

“We’re tired of trees”.

On Deleuze and Guattari as Readers of Chomsky

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Abstract. This paper reconstructs Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s philosophical critique of Chomskyan syntactic trees, centering on their “rhizome” concept as a non-hierarchical alternative. Using Antoine Culioli’s Theory of Predicative and Enunciative Operations (TOPE), it demonstrates how tools like *treille* structures and the notion of the *langagier* articulate a pragmatized syntax. This analysis clarifies the demand for trees to “form a rhizome” as a call to dissolve boundaries between syntax and pragmatics. Although Chomsky acknowledged pragmatics, a fundamental divergence persists: he maintains the autonomy of syntax, whereas Deleuze and Guattari argue for their constitutive fusion, confirming the enduring relevance of their critique.

1. Introduction

In mathematics, the term “tree” refers to a specific category of graphs. A graph is a discrete structure composed of nodes and edges. The nodes can be visualized as isolated little dots, while the edges are segments or curves that link the nodes together (Fig. 1).

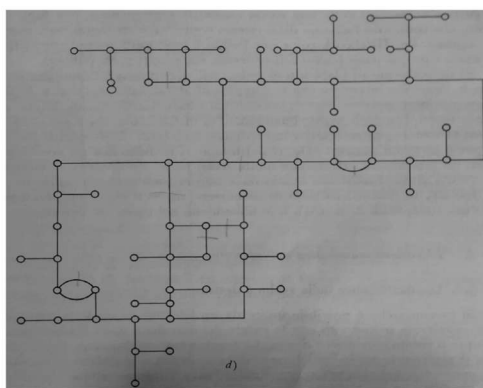


Fig. 1 – Source: Rosensthiel (1979).

A tree is “a connected and acyclic graph” (Cerasoli, Eugeni, Protasi 1988, p. 221): it forms one single piece and is devoid of any paths where the starting node and the ending node coincide. Another peculiarity of trees is constituted by their nodes: their number exceeds by one unit the edges incident to them. The additional node is called the “root” (Fig. 2).

This work aims to critically and reconstructively examine the objections raised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari against the application of trees in late-twentieth-century linguistics. The last century saw Noam Chomsky pioneer a widespread, metalinguistically oriented use of arborescent graphs. Conversely, it was Deleuze and Guattari who mounted the most forceful philosophical refutation of this use. An ideological dimension underlies this critique, one that is inextricably linked to its deepest theoretical implications. To illustrate its genesis, this study will clarify a key notion in Deleuze and Guattari’s reflections on Chomskyan trees: the rhizome. After outlining the main lines of attack based on the rhizome, a new perspective will be introduced to establish a framework for evaluating the

articulated criticisms. The chosen framework will be Antoine Culioli's Theory of Predicative and Enunciative Operations (henceforth TOPE). This move is justified by considerations of epistemological expediency. TOPE effectively supports some of Deleuze and Guattari's central insights.

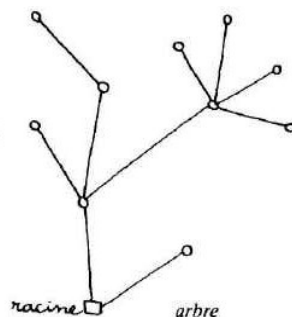


Fig. 2 – Source: Rosensthiel (1983).

This will be demonstrated through a discussion of *treilles* structures – a topologically modified variant of trees developed by Jean-Pierre Desclés – as well as an analysis of the concept of the *langagier*, one of the most fruitful acquisitions of TOPE. Through these investigations, the aim is to clarify in what sense and why trees ought, for Deleuze and Guattari, to “form a rhizome” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 23). Following a summary, the results of the analysis will be tested against the context of some recent statements by Chomsky. Although this comparison may suggest that the friction between the different perspectives is neutralized, a fundamental difference will emerge, confirming the divide from which, over forty years ago, the Deleuzo-Guattarian critique of Chomskyan generativism originally developed.

2. From $\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\mu\alpha$ to Rhizome

“Rhizome” derives from the Greek $\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\mu\alpha$, a neuter noun denoting the “mass of roots of a tree” (Liddell, Scott 1996, p. 1571). Foundational texts of Greek thought (Colli 2019, pp. 23-125) dwell on the term's theoretical connotations, whose resonance endured into the 17th century and beyond (Crowley 2021, p. 352). For their part, Deleuze and Guattari use the word “rhizome” without referencing the scholarly tradition of the classical world. Empedocles, the Pseudo-Pythagoras, and later, Aristotle and Theophrastus, are names to which the authors accord a calm indifference. Instead, they recall for the term a basic botanical meaning, which, however, differs from a “mass of roots”. As readers of Henri Baillon's *Dictionnaire de botanique*, Deleuze and Guattari note that “rhizome, as a subterranean stem, is absolutely different from roots and radicles” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 6). On the other hand, they state that “there exist [...] root structures in rhizomes” (*ivi*, p. 15). Far from resolving into an alternation of antagonistic positions on the proper sense of $\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\mu\alpha$, such oscillations are inscribed within a broader framework where different planes of analysis coexist. If the idea of the rhizome as a “subterranean stem” originates from direct botanical knowledge, what follows in the text is the product of other theoretical imperatives, blending linguistics and semiotics, political philosophy and graph theory. For an effective understanding of this intertwining, the botanical background from which Deleuze and Guattari depart must be clarified.

