University of St.Gallen

The Power of Language

3rd International Conference at
Luigj Gurakuqi University of Shkodra
22-23 November 2019

Meaningless work with words
The literary character of the scribe

Dr. Sixta Quassdorf, St. Gallen (CH)

University of St.Gallen

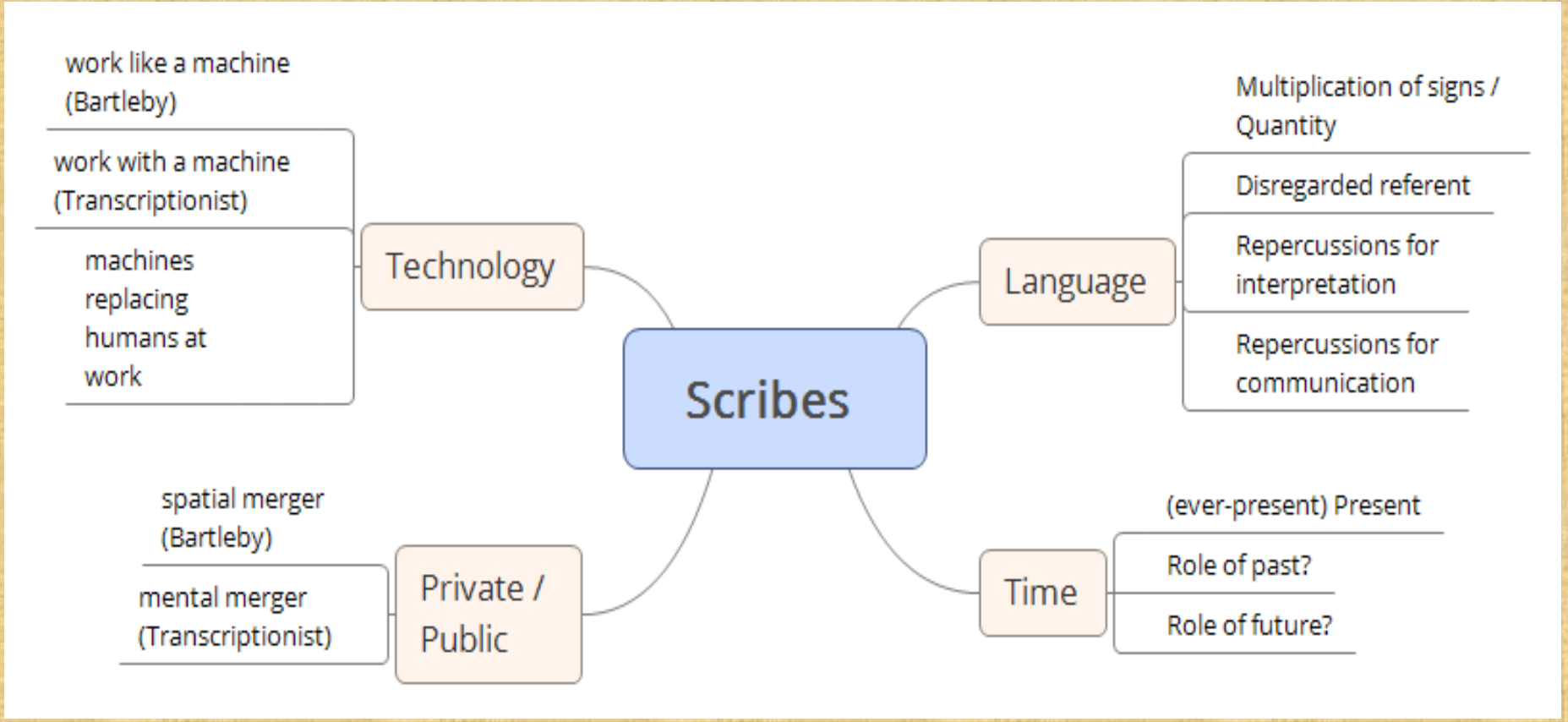
The Allegorical Scribe

"I AM a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written:—I mean the law-copyists or scriveners."

(Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" 635)

University of St.Gallen

The Allegorical Scribe



University of St.Gallen

Jean Baudrillard: Simulacra & Simulation

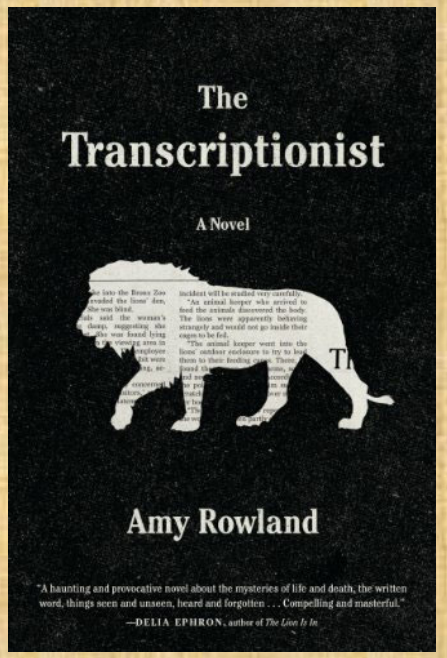
"By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials - worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes." (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 2, transl. Sheila Faria Glaser)

University of St.Gallen

The Allegorical Scribe

1. Melville, Herman (1853):
   "Bartleby, the Scrivener. A Story of Wall Street."
   (In Herman Melville. *Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd, Sailor*. New York: The Library of America, 635-672.)

2. Rowland, Amy (2014): ***The Transcriptionist***.
   (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books.)



Protagonist: Lena Respass, the transcriptionist,
works for a major newspaper in New York,
The Record

Alter ego: Arlene Labow, blind court reporter,
commits suicide in the lions' den at the zoo

University of St.Gallen

Herman Melville: «Bartleby, the Scrivener»

"At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically." (Melville, Bartleby 642)

University of St.Gallen

Amy Rowland: The Transcriptionist

"She closes the book and turns it over to the back cover, where two reporters look out with placid credibility. Let us sort it out for you, they seem to say. Let us cut it down and put it between the covers of a book so that it's bite-size, ingestible, digestible. It's not their fault, Lena says to herself, that the massive amount of information, and the continual cycle of commentary, has blunted all meaning."

(Rowland, *Transcriptionist* 158).

University of St.Gallen

Jean Baudrillard: Simulacra & Simulation

"It is this gap that vanishes in the process [...] In fact, this whole process can only be understood in its negative form: nothing separates one pole from another anymore, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contraction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other: *implosion* - an absorption of the radiating mode of causality, of the differential mode of determination, with its positive and negative charge - an implosion of meaning. *That is where simulation begins*."

(Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 31, transl. Sheila Faria Glaser)

University of St.Gallen

Amy Rowland: The Transcriptionist

"'Do you want to go?' he asks carefully. He has been through enough middle-management training to know how to talk to union employees, following the Record's dominant management style …" (Rowland, 44)

"Someone asks Howard about his father. The query is perfectly scripted, just like Lena learned in a mandatory development workshop. You are always to have two thirty-second dialogues prepared (one social, one professional) in case you are in the elevator with 'senior management.'"

(Rowland, 65)

University of St.Gallen

Amy Rowland: The Transcriptionist

"She awakens in the morning with someone else's words, someone else's thoughts, ribboning around her brain. And while she is transcribing, she recites, without realizing, things she has learned from transcribing stories and interviews, mixed in with the flotsam of dreams until she does not know anymore what is real and what is *Record*. "

(Rowland, *Transcriptionist* 8)

University of St.Gallen

Amy Rowland: The Transcriptionist

"There is basic equipment required: a headset, a Dictaphone to play the tapes that must be transcribed, and patience, a willingness to become a human conduit as the words of others enter through her ears, course through her veins, and drip out unseen through fast-moving fingertips. "

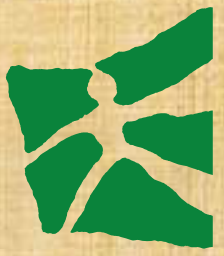
(Rowland, *Transcriptionist* 4)

University of St.Gallen

Amy Rowland: The Transcriptionist

"We are the fourth estate my friends, and though we were not elected, we are the check on all the branches of government. We are the guardian of the guardians, and with this comes the burden of awesome responsibility. When people open their newspapers and read the same article with the same dateline and time stamp that Americans from Peoria to Palmyra are reading, we create among them a sense of imagined community."

(Rowland, *Transcriptionist* 143)



University of St.Gallen

Thank you!

University of St.Gallen

References:

Primary Literature:

Melville, Herman. (1984 [1853]). "Bartleby, the Scrivener. A Story of Wall Street." Herman Melville. Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd, Sailor. New York: The Library of America, 635-672.

Rowland, Amy (2014). *The Transcriptionist*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books.

Secondary Literature:

Baudrillard, Jean (1994 [1981]). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Transl. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press.

Berardi, Franco (2009). *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy.* Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series.

Deleuze, Gilles (1994). *Bartleby oder die Formel*. Berlin: Merve-Verlag.

Grice, Paul Herbert (1957). "Meaning." *The Philosophical Review* vol. 66:3, pp. 377-88.

--- (1975). "Logic and Conversation." *Syntax and Semantics vol.* 3, pp. 41–58.

Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson (2007 [1995]). *Relevance: Communication & Cognition*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.