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Between Translation and Translocation: How Art Sensorially Explodes Language in the Airport Space

ABSTRACT

After Bataille, one can argue that, like the “castle, church, temple, or palace” before, nowadays the airport terminal—as elementary architecture of modern urban communication—emerges as a “grand didactic monument.” Erected to manage *landside* movement prior to flight, the air terminal as a techno-capitalist structure axiomatically operates with language, thus training the sensorium. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical toolbox, in the first part of this essay, I will elucidate how language, spatially deployed in the airport, operates as a system of order-words. In doing so, I will account for how translation moves away from textual experience to become a logistic and increasingly automated procedure, thus contributing a negative understanding of air terminal space as an alienating non-place. Curiously, leading airports are simultaneously incorporating art to create unique and memorable encounters which enhance passenger experience by constructing a sense of place. In the latter part, I will engage with Eve Fowler’s *A Universal Shudder*, exhibited at LAX in 2022, exploring aesthetic manners in which it configures language and/in the air terminal. I propose that this artwork heightens awareness not so much of art as art (in the airport), but rather of the translocating power of language itself, which it sensorially stimulates. Consequently, the pragmatics of translation will be shown to coincide with a political aesthetic of translocation, which explodes the airport regime of order-words, thus yielding a novel mode of experiencing and understanding the air terminal.

Keywords: airport, art, language, translation, translocation.



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“[L]anguage is no longer defined by what it says . . .
but by what causes it to move, to flow, to explode.”
(Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 145)

INTRODUCTION: WHAT LANGUAGE DOES THE AIRPORT SPEAK?

Even though “[a]ir travel is a quintessential mode of dwelling within the contemporary globalized world,” as John Urry pointed out (31), international air terminals remain notoriously intimidating spaces—alienating and perplexing. This common perception is not only due to their peri-urban geography, the intricate manner in which they are architected and spatially designed to effectively manage flows of travelers and warrant safety, and to their semi-public status, but it also arguably owes a great deal to the highly specific and protocolized language and style of communication that airports develop and deploy, which turns them into a “grand didactic monument”¹ of hypermodernity. An aurally and visually jargon-saturated topography emerges, suffused with signage, screens, protocols, information, instructions, and idioms, plastering the airport space with diverse signs and codes, and thus creating sensory overload, which overstimulates the occupants’ perception and exhausts their brains. Spatially determined by functionalist imperatives and operating procedures addressed to international travelers, structured in compliance with legal requirements of both state and international regulations, as well as fashioned by the commercial interests of consumption-fueled capitalism, airport language ends up universalized and standardized,² subject to a grammar of efficiency and sterilized of anything that might cause miscomprehension or disturbance.

207

¹ Georges Bataille observes that the “castle, church, temple, or palace” constitute “a grand didactic monument . . . a monument speaking and proclaiming authority which made the crowd bow” (127, translation mine), thus drawing attention to their aesthetic and political power. I will argue that airport continues this didactic tradition, which I will explore in the following by concentrating specifically on its linguistic dimension.

² This tendency to embrace and implement universal design for both language and spatial communication is part of a placemaking transformation of terminal airspace from alienating *non-lieu* into a pleasant and accessible place, and is nowadays on the rise world-wide. This accompanies the growing social awareness of diverse individual needs and is illustrated by, for instance, the introduction of digital signage and conveyance of messages in sign language alongside captions, tactile paths, typhlographic plans with convex lines representing the walls, paths, symbols and objects, descriptions in Braille and buttons that can be pressed to receive voice messages, as well as sensory rooms designed for neurodivergent travelers (see “Typhlographic Terminals”). These relatively new technological solutions are intended not to make airports different and unique; conversely, they are built and integrated seamlessly into the air terminal space so that everyone has the same experience.