3. Rhizome: A Botanical Parenthesis

In modern botanical science, the term “rhizome” designates “a stem that develops more or less horizontally underground” (Marinelli, Hays 2001, p. 14) (Fig. 3). Rhizomes and roots are distinguished primarily by their axes of expansion: the more or less pronounced horizontality of the rhizome contrasts with the verticality of the root, defined as the “descending part of the plant that fixes itself in the ground where it develops” (William Johnson 1869, p. 212) Whether it is undivided, fusiform, or branched (Fig.

4), the root differs from the rhizome in its lack of nodes, leaf buds, and scale leaves: all of which are exclusive features of the horizontal stem (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3 – Source: Marinelli, Hays (2001).



Fig. 4 – Source: William Johnson (1869).

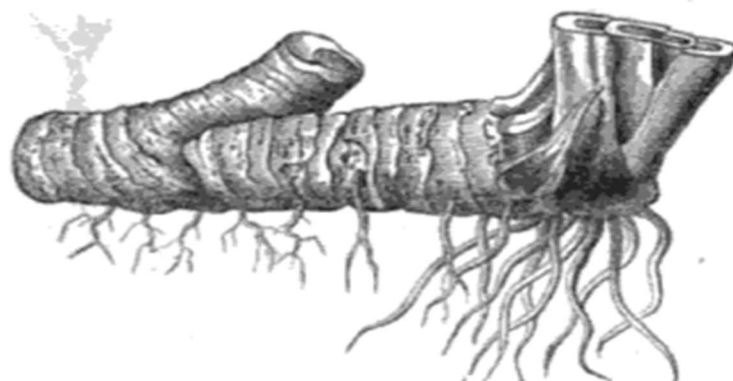


Fig. 5 – Source: William Johnson (1869).

On the other hand, as previously indicated by Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome can be a matrix for roots or buds “with the apex pointing upwards” (Copani, Cosentino 2017, p. 619): a sign that verticality, although distinctive of roots and radicles, intermingles with the horizontality of the rhizome (Fig. 6, Fig. 7).



Fig. 6 – Roots of the rhizome.
Source: Copani, Cosentino (2017).



Fig. 7 – Source: Copani, Cosentino (2017).

However, in Deleuze and Guattari, there is a way of emphasizing the differences between stem and root that is situated beyond the botanical horizon. The explicit indicator of this shift is the adverb “absolutely” (§ 2): placed into the phrase “is different”, this intensifier inscribes the differences between the rhizome and the root within the spheres of political and metalinguistic discourse.

4. The Rhizome as a Critique of Generativism

Even before introducing the image of the stem, the reflections initiated in *Mille Plateaux* identify a dual aspect in the roots of Chomskyan trees. The root of every generative tree is presented as both the topological representative of a syntactic category and the graphical counterpart of a “marker of power” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 7). There is no discontinuity between grammar and politics. The “categorical symbol S” (*ibidem*) placed above or beside a root is a metalinguistic symbol and a symbol of power: it is metalinguistic because “S” stands for *Sentence*; it is a symbol of power because “S” denotes specific power relations that impose a presumed universal form upon the “mobile heterogeneity of language” (Culioli, Fisher, La Mancia 2020, p. 209). This form corresponds to the imperative “you will divide each statement into a noun phrase and a verb phrase” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 7). Generative trees would thus be constituted around a coercive dichotomy that graphically translates the rewrite rule $S \rightarrow NP + VP$, where NP stands for Noun Phrase and VP for Verb Phrase. Sometimes presented as a “most general rule” (Garroni 1977, p. 35), “at least in certain states of the doctrine” (Lazard 2006, p. 48), the decomposition of S into the dichotomous structure NP+VP has been subjected over the years to scathing critiques that have diminished its scope. The primary limitation identified in the NP+VP schema is its thinly veiled glottocentrism. The foundational rule of generative grammar claims to be cross-linguistically valid without being so. In Japanese, there are “predications consisting of a single element” (*ivi*, p. 49) upon which the bifurcation of arborescent roots has no purchase. This is the case with the adjective *atsui*, which can alone constitute “a complete sentence meaning ‘it is hot’” (*ibidem*). It is probably not upon knowledge of such precise details that Deleuze and Guattari build their critique of generativism. *Mille Plateaux* abounds with continuous references to semiotic-linguistic disciplines, but these are allusions that never cross a certain threshold of specificity. Nevertheless, as the mentioned case study suggests, the results of specialized research corroborate to some extent the plausibility of the Deleuzo-Guattarian viewpoint. It is not coincidence that, with specific reference to Deleuze’s work, Paolo Fabbri very aptly spoke of a “philosophical linguistics, that is, a philosophy working [...] with other means, among which those of linguistics and semiotics” (Fabbri 2024, p. 77).

