adornment, unaffected by interpretive role of the performer that carries an infinite potential for miscommunication.

In order for a symphony to be extracted from the score, only a minimal amount of information, in the form of marks on paper, needs to be provided. These are the parts that when heard can in reverse be written down/notated. All notions of representation and similarity are based solely on those features of the symphony that can be translated into formal language. This relationship between elements of depiction and translatability into performance, is in effect what constitutes logical structure shared by the depiction and the depicted in equal ratio. Any examples of nuanced interpretation that may exist within the performance exists outside of the logical structure. Once notated the manuscript must be able to be played. Notes must be able to be played and played notes must be able to be notated. They are thus relative to each other – the depicted and the language of depiction coalesce to produce meaning, independent of specific circumstance or condition. Everything outside of the logical structure is ‘sent to Coventry’. It is noise that paradoxically must be passed over in silence – not spoken of or to in formal terms. Yet questions remain. What is outside of the logical structure of the symphony, or more accurately: what out of all that is inside is superfluous? Is the ‘outside’ essentially an affective and distinct mystical realm? Are accidents, mistakes, errors and miscommunications necessarily designated as mystical? Finally, must the mystical be brought under the control of logic or can it be liberated as energy that is present without demanding representational recognition, and therefore not mystical at all? The position adopted here is that in a chaotic universe, that which is logical is bound to the mystical and that which is mystical is only the unrealised potential of all that ultimately becomes manifest in language. The fate of each, if they are separated, becomes political and dependent on a human vocabulary of expediency, choice and hierarchy. So, the task is to breach the divide and to recognise the extent of self-organisation in a universe where the logical and the mystical are unstable and fluid pattern formations that inhere in each other and emerge from a single material plenum.

In contemporary terms this idea of the logical and its relation to the mystical, raises the related issue of the divide between the digital and the analogue, and the question, what is outside of the digital (itself a form of linguistic logic)? The answer in simple terms is, nothing, because everything can be coded and made to conform to mathematical logic. In the same way as the mystical and the linguistic cohabit, the analogue inheres in the digital and the digital in the analogue. Yet to return to the significance of the MP3 mentioned earlier, even when everything can be reduced to logic, and the self-fulfilling modern project is seemingly complete, a strange kind of waste continues to be produced. Strange because having already been modelled and codified it is demarcated as unnecessary rather than disposed of, or consigned to the abstract mystical realm. The abandonment of the

proportion of the signal that cannot be perceived by a statistical average of the population serves to flatten the experience of listening, and in doing so constitutes a neat analogy for exclusion at the level of political economy. The enduring presence of this digital waste, and with it the spectre of error and miscommunication, means that the drive towards efficiency, to the final victory for Mars, and to a logical understanding of everything through an economy of expenditure, is always destined to fail. With this failure Venus returns to 'sow the time of hope' and to draw our attention to areas historically neglected.

Such an analytical, or logical approach to language and communication, as was undertaken by Wittgenstein, concentrates meaning within a given band or frequency. Anything beyond this is silenced, darkened and designated as mystical. This notion - of a darkened realm that wraps around an illuminated zone - is developed further by Zygmunt Bauman in his *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. To illustrate the point Bauman uses the concept of design to suggest a specific kind of ordering or patterning, describing a design language that compresses in the service of narrative.

Bauman exonerates stories and the process of storytelling and defends their propensity to 'include through exclusion and to illuminate through casting shadows'. It is for him, as it was for Wittgenstein, an appropriate form of data compression that filters out all that is unnecessary for the creation of meaning. In order to further illustrate this, he refers to the Ireneo Funes story by Jorge Luis Borges. Funes, having been thrown from a horse is injured to the extent that he is no longer capable of enacting the compression of data required for sense making. He is 'virtually incapable of general Platonic ideas'. Instead the common logic, present in the structure of language, as set out by Wittgenstein, is flooded by the superfluous to the point of incomprehensibility. Funes was "...able to (had to!) perceive 'every grape that had been pressed into the wine and all the stalks and tendrils of its vineyard' where you and I, 'with one quick look', 'perceive three wine glasses on a table'. (Bauman: 17) In such a case simple meaning becomes essentially impossible to communicate, and the potential for miscommunication is once again infinite. No waste is created in the mind of Funes, nothing forgotten, nothing ignored. It is the virtual field, the not yet manifest, the endlessly possible – a quantum landscape where the rules of neither geometry or representation prevail. In essence it is a chaotic mind that cannot process information into knowledge. "To *know* is to *choose*. In the factory of knowledge, the *product* is separated from *waste*, and it is in the vision of the prospective clients, of their needs or their desires, that decides which is which." (Bauman: 18) In order for something to be known, to enter the realm of knowledge, something else must be unknown, choices must be made. It is not possible to have knowledge of the totality. Not possible for most humans at least. "For all practical intents and purposes, things excluded – thrown out of focus, cast in the shadow, forced into the vague or invisible background – no longer belong to 'what is'." (Bauman: 18) They are effectively destroyed.