Acknowledging Deleuze's pronouncement that language is "not a homogenous system . . . but a heterogenous assemblage"³ (*Two Regimes* 368), which the airport's space and functioning evidence by implicating and co(d)entangling multifarious languages,⁴ in this paper adapting Deleuzo-Guattarian a-signifying semiotics,⁵ I will analyze airport language and explore its political-aesthetic mode of communication, focusing *not* on what it says, but on what forces it to move beyond the established spatial regime of signification, and thus probing its limits of expressibility. Positing signs as aesthetically and linguistically deterritorialized, a-signifying semiotics permits us to trace and follow their intensive extrapolations and excrescences without falling back on the dominant, representational semiology into which they can be retroactively translated. Bypassing the pitfalls of representation, a-signifying semiotics recreates direct connections to vital forces, thus potentially novel modes of relating to signs and their various assemblages can be constructed and explored. Rather than decode that which has been coded, one is challenged to remain open to aesthetic experimentation in the constructive process of handling multiple and intersecting semiotics. Its point, in Deleuze's words, "is not justification but a different way of feeling, another sensibility" (*Nietzsche* 94). Consequently, a-signifying semiotics is tasked with helping us to discern patterns of

³ Originating in Félix Guattari's psychiatric and psychoanalytic practice and used to replace the notion of "group" which he found too positivistic and inadequate to render the complex nature of desire, "assemblage" refers to enunciation which is never individual or reducible to symbolic or linguistic communication, but expresses intensive non-totalizable multiplicity that immanently engages diverse semiotic systems. In his collaborative work with Deleuze, the term acquires an ontological rendering as an immanent open whole that multiplicities dynamically construct.

⁴ Given the material, objective, as well as philosophical framework of this article, which addresses the linguistic dimension of terminal airspace, it is essential to make a caveat that the critical argumentation and aesthetic speculation developed here are circumscribed by the passenger's perspective, and thus remain limited to the passenger-accessible section of the air terminal. Aviation language and communication are beyond the scope of this examination.

⁵ Originally introduced by Guattari in the late 1960s, a-signifying semiotics was further developed in his collaboration with Gilles Deleuze, particularly in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, as an immanent and radically materialist proposition removed the furthest from that of linguistic structuralism, which is deemed a repressive apparatus, "a broken machine." Disavowing signification and representation, it explores immanent entanglements between language and real material forces, (capitalist) power, and the social, replacing the semiology of linguistically established meaning with a political ontology of the material sign. Taking cues from Hjelmslev's glossematics and Peirce's semiotics, Deleuze and Guattari construct modes of semiotization which—in pulling down the transcendent(al) edifice of the signifier—immanently affirm and express semiotic pluralism, or a polysemiotics (*A Thousand Plateaus; Anti-Oedipus*).

translocation, namely the mutational potential of a sign or a series thereof in a particular assemblage, and to explore its routes and passages in and between semiotic assemblages and milieus, thus engendering new modes of trans(re)lating (to) language by undoing alienating and deadening redundancies inherent in communication.

In the first part of the essay, the task is to critically consider the entangled relationship between language and the air terminal, thus elucidating how site-specific language contributes to a negative understanding of the airport as an alienating non-place. In arguing that the airport operates language axiomatically, I will harness Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the order-word,⁶ to further examine what language is spoken by the airport, and how this communication is spatially designed and executed in a manner that moves translation away from textual and sensory experience towards becoming a logistic and increasingly automated procedure. Definitive of language *per se*, and unassimilable to an actual word, the order-word captures the social relation of every word and every statement to implicit presuppositions inherent in any kind of enunciation: "the verdict" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 107), which makes of it—regardless of the channel and medium of communication—a form of judgment, an essentially political apparatus. Interpellating travelers into the adventure of flight as passengers,⁷ the airport space will thus be demonstrated to immanently rely on the traffic of order-words and translation as a pedagogical technique of transportation into a habit(at) of self-control and obedience. Unlike translation, translocation⁸—an essentially political process—expresses a Lucretian *clinamen*,⁹ an immanent mode of resistance against that which is regarded as the natural repetition of the established schema and syntax of communication, whereby words, like atoms, commence to self-divide and self-transpose. Immanently merging the two processes of dislocation and transformation, translocation expresses a creative

⁶ They zero in on the concept of the order-word (*mot d'ordre*) in a plateau "November 20, 1923—Postulates of Linguistics" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 75–110).

⁷ David Bissell and Gillian Fuller demonstrate how the passenger is a spatially-discursively produced category of a political nature (8–11).

⁸ Originating from the field of genetics, the term designates a genetic change in which a piece of one chromosome severs and attaches to another chromosome, resulting in unusual rearrangement. For the purposes of this essay, I adapt it to my argument about language's *translocating* power which air terminal space both expresses and operates.