5. Further Critiques: The Rhizome through TOPE

Through precisely this methodological arsenal, Deleuze and Guattari intensify their declared aversion to generativism by stating that they are “tired of trees” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 15). The rejection of arborescences is motivated by two sets of reasons: 1) the binary character of their ramifications; 2) the multiplicity of semiotic processes (which Deleuze and Guattari call “chains”, *chaînes*) to which every “root-tree” (*arborescence*, p. 5) is potentially exposed. For the authors, it is necessary to dismantle the syntactic binarism of every node by making trees permeable to the action of semiotic chains. A research program that has, in part, intersected with the desiderata of Deleuze and Guattari is Antoine Culioli’s TOPE. Having emerged in contemporary linguistic debate towards the end of the 1960¹, TOPE occupies today a position that is simultaneously central and peripheral within the heterogeneous galaxy of French theories of enunciation. Its position is central insofar as, from its very beginning, its importance has been widely recognized even within the field of semiotics. Yet it is peripheral because, for a long time, it remained the preserve of a very small and exclusive circle of scholars. On the other hand, Félix Guattari, who in certain of his texts would mention – albeit in passing – the name of Antoine Culioli (Guattari 1989, p.59), has recalled how much Culioli had worked on the concept of enunciation (Guattari, Uno 1992). Therefore, although Deleuze and Guattari do not mention Culioli in *Mille Plateaux*, there are sound reasons to believe that the Deleuzo-Guattarian critique of generativism could have benefited from the metalinguistic tools provided by TOPE. The nature, modes of formation, and contaminating action of the “semiotic chains” themselves remain beyond the immediate scope of these tools. However, over a more extended period, certain developments within TOPE have also provided an adequate epistemological framework for these very constructs. From a perspective of continuity, it is possible to outline a path that leads to the semiotic chains by first analyzing the limits of arborescences and the common syntactic-semantic-pragmatic (or *enunciative*) substrate upon which TOPE has built its unique vision of language activity.

6. Entanglements and *Treilles*

In several texts co-authored with Jean-Pierre Desclés, Culioli introduced a graph that rectifies, in several respects, the trees of early Chomskyan generativism. Known as *treille* (literally “trellis”), these are metalinguistic devices distinguished from arborescences by a crucial topological detail. Whereas in a tree each node distinct from the root has at most one father, in a *treille* structure all nodes other than the root can have more than one father (Fig. 8, Fig. 9).

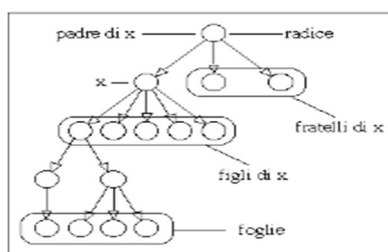


Fig. 8 – for any node x , its father is defined as its immediate predecessor; that is to say, a node that dominates x and has a direct outgoing link to x . In a tree structure, every node has at most one father. Source: www.diag.uniroma1.it/~nardi/Didattica/html.it.

¹ The birth of this research program is traditionally traced back to the publication of a paper, *La formalisation en linguistique* (henceforth FEL), which appeared in Issue 9 of *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. This journal, which boasted such distinguished intellectual patrons as Louis Althusser, Alain Badiou, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, long served as an inexhaustible forge of ideas. These ideas often ran counter the prevailing sensibilities of the time, yet proved pregnant with consequences for the development of diverse areas of contemporary thought. According to Sophie Fisher, the inclusion of FEL in the *Cahiers* was strongly advocated by Althusser and met with the cautious approval of Lacan. For further details, see Desclés, La Mancia (2023 pp. 237-254).

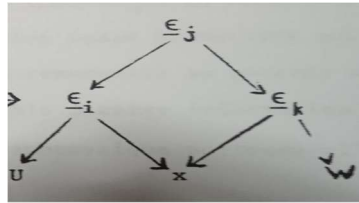


Fig. 9 - *Treille* structure. Node x has two fathers. Source: Culioli, Desclés (1982).

Nodes constituted in this way represent elements “entangled” (*intriqués*) within multiple relations. Such entanglements are a novelty in the landscape of arborescences. Only recently have they been adopted by certain epigones of Chomsky². In any event, the insertion of “the same term x [...] into two distinct relations” (Culioli, Desclés 1982, p. 14) inverts a key topological tendency of generative trees. Whereas arborescent nodes are centers of bifurcation, nodes in a *treille* structure also function as centers of confluence: the “One that becomes two” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 31) coexists with its specular opposite, the two that become one. To be sure, a generative tree is not necessarily a binary machine: a rewrite rule more sophisticated, such as $S \rightarrow NP + Aux + VP$, corresponds to a root that, instead of bifurcating, trifurcates (Fig.10). For other nodes as well, outgoing branches greater than two can be envisaged; everything depends on the computational accuracy of the generative rules (Fig. 11).

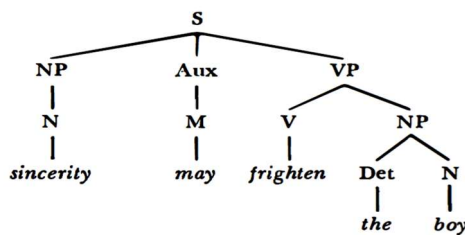


Fig. 10 – Source: Chomsky (1965).

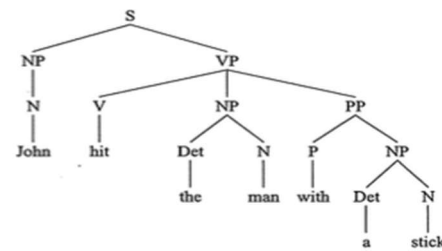


Fig. 11 – Source: Lasnik, Depiante, Stepanov (2000).