The mind of Funes is the chaosmos, the universe of endless possibility, a purgatory from which release is only guaranteed via recourse to the reason and logic that he lacks. That those who have access to such faculties should be grateful is a difficult proposition to argue with. Yet it somehow feels a little too clinical – too cut and dry, too universal, too modern. Does each individual go willingly into a universe of signs, accepting the Platonic contract that there is much that cannot, and maybe should not, be known? What if we do not go willingly though? What if the contract is political and economic rather than simply rational and logical? Would there not always be a curiosity, a compulsion to know whether that which has been discarded might be preferable to what was retained (as knowledge)? These questions are undoubtedly beyond the remit proposed here, but suffice it to say, and this is Bauman's point: it is now imperative that we attend to the discarded, the superfluous, the unwanted and the different. Indeed, these are recurring themes at present – ecological catastrophe, national retrenchment, economic crises, gender identity and anxiety. All of these have become consistent tropes in recent times and are related to the notion of miscommunication, over-communication and overtly false, or 'fake' communication. It is also related to the notion of constant uncertainty and unreliability in relation to our engagement with the world, where meaning once arrived at may need to be renegotiated almost immediately – over and over. Rather than moving inexorably in a linear progression, that which we thought we had left behind, returns – is folded back into the present, and we can witness this everywhere. How do we deal with this? How do we turn silence onto noise, or cast a light across the whole stage without being cast into a catastrophic existential crisis of global/universal proportions?

The superfluous and the unexpressable, or that which has not yet been contained in language, in Wittgenstein's universe, must now be given due attention. They inhabit the same realm from which meaning and logic emerge as that which can be expressed or spoken about, or recognised and made sense of. Such sensible manifestations however, in so far as they are compressed, too often stand aside from that which is designated waste, or beyond sense, surplus to requirement, and in effect silent. These maligned modes of being, if theorised differently however, can be understood as 'the guardians of the possible', whose silent presence is always a danger, or an opportunity, standing ready to permeate the sensible. The borders, such that they exist or are erected, are malleable, and likely to be breached at any moment. Science breached by myth, and myth by science, back and forth across time and space, as Lucretius, and many others return to the fold as our contemporaries. Myth communicates with mathematical patterns, analogue with the digital, sensible speech with noise and waste, to form a protean tide that compression seeks to tame creating passing moments of order. To fully comprehend this process and our place within it we need to change our relationship to time, and space and the 'unthinking, mindlessness of nature' – self-organisation and pattern formation.

This of course carries the risk of distinct voices becoming indecipherable as the mix becomes too

dense, too busy, too noisy. It also risks coherent logic being sacrificed to a kind of pre-modern chaos, and a submission to mysticism. Yet it is a risk that Serres is prepared to take. He is not deterred by the scale of the task. He begins by plotting the complex passages that link these diverse voices, realms, disciplines and domains. They are passages through which communication is mediated and translated, and of course this means there is always the chance of distortion, or miscommunication and misunderstanding.

In the Hermes series, and later through his work on the theme of angels, Serres tackles head on this notion of translation as a process of making connections and setting out lines of communication that create passages between multiple distinct realms. He uses the example of J.M.W Turner whose paintings he says demonstrate the communion between art and science with Turner's work residing at the intersection between classical mechanics and thermodynamics. This is not though a simple matter of cause and effect. Turner is not ushering in a new paradigm, nor simply responding to one, but is rather an integral element in what is now a complex process of translation and communication, without direct representational form (Brown: 5). There are countless other cases that cut across aesthetics, popular and intellectual, spatial and temporal, scientific and philosophical divides in the spirit of Serres. They are a common feature of the narrative texts that pervade our culture, and it is worth pausing for a moment to consider a particular example.