⁹ According to Lucretius, *clinamen* designates an unpredictable and abrupt swerve of atoms which determines free will, characteristic of humans (Inwood). In *Order out of Chaos*, Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers argue that the *clinamen*—the swerve of events—fundamentally determines the creation of new and unpredictable patterns of self-organization in the universe.

mutation, exposing the heterogeneous and dynamic construction of the assemblage that language is. In so doing, translocation deterritorializes the representationally established and meaning-fixated system of language, which—in air terminal space—operates through order-words. Opening it to extra-linguistic and extra-textual ways of relating to verbal communication, the process of translocation thus demonstrates that no symbolic and meaning-governed system of language will ever delimit and exhaust either the modes of organizing social and spatial relations or the singular praxes in translation. Therefore, in the latter section of this essay, harnessing a-signifying semiotics and moving beyond conventionally established meaning, I will consequently speculate an alternative—translocational—experience and understanding of language in the air terminal, fostered by a relatively recent aesthetic tendency of placemaking, observable at international airports, which—both commercially and conceptually—introduce art to revamp what for many decades has been perceived as a generic, tedious, and tiring space into a singular and whimsical venue of wonder and relaxation.

Aside from site-specific examples merely conjuring the feeling of air travel, international airports more and more frequently showcase extraordinary artworks, media art installations, as well as experimenting with artistic design solutions, which profoundly change both the air terminal and our aesthetic experience therein and thereof. Following Deleuze's admonition that art "has nothing to do with communication . . . does not contain the least bit of information" (*Two Regimes* 322), but is fundamentally related to, and expressive of, resistance (323), I will engage with Eve Fowler's *A Universal Shudder*, the media artwork exhibited at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) in 2022. My goal is to explore the political-aesthetic manner in which it immanently reconfigures the relationship between language and/in the air terminal. I will propose that Fowler's artwork heightens awareness not so much of art as art in the airport space, but rather of the translocating, and thus essentially political, power of language itself, which it sensorially stimulates. In laying bare the mechanism of translocation as liberating, I will argue that Fowler's artwork immanently creates loci of linguistic imperceptibility, thus engendering a novel urban and aesthetic ecology of inhabiting air terminal space beyond linguistic habits. Immanently considered, translocation cannot be conceived as a mere dialectical reaction against the translation regime of order-words, but rather as its deterritorialized and more creative expression, with potential for the heterogeneous assemblage of linguistic and spatial communication.

TRANSLATING AIRPORT LANGUAGE

Whereas both language and air terminal space independently have long been systematically and extensively examined, critical and cultural scholarship on their complex relationship barely exists. Spanning a little over two decades, the few sociolinguistic and semiotic analyses have tended to dominate the field, focusing on issues as diverse as the standardization of the signifying semiologies of air transit wayfinding systems (Fuller), the techno-enhancement of border security language (Adey), social signification, stratification, and elite mobilities (Thurlow and Jaworski), the relationship between the semiotic and spatial design of the airport and emotions (Urry et al.), the airport's linguistic landscapes (Woo and Riget), as well as raciolinguistic ideologies at security checkpoints (Sterk). Contributing a groundbreaking, critical-cultural analysis, *Aviopolis* (2004), Fuller and Harley demonstrate how travelers' relationship to the terminal airspace is mediated through alphanumeric and pictographic signs (86), explaining that "[t]he distinction between the building and its signs, between the text and the territory, becomes indistinct through the act of traversal in these complex multidimensional spaces" (88). Reasserting their argument of the performative co-constitution of language and air terminal space and the aesthetically transformative power of transitory position and perspective, I will furthermore concur with Fredric Jameson's relevant observation that the air terminal, especially in its hyper-postmodern version, engenders a feeling of entrapment in a hallucinogenic space, and our experience thereof calls for a new critical language (43). Whilst Fuller and Harley express an urgent "need for a shared conceptual language between media and architecture" (87), Jameson decries the prevailing—descriptive and impartial—language of volume. Instead, he advocates a new political-aesthetic language of immersion, one he finds adequate to this aporetic and depthless space, which—he claims—"has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself" (43–44). It is, indeed, a puzzling space, which in keeping with the ancient Greek origin of the term—paradoxically enough—can be read as aporetic, literally, with no path or passage, no exit: a space enclosed upon itself, upon its own eternal and immersive presence.