In certain respects, then, the anti-binarism of Deleuze and Guattari (§ 2, §3) might seem to reduce to an *ad hoc* caricature of Generativism. However, this is not the case: [1] is nothing other than the unpacking of [2]. There are many instances where VP appears as the contracted form of Aux + VP (Fig. 12).

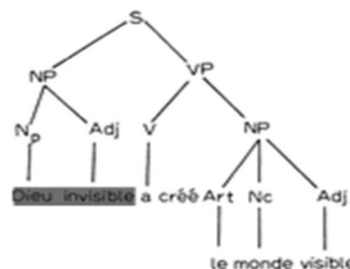


Fig. 12 – Source: Gross, Lentin (1970).

The core generative rule remains dichotomous, just as the arborescent ramifications that visualize it are dichotomous. Moreover, all the rules which, together with [1], form the computational engine of any generative grammar, exhibit a binary form. This is why “for Chomsky, the node represents a binary

² See Citko (2005).

relation” (Greimas, Courtès 1979, p. 214) conforming to the “spiritual reality” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 5) of the root-tree³.

7. Divisions and Convergences

The observations of Deleuze and Guattari capture a property of trees that, for a certain period, represented a key characteristic of generativist formalism. Whether dichotomous or trichotomous, the nodes of Chomskyan trees adhere to a general principle of division that governs the entire structure. The nodes of a *treille* structure, by contrast, respond to two principles: a principle of division and a principle of convergence into unity, which gives the structure the form of a grid. However, we are still far from the rhizome.

The rhizome is akin to an a-centered universe: a multiplicity devoid of a center and entirely heterarchical. A *treille* structure, on the other hand, is hierarchical and bifurcating. However complicated its fabric may be by entanglements, it cannot be equated with a rhizomatic multiplicity in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense. Whereas every multiplicity is a reality of process, which “is defined not by its elements nor by a center of unification or comprehension” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 249) *treillis* structures are endowed with roots that fulfill the role of a “strong principal unity” (*ivi*, p. 5). From this perspective, the gap between *treilles* and multiplicities is no less profound than the divide that arises between the latter and generative trees. Thanks to entanglements, however, *treille* structures capture an aspect of language activity that resonates with the Deleuzo-Guattarian critique of generativism. This aspect concerns all everyday utterances that violate a fundamental syntactic property: “bracketing” (Chomsky 1965, 2006).

8. Types of Bracketing

Let us consider an old textbook example. The sentence “Il cane mangia il pane” (*The dog eats the bread*) [3] can be associated with a tree illustrating its constituent structure (Fig. 13).

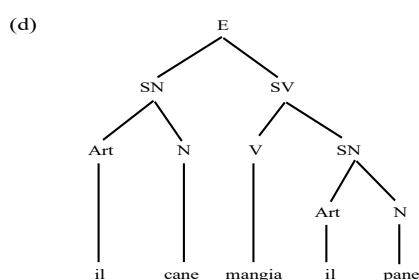


Fig. 13 – Source: Bonomi, Usberti (1972).

The tree can, in turn, be converted into a linear notation that serves the same representational function (Fig. 14).

³ The adherence to binary logic is a constant even in later works of Chomskyan inspiration, after the so-called minimalist turn. “Branching is always binary. One could imagine representations with multiple branching, but natural languages use only binary branching” (Rizzi 2021, p. 28).

1. E (Simb. iniz.)
2. $(_E \text{SN} + \text{SV})_E$ (R'1)
3. $(_E (\text{SN} \text{Art} + \text{N})_{\text{SN}} + \text{SV})_E$ (R'2)
4. $(_E (\text{SN} \text{Art} + \text{N})_{\text{SN}} + (_{\text{SV}} \text{V} + \text{SN})_{\text{SV}})_E$ (R'3)
5. $(_E (\text{SN} (\text{Art} \text{il})_{\text{Art}} + \text{N})_{\text{SN}} + (_{\text{SV}} \text{V} + \text{SN})_{\text{SV}})_E$ (R'4)
6. $(_E (\text{SN} (\text{Art} \text{il})_{\text{Art}} + (_{\text{N}} \text{cane})_{\text{N}})_{\text{SN}} + (_{\text{SV}} \text{V} + \text{SN})_{\text{SV}})_E$ (R'5)
7. $(_E (\text{SN} (\text{Art} \text{il})_{\text{Art}} + (_{\text{N}} \text{cane})_{\text{N}})_{\text{SN}} + (_{\text{SV}} (\text{V} \text{mangia})_{\text{V}} + \text{SN})_{\text{SV}})_E$ (R'6)
8. $(_E (\text{SN} (\text{Art} \text{il})_{\text{Art}} + (_{\text{N}} \text{cane})_{\text{N}})_{\text{SN}} + (_{\text{SV}} (\text{V} \text{mangia})_{\text{V}} + (_{\text{SN}} \text{Art} + \text{N})_{\text{SN}})_{\text{SV}})_E$ (R'2)
9. $(_E (\text{SN} (\text{Art} \text{il})_{\text{Art}} + (_{\text{N}} \text{cane})_{\text{N}})_{\text{SN}} + (_{\text{SV}} (\text{V} \text{mangia})_{\text{V}} + (_{\text{SN}} (\text{Art} \text{il})_{\text{Art}} + \text{N})_{\text{SN}})_{\text{SV}})_E$ (R'4)
10. $(_E (\text{SN} (\text{Art} \text{il})_{\text{Art}} + (_{\text{N}} \text{cane})_{\text{N}})_{\text{SN}} + (_{\text{SV}} (\text{V} \text{mangia})_{\text{V}} + (_{\text{SN}} (\text{Art} \text{il})_{\text{Art}} + (_{\text{N}} \text{pane})_{\text{N}})_{\text{SN}})_{\text{SV}})_E$ (R'5)

Fig. 14 – Source: Bonomi, Usberti (1972).