Echoing Serres' call to the angels *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A Matter of Life and Death*, *Field of Dreams*, *Wings of Desire* – can all be cited as examples of narrative discourse in relation to translation, communication, and indeed miscommunication between realms, mediated by a heavenly messenger. For the purposes of this chapter it is *A Matter of Life and Death* that perhaps best illustrates the point being made. As a narrative text it shines a light on a particular moment in time and space, yet it equally embraces the inter-translatability between realms – the dark and the light, or in this case the Technicolor and the black & white - as time and space, and the specific instances that inhabit them, become entangled. A film by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger from 1946 *A Matter of Life & Death* constitutes a non-linear unfolding as it looks forward from the darkness of war, through the a-temporal lens of the film's heavenly inhabitants, to a reinvigorated future where life returns to a corporeal host from which it could so easily have been taken, miscommunication and mistakes notwithstanding. With its mission to consolidate US/ UK relations in the midst of a Europe having torn itself apart, it has a timely resonance and that can and should be re folded back into a contemporary context.

Seventy three years later, this cinematic masterpiece is still playing to audiences and its contribution to new modes of understanding remains undimmed. In the film a mistake by an angel/conductor, allows a man who should have died, to live. It is a mistake that threatens the



very fabric of the universe – though one that when corrected via logical argument can be accommodated by a universe that is resilient and able to adapt to new and unusual situations. Like Lucretius, Powell & Pressburger become our contemporaries, connecting between realms, crossing the divide. Wittgenstein’s mystical and real are connected by an angel - heaven and earth inhere in each other and become parallel dimensions (that can now be spoken of logically through the language of cinema) that can always potentially connect as the narrative folds back into the present to inform and support our thinking. Within such narratives the unknown is not abstract and impotent, but a potential force that can impact at any moment to create something *new*. This is what Powell & Pressburger and Michel Serres have been able to deduce for us, and what we need to comprehend for ourselves as we endeavour to account for contemporary complexities.

The *new* emerges out of unique combinations of communication and translation between realms, whether object orientated or theoretical in the form of ideas. Sometimes this process can be smooth and flawless and result in the common structure that Wittgenstein described. But equally it can be unpredictable and problematic. In his outlining of Serres’ position Steven Brown cites the work of John Law, and it is worth repeating within the current context. Law suggests that translation (*traduction*) is a form of transformation as well a kind of betrayal, a treason (*trahison*). But this is not necessarily a bad thing (Brown, 2002: 6). It is too simple, he says, to assume that communication is good, whilst miscommunication is bad. Communication, whether transformation or betrayal, is always a complex mix, and in the context of the argument that is being developed here, it is a mix of noise, music (as an emerging pattern) and meaning. The basic sender receiver model, or simple laws of cause and effect do not suffice in such noisy environments. Because Serres understands this, he is extremely important in terms of supporting models of thought capable of accounting for the current complex nature of our existence where the fuzziness of uncertainty and anxiety are recurring features. For him things constantly get mixed up: history, myths names and language move from Greek to Roman, Heracles becomes Hercules, and this is Serres’ terrain of choice, a space where information moves in and out of range, commingling to produce sense and nonsense – intended and unintended effects. In *Rome* (Serres, 2015), Heracles kills Cacus: having stolen a herd of cattle from Geryon, Heracles himself becomes the victim of a misdemeanour when Cacus contrives to separate Heracles from his herd. In a complex manoeuvre Cacus reverses the cattle’s line of flight, but not their direction of travel as indicated by their footprints, by dragging them by their tails to his lair. On awakening Heracles resolves to follow the footprints and in doing so sets off in the ‘wrong direction’. His quest though is interrupted when he hears the lowing of the cattle behind him. He reverses his course and discovers his stolen cattle hidden in Cacus’ cave. “The tracks deceived Hercules, and the Lowing undeceived him.” (Serres, 2015: 11) The deception at play here is not the result of an untruth however. Both the direction of the footprints and the lowing are read correctly. But only in

combination do they unconceal the full picture of Cacus having duplicitously dragged the cattle to the cave. The footprints miscommunicate in terms of spatial location on this occasion, but in doing so form an essential part of the communication of the overall picture. They serve as a text to be read by Heracles, yet while his reading is correct his direction of travel is not. If the footprints are a kind of text, the lowing is a kind of hypertext that alerts Hercules and induces an immediate change of direction. As such the cattle have adopted a superposition where their physical presence is contrary to the represented position without the latter being false. For a moment all possibilities exist at once. This is an intriguing portent of the digital, a folding of history from the ancient into the contemporary where multiple possibilities coexist and where in digital time and space any direction of travel can immediately be disrupted and recalibrated as part of a continuous discontinuity where a text no longer needs to be followed beginning to end in a single direction. There is an apparent explosion of options. To 'stay on track' is one option, one that Hercules (as a God) did not take, because as a god he could comprehend, like Funes, all of the sense data simultaneously. To 'stay on track' is an option or a predisposition that draws on what Lyotard has referred to as the 'acte manqué' (Lyotard: 17), a 'putting away somewhere', temporarily forgotten and just out of reach (a kind of filtering out of noise) of information, in favour of the continuing concentration on 'reliable' compressed data, and the continuing functioning of the chosen at the expense of the discarded. This implies a trust in and a reliance on, communication at the expense of miscommunication. If the suppressed data is permitted to return, there is a risk of chaos. This is the contemporary digital paradox: a multiplication of messages to unprecedented levels is afforded by a process that is at the same time compelled to compress, lest that multiplication exceed the reach of man and attain reception only by the Gods (or at least the speculative realm of the non-human).