The air terminal emerges as an integral infrastructure of what Adey terms a distinctive "aereality" (8), which, premised upon air-mindedness, is shaped, managed, and communicated by means of a specialized language.¹⁰ Deeply anchored in social and transportation infrastructures, airports remain one of the largest and most singular public spaces of our era, which renders them

¹⁰ "Aereality" designates a kind of mobile society, which the aeroplane has instigated, inspired, and determined, and whose essence lies in being on the move and in transit (Adey).

political constructions *par excellence*. They are artefacts of capital and spatial expressions of the dominant mode of production, which are, as Lovell cautions, never “value-free” and always responsive to its concrete tactics and strategies (11). As such, they embody political power as well as a politically fueled desire for techno-efficacy and economic profit. As Hughes puts it, “[b]uilding is the art we live in; it is social art, the carapace of political fantasy, the exoskeleton of one’s economic dreams” (164). Immanently co-creating this immersive environment, air terminal language affects the manner in which we perceive the space and regulates our conduct within it, but it can also distract our travel or shield us from its distractive, spatially deployed procedures. In doing so, it can restrict our consciousness and shrink our field of experience in ways which we can barely discern. It thus generates a sense of existential remoteness, turning us into transients—a peculiar experience of estrangement from oneself and dissolution into this linguistically standardized and protocolized space. As a matter of fact, most airport spaces are designed to dissociate travelers from the building’s linguistic nucleus, and, therefore, it is habitually overlooked. We perceive it indifferently, and yet it has the power to exert impact that—whether we discern this or not—overwhelms us, forcing us to take heed and respond. Immersion dispenses with critical distance, which, far from rendering translation obsolete, automatizes it, so that it becomes a conveyor of order-words, which effectively blocks understanding. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari state, “[l]anguage no longer signifies something that must be believed, it indicates rather what is going to be done, something that the shrewd or the competent are able to decode, to half understand” (272). Designed to manage and coordinate the flows of linguistically diversified passengers, international airports dilute the political essence of language into functionalist and ideological communication, thus effectively camouflaging the underlying narcissistic link between the speaking (act) and that which is spoken (statement), which cements word-orders. As passengers, we subsume ourselves under this regime of redundancy—a compulsively repetitive relation, in which we accept and perversely enjoy being told what to think, say, and do. In consequence, airports emerge as spaces not so much to be understood, but, first and foremost, to be effectively used by following word-orders. Admittedly, if we fail to address the air terminal language, we find ourselves in a depoliticized space, which nevertheless speaks to us and hails us politically.

Whereas nowadays the air terminal space is becoming more expansive and deterritorialized, as evidenced by new airport construction and modernization projects¹¹ and their intensive digitization, the air terminal

¹¹ Among others: Noida International Airport, India; Changi Airport Terminal 5, Singapore; airport expansion projects at JFK in New York City and LAX in Los Angeles; Al Maktoum International Airport expansion, Dubai; Solidarity Transport Hub, Poland.

language falls back on reterritorialization and encapsulation, which, after Bissell and Fuller, I designate in terms of “containering”¹² (8). In consequence, both air terminal language and our perception of air terminal space, which it informs—despite its ostensible porosity, and, not infrequently, its aesthetically ostentatious panache—have become enclosed upon themselves, losing their traditional layout of openness and scale. Put differently, in the context of the air terminal space, spatial and linguistic extension, in Jean-Luc Nancy’s words, has “ceased to be expansive. It’s become intensive” (12, translation mine). Paradoxically enough, contemporary terminal airspace emerges as less a place of passage and crossing, changing into “a point on an immanent map of travel, and a point is without dimensions” (12). Diagnosing contemporary global and totalizing capitalism, Badiou speaks of “worldlessness” to account for this spatial transition into “worlds” of points, which in the social context amounts to *wordlessness*. Words are replaced by pointed order-words; acts of commanding supplant those of comprehension, of which the narcissism-fueled social media environments provide a poignant illustration. The airport is but one of such aporetic—*world-less* and *word-less*—places that contemporary global capitalism produces, which, as Žižek insightfully puts it, establish a regime of “truth without meaning” (181). In being contained by the air terminal space, passengers consent to being deprived of their ways of locating meaning. In becoming a point, the world of the air terminal, consequently, has lost the meaning. Non-passing implicates non-communication. The words, phrases, and syntaxes to which passengers are exposed, moving through the terminal in signage system and voice and messaging communications, have grown formally succinct over time and aesthetically intensive through digitization, increasingly establishing a system of briefly formulated and abbreviated orders, commands, directions, and recommendations.¹³ Subservient to the functional and pragmatic essence of the air terminal, which is erected to prepare travelers for flight, language in this space becomes an instrument of training and instruction for the sensorium. The air terminal thus illustrates how language works axiomatically through the intermediary of order-words.