In the change of notation, the branches give way to nested brackets that delimit the constituents of [3] without overlaps or tangles. The structure of [3] is bracketed, meaning it conforms to the “use [of] brackets” that obey the “no-tangling principle” (Rosensthiel 2013, p. 222): a formal constraint stating “when a bracket is closed, the last bracket that was opened is closed” (Rosensthiel 1984, p. 24). However, actual language productions – utterances – often deviate from the neat regularities of [3].

9. “Il y a Jean, il mange un gâteau”

The utterance “Il y a Jean, il mange un gâteau” [4] is an excellent test case. It blatantly violates the no-tangling principle. To verify this, one need only examine the textual phenomenon that underlies it. This is an anaphora, that is, an operation whereby a constituent “signals that reference is being made to something already mentioned” (Simone 2022, p. 115). Through this process, we can trace “il” back to “Jean”. Because of the anaphora, therefore, the proper noun is entangled between two predicative relations: “one, linked to its thematic presentation (*Il y a Jean*); the other, to the rhematic presentation concerning it (*il mange un gâteau*)” (Desclés, Guentcheva 2014, p. 82). The enunciative genesis of this connection contravenes the no-tangling principle because it translates into a metalinguistic formula whose brackets are paired according to the interlocking typical of an entanglement (Figure 15).

$$I' \quad \boxed{<_2 \text{ Sit } (\mathcal{P}, \mathcal{C}_0) \geq <_1 a_2 > \geq <_0 () \text{ r b }_0 >_1 >}$$

Fig. 15 – Source: Culioli, Desclés (1982).

The angle brackets in [I'] form an entangled order. There is a segment of the formula where one pair of brackets opens inside another pair that closes, and vice versa. The result of this reciprocal interlocking is cross-serial bracketing:

$$<_1 a_2 > [I']$$

Enclosed between “<1...” and “...2>”, the letter *a* stands for the nominal constituent “Jean”. As is evident from [I’], the bracket that closes is by no means the last one that was opened. The letter *a* is therefore entangled between two pairs of brackets, <2...2> and <1...1>. But there is more. Since it refers to the “Jean” in [4], the letter *a* is situated at the intersection of two sub-formulas, each of which represents one of the predicative relations in which “Jean” is entangled. These are, respectively:

$$[I'_1] \quad \langle_2 \text{ Sit } (S_0, T_0) \supseteq a \rangle_2$$

Source: Culioli, Desclés (1982).

$$[I'_2] \quad \left\langle_1 \overbrace{a \rangle_2}^{\supseteq} \langle_0 () \text{ r b } \rangle_0 \right\rangle_1$$

Source: Culioli, Desclés (1982).

From [I’₁] it is possible to trace back to “Il y a Jean”. The notation denotes the *enunciative space* where “Jean” (*a*) is situated ($\supseteq$) as the theme: as “that about which something is said” (Granger 1994, p. 95). From [I’₂] it is possible to trace back to “il mange un gâteau”, where *il* is the anaphor for Jean. The notation denotes “the identification between the empty slot of an unsaturated predicative relation and its identifier, Jean” (Culioli, Desclés 1982, p. 18). Given that the equals sign “=” stands for the identification operation of which *il* is the trace, the complex predicate “rb” is situated ($\supseteq$) as the theme of Jean (*a*): as “that which is said about the theme” (Granger 1994, p. 95): “r” stands for “manger” and “b” for “gâteau”.

The position of *a* in [I’] is dual: “*a*” is a term situated within [I’₁] and the site of [I’₂]. This confirms the metalinguistic duality of entangled terms, of which *a* is an example. But let us return to Deleuze and Guattari. Although it is impossible to establish how they would have reacted to *treille* structures, it is legitimate to inquire into potential resonances. Beyond mere conjecture, the analysis reveals that at least one aspect of *treille* intersects with the rhizomatic critique of generative trees.

10. When Does a Tree “Form a Rhizome”?

According to this critique, Chomsky failed to grasp the possibility inherent in trees to “in turn form a rhizome” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 15). This observation is cryptic, but the footnote that Deleuze and Guattari directly associate with the expression “form a rhizome” clarifies its arcane meaning (or so it would seem). It alludes to the possibility of “introducing [...] ‘pragmatic properties’ into Chomskian trees” (*ivi*, p. 519). Thus, based on this textual clue, the rhizomorphic (or rhizogenic) aspect of arborescences could lie in their capacity to acquire specific situational parameters. Moreover, this reading is corroborated by the dozens of pages in *Mille Plateaux* that insist on the necessity of pragmatizing syntax, finding in the footnote a concise and operational formulation. If this intuition is correct, *treille* structures could illustrate some of the most significant theoretical consequences of this making a rhizome. They could account for that pragmatic contamination of syntax which is the key aspect of the Deleuzo-Guattarian critique of generativism. *Treille* structures offer an effective visual representation of this contamination because they are equipped with symbolic materialities suited to the purpose: among these, the notation Sit (*S*₀, *T*₀). This acronym stands for “situation of enunciation” (Fig. 16).