In conclusion, for Wittgenstein, the mystical, until such times as it could be expressed in language, must remain silent and unknown apart from in terms of speculation. His resolute position does the world of knowledge and logic a great service. Dispensing with faith, romanticism and superstition, his is a philosophy capable of bringing much into the realm of the known through a process of detailed analysis. However, by designating a realm of undecidability, his model also contributes to the underpinning of social and political regimes of exclusion. Even where that realm can itself be modelled through a form of language, if it is not recognised by the dominant model it remains distinct. So, the challenge is to expand Wittgenstein's logic to the point where as much as is possible is included, and as little as possible excluded. The challenge, though, becomes ever more acute in a time of digital modelling with its attendant compression algorithms. Wittgenstein was interested in the efficiency of exchange, a picture, and eventually a model of reality that could be reduced to a common structure. At the root of that structure is the notion of translation, between the picture/model and reality, and the inter-translatability *between* the different models. When all of this can be

demonstrated the common structure is revealed. It is this structure, or network of structures that gives meaning to our world. That which cannot be contained within such a structuring is consigned to the realm of the mystical and to myth – and this should not be the concern of philosophy for Wittgenstein. However, that which is rejected or designated as unnecessary, surplus to requirement, or whatever unwanted category it is placed in, can no longer be conveniently placed out of view, or effectively silenced. Instead order and chaos are increasingly engaged in dialogue. Order and chaos, Mars and Venus, are back on speaking terms. The world is no longer conducive to a neat dialectical ordering. The ‘act manques’ no longer suffices. There are fewer and fewer hiding/storage places in which to place those ideas, concepts, or objects that somehow ‘do not fit’. Faith and confidence in a consistent ordering of this kind belongs in the modern world, but in some sense as Latour famously pointed out ‘we’ve never been modern’; never free from potential contaminants, we have never been on an orderly linear path that moves logically and continuously through time to a steady beat/tempo. But, equally perhaps we’ve never been postmodern or pre-modern either. Rather, we vacillate constantly between states of order and chaos, where each is an essential component of the other. There are of course periods when the prevailing order appears to work and the towering human achievements born out of ‘modernism’ are testament to this – but at what cost does the imposition of this kind of order come? Any such order that does exist, or has existed, whatever its historical categorisation and designation, generates a degree of exclusion and occurs through a process of translation. It is manifest in an evolving set of technological standards, operating simultaneously as the consolidation, imposition, mediation and communication of a kind of stable and perceptible set of norms.

Such norms form the common structure of language and underpin meaning and comprehensibility. They determine *what* can be read as well as *how*. Evander, as a mortal, reads signs inscribed by man as prophetic, as forming a linear trajectory through writing which presumes an orderly memorandum of understanding between coding and decoding, to produce by design a very particular, human, kind of knowledge. Hercules’ mode of reading though precedes Evander’s. Hercules is a God and can therefore read both the visual tracks and the audible lowing, the co-presence of meaning(s), communication and miscommunication alike – the two mixed into a noisy cacophony of data that is beyond mortal perception. Today though, human and non-human media, messages, and signs mix together to form a singular totality as dense in complexity as the world was for Funes. Hence, we need to be able to read in multiple directions at once, and to take the meanings we deduce as unstable and temporary. Serres helps us with this. He mixes things up constantly. His method echoes the work of the rogue termites, the ‘guardians of the possible’, straining to hear what Wittgenstein condemns to silence. Serres inhabits an expanded field of influences and intermediate expressions where languages, disciplines, and temporalities enter into conversation, where miscommunication and misunderstanding are likely to occur. Like Wittgenstein, the notion of translation is central to Serres’

work, though with clear differences: he is not content to ‘pass over’ in silence, but is determined to proceed accompanied by a cacophony of noise.

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