An axiom is, by definition, a proposition which cannot be proven right or wrong, thus being universally established as self-evidently true, conventionally accepted as the unquestionable fundamental and/or foundational principles, which become a source of morals and governing rules. The logic and logistic

¹² Bissell and Fuller put it thus: “This containment is more than just metaphor; it is a set of techniques and methods for traversing the networked world” (8).

¹³ This expresses the law of redundancy, which in information theory accounts for the degree of efficiency in message transmission. I will address this by reverting to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the order-word.

of such linguistically constructed axioms are expressed in the operation of the terminal airspace and are manifested through both the global nature of the air transportation system, whereby countries set aside their inherent national agendas and adhere to rules that facilitate smooth air travel, as well as the status of English as the *lingua franca* of international aviation and airport communication. As Fuller and Harley argue, “[y]ou may not need to speak the language of the country to get around; but you do need to know the techno-cultural dialect of English—the international language of the airport” (31). The air terminal space appears to effectively implement the cardinal axiom of aviation: “Aviate—Navigate—Communicate,” which institutes a fundamental hierarchy of actions for pilots, namely, to prioritize aircraft control, then navigate to safety, and then communicate. This is borne out by its spatial and linguistic design, which demonstrates that all communication is subordinated to the navigational imperatives which shall be followed in order for passengers to get airborne.¹⁴ The entire experience of air travel bizarrely resembles the five stages of what is universally established as the “natural” human sexual response, that is, desire, arousal, plateau, climax, and resolution. As such, air terminal space and its communication can be shown to axiomatically attend to, and perform, two of them, namely, arousal and plateau,¹⁵ with desire being handled by the global business of marketing and advertising (e.g., airlines, the tourism industry), while the latter two remain in the hands of pilots and the airline onboard crew members who are responsible for taking us to the skies (climax), and providing attention and assistance from take-off through touch-down (resolution).¹⁶ In keeping

¹⁴ Strikingly, this resembles the Christian theology (and logistic) of salvation conditioned by a willful subordination to God and dutiful abidance by his command(ment)s. Only if conscientiously attended to, do they warrant our being taken to the Heavens.

¹⁵ This underlying philosophy of romance seems to be inscribed into recent airport terminal modernization projects which aim to break away from the global airport architectural language by replacing the generic materials and styles with innovative and unprecedented design solutions, stimulating a *wow* factor deliberately intended to romance, seduce, and elate travelers. For instance, Basile Boiffils, managing director of the Paris-based Boiffils Architectures studio—commissioned as the interior design lead for the refurbishing of Terminal 2 at Changi, Singapore—explicitly addresses this shift: “Our idea was to romanticize the airport experience, infusing pleasurable experiences into increasingly stressful travel scenarios through a series of visual, audio and interactive stimuli intended to soothe the mind, body and soul” (James).

¹⁶ Curiously, this linear model of human sexuality has been exposed and critiqued as not only technical and hydraulic, but also reductive, gender-biased, and ideological (purportedly representative of male sexuality, and thus in the service of patriarchal power). Importantly, Luce Irigaray critically conceives this model as “phallogocentric,” thus drawing attention to the co-entanglement of language and communication (logos) and the masculine power over them (which the figure of the phallus symbolizes), which is molded upon, and reflects specifically, male morphology and desire.

with contemporary fulfillment-driven, experiential economy, as Jameson points out, “[t]he anonymous space of airport terminals produces abstract and nonsituated feelings which intensify passengers’ perception” (116).¹⁷ Consequently, it is hardly surprising that air terminal space emerges as a theater of variegated intensities, causative of processes of sensorial stimulating and sustaining, heightening, and enhancing. By creating a safe and seductive locale, which suspends our defensive mechanisms, and thus renders us more sensitive and susceptible to play and fun, the air terminal simultaneously exposes our vulnerability and docility, which in turn easily make us succumb and conform to order-words axiomatically relayed to us.