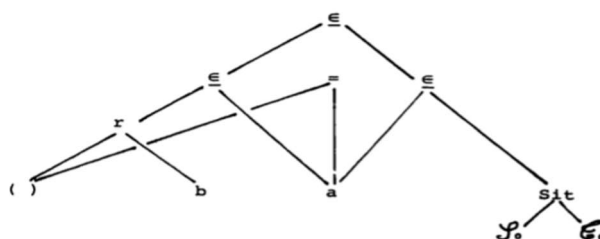


Fig. 16 – Source: Culioli, Desclés (1981).

As early as the late 1960s, in circles close to Chomsky, Dieter Wunderlich asserted the need to “search for an adequate pragmatic notation for situations of enunciation” (Wunderlich 1972, p. 46). This notation is exemplified by the Culiolian formula. Through its symbolic repertoire, it introduces two formal parameters ignored by the arborescent representations of orthodox generativism: the enunciator subject (“ S_0 ”) and the instant of enunciation (“ T_0 ”). However, the situations of enunciation in TOPE are not reducible to Wunderlich’s situation of enunciation. Profound divergences exist between the two situations, reflecting different conceptions of pragmatics.

11. External Pragmatics and Internal Pragmatics

Wunderlich’s situation of enunciation reduces to what other traditions call a “situation of interlocution” (De Vogüé 1991, p. 32): an interactive context (*Rel.*) whose main actors are speakers (*Loc.*) and listeners (*Aud.*), agents moved by communicative intentions (*Int.*) and implicit knowledge (*Prés.*)⁴. In contrast, Culioli’s situation of enunciation is not an interactive context but a metalinguistic construct. It is a computational device in which “ S_0 ” does not represent an individual, but rather the underlying language operations responsible for the modes of constitution of utterances⁵. From this perspective, at a deeper and more sophisticated level of description, S_0 exhibits notable affinities with certain theoretical constructs developed within Greimasian and post-Greimasian semiotics. One of these is the concept of *enunciative praxis* (henceforth PE). Like PE, S_0 operates on a plane of enunciative work that exceeds the boundaries of individual locution acts and thus pertains to the sphere of the “ça énonce” (Fontanille 2022, p. 32). Indeed, at least in one phase of its development, the Culiolian concept of enunciation refers to the general operativity of language, to a “machine” (De Vogüé 1992, p. 98) that belongs to everyone and no one in particular, and which in this sense is “impersonal” – precisely like PE⁶ (Fontanille 2022, p. 27; Bertrand 1993). But let us dwell on the initial discrepancy, which first allows us to grasp the divide between the two types of enunciative situation. This difference is substantial, and understanding it is fundamental to appreciating the rhizomatic opening of trees. Along with Jerry Sadock, Wunderlich is a key reference for Deleuze and Guattari. The names of these two linguists appear in the footnote associated with the expression “form a rhizome”, as well as in other parts of *Mille Plateaux*. The

⁴ See Wunderlich (1972, pp. 54-56).

⁵ See Fisher, Fraenckel (1983, p. 133-135).

⁶ Although closely related, S_0 and PE are not identical. S_0 lacks at least one constitutive feature of PE. Fontanille refers to this feature as “temporal depth” (Fontanille 2022, p. 22), by which he means the capacity of every utterance to “participate in a field of broader enunciative manoeuvres” (*ivi*, p. 27). That is to say, in S_0 the enunciative machine still remains confined to language operations that unfold in the *hic et nunc* – the here and the now – of individual enunciative sequences. In PE, by contrast, the here and the now is in constant relation with other “heres and nows”, as well as the *elsewhere* and the *elsewhen* of prior utterances and the *elsewhere* and the *not-yet* of future utterances. In short, from the perspective of PE, every enunciative sequences relates to other concomitant sequences, while also being simultaneously the re-enunciation (or *reprise*) of prior enunciations and the projections (or *relancement*) of subsequent ones. I discuss this aspect of enunciative machine at length in La Mantia (2020, pp. 188-198) and La Mantia (2023 pp. 359-380), albeit with reference to other theoretical paradigms, including the so-called “flat model of enunciation” proposed by François Rastier (Rastier 2015).

pragmatization of syntax advocated in the text thus proceeds through situational parameters attributable to Wunderlich's interactive contexts. On the other hand, a characteristic element of Culioli's approach also contributes to the rhizomatic opening of trees. The modes of constitution of utterances – the processes by which they are formed and transformed – are a constant concern for Deleuze and Guattari. The two authors designate this concern as “internal pragmatics” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 91), an expression that recurs with the same meaning in TOPE⁷ and identifies a field of study distinct from the interactive contexts dealt with by “external pragmatics” (*ibidem*).