In the airport context, order-words are configured as conveyors of site-specific ends operated with a view to demarcating and pedagogically circumscribing the passengers’ space of maneuverability, thus warranting their obedience.¹⁸ Instead of delineating or hailing an identity, order-words express series¹⁹ of actions and enfolded relations that expose redundancies²⁰ which structure language. As such, the concept of the order-word designates a relation of serial repetition between the statement and the act. Deleuze and Guattari elucidate as follows:

We call *order-words*, not a particular category of explicit statements (for example, in the imperative), but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions. . . . Order-words do not concern

¹⁷ This is also illustrated by a trend that has recently been taking hold in commercial aviation, called “retail-tainment,” which airports have been adopting as a business and a spatial-aesthetic design model. Combining retail with entertainment, it is about transforming a traditional transit space into a wondrous adventure. Passengers are engaged, entertained, and amused, technologically and sensorially titillated to spend money and make memories at the same time.

¹⁸ The most extreme example of this appears when one gets removed by security, arrested, detained, or banned from a flight or terminal for speaking a certain language or uttering specific phrases or words.

¹⁹ In keeping with Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, a *series* denotes animated variation with little non-mediated difference according to intensities and not identities. As such, a series is expressed through dynamic resonances, fluctuations, or transformations that occur between the repetitions. Intensities come in series and are thus sensorially apprehended.

²⁰ Plucked from information science, *redundancy* denotes the amount of language that is indispensable to convey the actual message. Human language exhibits a high degree of redundancy. The more redundancy there is, the more resistance to entropy. Order-words as redundancies are operative mechanisms of delivering and propagating commands. Deleuze and Guattari further explain: “Redundancy has two forms, *frequency* and *resonance*; the first concerns the significance of information, the second concerns the subjectivity of communication” (79). As redundancies, that is a minimal amount of language to relay a message, order-words connect us with an established aeroreality. Interestingly, this appears to resonate with the Jesuit principle of parsimony, which advocates maximum message with minimum means.

commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a “social obligation.” Every statement displays this link, directly or indirectly. Questions, promises, are order-words. The only possible definition of language is the set of all order-words, implicit presuppositions. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 79, emphasis in the original)

Whereas “[h]uman language never refers back to itself and always remains open to all other modes of semiotization” (Guattari, *Machinic Unconscious* 27), the system of order-words, as air terminal language evidences, makes it enclose upon itself by establishing a narcissistic link between the speaking and the spoken. All communication here is ordered by a statutory relationship that assumes falling for, and following, that which is spatially established and repetitively relayed. Petrified into structural markers, words as word-orders no longer produce anything—clad in their endowed meaning, their sole performance is death. Deleuze and Guattari pointedly remark: “The word-order is a death sentence, even if it has been considerably softened, becoming symbolic, initiatory, temporary. Order-words bring immediate death to those who receive the order, or potential death if they do not obey” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 107). Insofar as airport language is considered spatial deployment of force, occupants do not decide whether to denounce or appreciate the communication system that is structured by order-words; however, being spatially and sensorially entangled, they have to respond to this, even without being explicitly hailed. As beholden to the air terminal field of forces, which in essence is agrammatical and axiomatic, meaning constructed out of order-words emerges as but a minute effect of axiomatic language, and is thus conducive to understanding. Assuredly, the airport and its language of order-words rely on the understanding which is philosophically established as a legislative faculty that operates by means of recognition. The narcissistic statute demands that we recognize ourselves in air terminal space as passengers and be recognized by it in return, which enforces obedience. Traversing airport space inevitably entails that, *vice versa*, it axiomatically traverses us. We can be said to occupy the space to an extent that we are occupied by it,²¹ for which, importantly, we no longer need to give consent other than by entering and using it.

Operating language axiomatically, air terminal space thus demonstrates that translation is no longer the ability of one language to render another,

²¹ Interestingly, the co-entanglement of language and space is already expressed in the Latin lexeme “loc-/loq-,” constitutive of a plethora of modern words, such as: location, locale, loquacity, interlocutor, eloquence, which indicate a co-expressivity of language and space. Notably, to speak in Latin (i.e. *loqui*) is a curious example of a deponent verb—one that has a passive form, yet an active meaning, which aptly illustrates the double-layeredness of existence in airport space and language.

but the logistic process of conveyance of order-words, which is to secure stabilization between air terminal space and its users. As such, harnessed as an instrument for instituting spatial obedience, translation is neither conducive to interpretation, nor does it invite commentary; conversely, severed from the logocentric context, it accounts for a politically motivated swerve into axiomatic and serialized redundancies. As such, translation expresses a loss of transformational power that accompanies the air terminal use of language. Yet, this simultaneously demonstrates its immanent plasticity and deterritorializing capacity. Can we then view the air terminal beyond the language of redundancies which it speaks to us? Can our experience of and in the air terminal be liberated from this procedure of translation which is no longer a textual relation of identity, but a technological one of redundancy? Cognizant of the fact that air terminal language is a political business of people, immanently trafficking in order-words, can we reconstruct the airport experience in an alternative fashion, irreducible and unassimilable to political-semiological redundancies? Responding to Lawrence Venuti's appeal to "foreignize" and "minoritize" translation, in the final section I will examine its translocating aesthetic power, thus reconfiguring it as an immanent exercise in deterritorializing difference and no longer one of dutiful equivalence.

AIRPORT ART OF TRANSLOCATION

The increasing presence of art in the air terminal paves the way for such an intervention, creating conditions for exploding the dominant language through what I will designate in terms of aesthetic translocation. As Deleuze argues, "[t]here will always be a relation to oneself which resists codes and powers; the relation to oneself is one of the origins of these points of resistance" (*Foucault* 103). It is noteworthy, however, that the thrilling sensation of expectancy associated with flight, which naturally leads to increased sensitivity to sensory stimuli and heightened vigilance, becomes (un)expectedly reduced in air terminal space which, instead, forces travelers to take heed, thus hardening their task-determined perception. Once at the airport, on the one hand, we must accept standardized forms of obeying the spatially written code insinuating itself into the travelling bodies, and, on the other hand, the senses are randomly exposed to media artworks and sensory architectures that refocus our attention and trigger extraordinary sensations. Offering unexpected moments of wonder and reprieve from the preordained march through the air terminal space, art installations and experiential media environments are designed to increase dwell time for the businesses, help reduce stress for the travelers, and

construct a sense of place by bringing in storytelling to the airport,²² thus allowing for both sensorially deepened and augmented an engagement with the terminal. Aside from making passengers linger and thus increasing concessions spending, art also enhances the overall customer experience and well-being both functionally (e.g., enriching intuitive wayfaring), and aesthetically (e.g., creating areas of respite and contemplation, reducing the aural and visual noise), altogether engendering an unobstructed, pleasing, and calming ambiance. Increasingly receding into the very structure of airport space, art aesthetically revamps and reinvents it by replacing the mixed perception of nostalgia and anticipation (Baudrillard) with a more cinematographic and simulative experience, inviting us to stroll through the terminal as though we were in a film (Nouvel qtd. in Baudrillard), psychologically engendering an increasingly surreal and delusive spatial and aesthetic experience.²³

Coming across art and randomly interacting with it while traversing the airport—customarily perceived as suboptimal for experiencing art due to distractions, anxieties, and split attention—deterritorializes the conventional space and language of art and airport. What is thus generated are milieus of aesthetic encounters which—precisely by virtue of their spatially disruptive nature, randomness, and impermanence—yield opportunities for intensive, albeit oftentimes inattentive and inarticulate, experiences with art. The aesthetic process of free association, triggered by these artistic chance happenings, makes us dawdle absent-mindedly, transforming a space of boredom into a milieu of contemplation. By opening us up to non-functional uses and experiences of the airport space and its axiomatic linguistic regime, art triggers an experiential translocation—an odd stationary journey, a foreign language within language, “something which could be either the shout, or silence, or stuttering, and which would be like language’s line of flight” (Deleuze and Parnet 22), allowing us to “speak in our language like a foreigner” (5). Alain de Botton pointedly remarks that “[t]he anticipatory and artistic imaginations omit and compress; they cut away the periods of boredom and direct our attention to critical moments, and thus, without either lying or embellishing, they lend to life a vividness and a coherence that it may lack in the distracting

²² For instance, in the case of Changi Airport in Singapore, these art solutions have been implemented as a response to passenger behavior analysis and statistical reports that reveal that travelers become increasingly keen to arrive at the airport early, three or more hours prior to departure, drop their bags off and linger there, indulging in the mesmerizing and wondrous air terminal space.