12. “In the Same Continuum”

There is no discontinuity between external and internal pragmatics. In fact, one flows into the other “as if the two aspects of pragmatics joined [...] in the same continuum” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 98). This thesis is bold and could be interpreted as a crude form of linguistic idealism. However, the position of Deleuze and Guattari is immune to such deviations. The continuity of relations linking external and internal pragmatics does not result in the collapse of one into the other. Internal pragmatics does not subsume external pragmatics, but rather establishes with it a “plane of consistency” (*ivi*, p. 88), a relationship that “ties together [...] heterogeneous elements” (*ivi*, p. 632) in the form of “multiplicities of the rhizome type” (*ibidem*). On the plane of consistency of the two pragmatics, aspects of one and the other consolidate and interpenetrate in the absence of a “fixed linear order” (*ivi*, p. 89). Let us take the case of facial expressions. Traditionally, these fall on the side of external pragmatics: in the literature, they are presented as “non-verbal means that accompany speech” (Guidetti 2010, p. 159) and which often “can replace words for the most diverse reasons (cases of deaf persons, persons communicating at a distance, in noisy environments)” (*ibidem*). The same approach is usually adopted for gestures but let us remain with facial expressions. If it is true that they are external to language, since they are not made of words, it is nonetheless true that words also consist of facial expressions, given that “the face is not an exterior envelope to the person who speaks [...] or who listens” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980 p. 167). More than merely accompanying discourse, the facial expressions of external pragmatics are indissociable from the forms of internal pragmatics: there is no word, *as actually used*, that can be detached from the face of the one who utters it or the one who receives it. Forms and expressions of the face constitute a plane of consistency, a rhizomatic block where one becomes the other and vice versa: the becoming-form of expressions, the becoming-expression of forms. From this double becoming emerges an indiscernibility of expressive-formal planes that exemplifies a particular case of a “semiotic chain” (§ 5).

13. Semiotic Chains

A semiotic chain is an accumulator of *semiopoietic energies*. Deleuze and Guattari model its function on tubers. Like rhizomes, these modified plant tissues absorb and store nutrients essential for the development of the stem. Potatoes, taro (Fig. 17), and “any enlarged plant organ due to the abundant development of reserve parenchyma” (Catalano 1948, p. 714) are tubers. A semiotic chain becomes a potato because it is “like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts: not only linguistic, but also perceptual, mimetic, gestural, cognitive” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 7). On the plane of consistency where external and internal pragmatics consolidate, the tree that forms a rhizome must therefore become a potato. However, this becoming-potato of trees is the taboo of generative grammar.

In the early 1970s, Wunderlich and Sadock attempted to transgress this taboo and initiate a program of pragmatic contamination of syntax, which was undoubtedly interesting for its time. Sadock introduced into trees certain components of Wunderlich's situation of enunciation. These elements are combined into strings or “hypersentences” located on dedicated roots. Through this expedient, the symbols for speaker (*Loc.*) and listener (*Aud.*) are placed alongside the traditional notation for the sentential phrasal constituents (NP, VP, etc.) (Fig. 18).

⁷ See De Vogüé (1991, p. 32).



Fig. 17 — Specimens of Taro⁸.

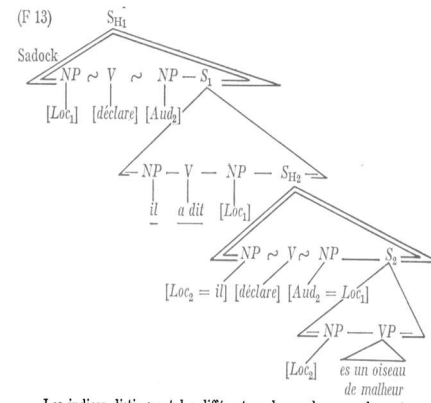


Fig. 18 – A pragmatically enriched tree of “Il m’a dit :
tu es un oiseau du Malheur”⁹.

Nevertheless, the outcomes achieved by this program prove to be inadequate to the expectations of Deleuze and Guattari. Grafted onto trees, the pragmatic components do not constitute a plane of consistency with the syntax, but rather an extrinsic relation where one is the superficial accompaniment of the other. The solution of Wunderlich and Sadock therefore cannot satisfy the authors of *Mille Plateaux*. What Deleuze and Guattari aim for is not the pragmatic enrichment of a pre-existing syntactic plane. Their objective is more radical: it is a matter of exploding hierarchies, tearing down inter-planar fences, and collapsing all planes of language onto that single plane of consistency which external and internal pragmatics consolidate through the mutual interpenetration of their respective domains. Not even *treille* structures go this far: although they introduce two parameters related to the mode of constitution of utterances, the many aspects of gestural, mimetic or ludic semiotics find no place in the intricate simulations that reconstruct the “constitutive history” (Culioli, Desclés 1982, p. 18) of utterances. Therefore, not even the graphs of Desclés and Culioli manage to become a potato. And yet, there would be no research program more suited than TOPE for understanding the *tuberized logic* of a semiotic chain.

14. *Langagier*

Later texts in TOPE present enunciative work as a process fueled by multiple semiopoietic energies. Culioli alludes to the presence of “heterogeneous factors [...] that are an integral part of verbal exchange” (Culioli 2002, p. 154). These are the mimetic, gestural, and prosodic features that permeate the circulation of enunciative forms. *Langagier* is the term with which the linguist designates the mimico-prosodic-gestural synergies operating “in the activity of producing and recognizing utterances” (*ivi*, p. 42). The term is well-suited to the semiotic chains of Deleuze and Guattari, as it identifies a level of description of language activity that captures the indiscernible heterogeneities of a plane of consistency.

⁸ Source: www.dissapore.com/cucina/super-tuberi-e-vino-doca-la-rivincita-della-patata-passa-per-lagronomo-peruviano-manuel-choque/.

⁹ (tr. "He told me: you are a bird of ill omen"). The phrase marker of each sentence (S_i , S_j) is associated with the marker of the corresponding hypersentence (SH_i , SH_j). The integration combines syntactic productions and pragmatic specifications. Thus, proceeding from top to bottom, the block [Loc_i] [déclare] [Aud_i]= SH_i describes the minimal interactive context of S_i : "Il m'a dit", while the block [$Loc_2 = i$] [déclare] [$Aud_2=Loc_i$]= SH_2 , that of S_2 : "Tu es un oiseau du malheur". The use of subscripts is instructive, as it allows for the distinction between the reported speaker (Loc_2) and the primary speaker (Loc_i) by indicating that the latter is the listener ($Aud_i=Loc_2$) in the context of the reported utterance S_2 . For further details, see Wunderlich (1972, p. 54).

On the plane of the *langagier*, “[g]estures and things, voices and sounds are caught up in the same ‘opera’” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 109). And this is because “linguistic and non-linguistic elements are inseparable from the start” (*ibidem*) in the chain that brings them together and transforms them. The *langagier*, however, encompasses not only the sensitive technologies of the speaking body: audio-vocal and mimico-gestural features are infiltrated by networks of psychic processes that constitute the ideational-phantasmic aspect of enunciative activity. The forms produced and recognized in context are not only continuous with the sensorimotor activities that ensure their circulation but are also the gateway for “spontaneous thoughts” (Ducard 2023, p. 6) that the speaking subject refers to himself or herself, to the other, or to himself or herself as another during interlocation. Referred to as “images” (Culioli 2002, p. 42), the tacit representations that insinuate themselves into the folds of language are a constant feature of verbal exchanges. In the semiotic chain of the *langagier*, the activity of interlocutors is traversed by psychic constructs or “imaginary representations” (Ducard 2023, p. 6) that are discernible in the mimico-gestural and audio-vocal features of every form: “a voice that breaks, that becomes atonic” (Culioli 2002, p. 42), the slight quiver of the lips, or any bodily movement caught in the mesh of interlocation can be signs of images that the ideo-phantasmic practice injects into the enunciation through the sensitive technologies of the interlocutors. A cohesive relationship exists between forms, images, and corporeality, by virtue of which each of the three relata is “machined” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 350) by the others. In the *langagier*, the gesture does not accompany discourse, nor does discourse accompany the phantasm, nor the phantasm the gesture. Rather, each becomes the other, “deterritorializes” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, p. 11) into it to the point of belonging to it, to the point of being machined by it in “a single matter” (*ivi*, p. 138). This is a matter that awaits understanding and reasserts the urgency of new reflections on the topic.

15. Conclusions

This article has examined some of the critiques levelled by Deleuze and Guattari against the trees of Chomskyan linguistics. The analysis of these critiques has not only made it possible to identify certain limitations of the generativist approach but has also clarified a mysterious expression used by the authors with programmatic intent. Through TOPE, the phrase “form a rhizome” has been traced back to a theoretical gesture that marks the point of maximal rupture between Chomsky and the authors of *Mille Plateaux*: the pragmatization of syntax. Despite its ostensibly disruptive nature, this aspect of Deleuzo-Guattarian thought risks being the most ephemeral. For Chomsky, “pragmatics must be a central component of any linguistic theory that aims to be comprehensive” (Stemmer 1999 p. 399). Consequently, in light of this observation, the objections considered would be rendered entirely obsolete. At best, they would capture an outdated and superseded phase of Chomskyan thought. A closer look, however, reveals that the concerns raised by Deleuze and Guattari, with reference to Chomsky, remain profoundly relevant. The centrality of pragmatics for Chomsky demands that syntactic combinatorics continue to function independently of pragmatic inputs. Were it otherwise, the mind/brain would be overloaded with information, implementing “computational systems of hopeless scope” (*ivi*, p. 400).

From this perspective, therefore, the distance separating Chomsky from Deleuze and Guattari would not have shortened by even a millimeter. For the American linguist, the tree would still not form a rhizome. This is because the plane of consistency where syntax and pragmatics become indiscernible would lie beyond the “limited resources” (Chomsky 2019, p. 275) of the “organic system” (*ibidem*). called the faculty of language. This thesis is known as the “Autonomy of Syntax” (henceforth AS). Chomsky has stated that he never used this expression, except in response to certain objections raised by his most vehement critics. Whether this is the case or not, it falls outside the scope of this article to discuss the tenets of the AS, or to establish their potential correctness or erroneousness. Undoubtedly, compared to the AS, the position of Deleuze and Guattari remains a clearly antithetical voice. A final observation, then, about trees. The later Chomsky appears to have wholly rejected them, based on considerations that, at least on the surface, seem to align with the authors of *Mille Plateaux*. It is quite striking to read that “trees are an extremely misleading



notation, [...] there may not be a root” (*ibidem*)¹⁰. One wonders what Deleuze and Guattari would have made of this. This constitutes a further reason for having discussed their positions, in the hope of returning to them in the future, perhaps in a more comprehensive work.

¹⁰ For an outstanding analysis of how the role of trees has been redefined within the Chomskyan minimalist framework, see the seminal Marcolli, Chomsky, Berwick (2025, pp. 20-150).

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