²³ The newly refurbished and reopened Terminal 2 at Changi, Singapore, is a case in point. By integrating art into air terminal space, it blurs the boundaries between architecture and natural landscape (“About Terminal 2”).

wooliness of the present” (14–15), where haphazardness couples with rigid order. In what follows, by addressing Eve Fowler’s artwork, which explicitly engages with language and/in the air terminal, I will explore the aesthetic-political—translocational—power of words, and what they can do beyond the air terminal-language axiomatics.

A UNIVERSAL SHUDDER

Deriving inspiration from the writings of the American modernist poet, novelist, and playwright Gertrude Stein, and taking cues from the legendary designs of the LA-based Colby Poster Printing Company (1946–2012),²⁴ this is a series of site-specific murals by Eve Fowler, displayed at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) in 2022 as part of the continuing Art at LAX Exhibition Program.²⁵ The installation was located in Terminal 2 and 3’s baggage reclaim area. Fowler plucks phrases from Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, experimenting with them intensely and intimately. Intended to abandon an otherwise futile quest for meaning, Stein’s Cubism-inspired, geometrical refashioning of language²⁶ is clearly echoed in Fowler’s aesthetic enterprise, wherein themes and motifs are maintained solely to cause us to escape from the redundantly established bounds of language into foreign, infinite wordscapes, thus deterritorializing language into singular yet entangled modes of expressivity. Subjecting language to artistic experimentation, Fowler follows in the footsteps of Stein, disrupting and unsettling the dominant power structures in languages (here these of order-words), which control our *sensus communis*, holding our faculties and our world in check.

A *Universal Shudder*, which could read like a sensorial response to a post-Covid resumption of international air travel—exhibited in the form of a large-format poster—was curiously placed on a wall next to the baggage carousels. The backgrounds, which are highly saturated in bright—pink and yellow—colors, contrast with the black copy. Intended to attract the attention of passengers who await their possessions, the posters dis-tract

219

²⁴ The Colby Poster Printing Company is historically renowned for developing and defining a poster aesthetic in Southern California, which is characterized by fluorescent backgrounds and black capital letters written in sans-serif typeface.

²⁵ <https://www.lawa.org/art-program/past-exhibits/2022/a-universal-shudder>

²⁶ Regarded as atrophied by Stein, words were fragmented, hewn, dismembered, mutilated, stripped of their conventional and logical meanings, predicative relationships, analogies, and associations, and once laid bare in their melodic materiality, were repurposed into fresh and heteroclit shapes and protean convergences. All this was done in order to translocate aesthetically the ideas and feelings co-entangled with these words in writing.

them, that is, put them out of their tracks—their routinized, and spatially delineated, airport activities. Far from a negation of attention, dis-traction conversely expresses hypersensitivity to the complex and intensive reality-in-process. Keeping us mentally and perceptually dispersed yet sensorially alert and attuned, it forces us to keep this sensorial field open, thus productive only of simulacra, all the while exposing itself as a political-aesthetic maneuver which detracts from, and disrupts, the representational regime of signification. The choice to exhibit this artwork in the baggage reclaim area seems appropriate; waiting for one's baggage aptly captures the process of waiting for sense to emerge through an aesthetic encounter with series of words, which never reveals one universal meaning. Fowler's engagement with the words of Gertrude Stein illustrates a process of serialization and intensification which proceeds translocationally. Series of words are not only translocated conceptually between Stein's poetic-political writing and Fowler's artistic intervention, but also spatially, into the airport and further co-entangling the passengers' perceptive apparatus. By translocating the short sentences outside the larger body of text and into the air terminal space, and further still into sensory encounters with air travelers, language's lines of flight are being constructed, which disavows redundancy as a mode of existence in the air terminal. As Fowler's portrayed series demonstrates, meaning and translating are but two of a series of vital processes (e.g., feeling, thinking), of which life expresses a complex system, making us remember that every text which we encounter in the air terminal virtually expresses as many meanings as there are singular modes of co-entangling.

The series of two posters—which read thus, one: “in the morning there is meaning,” two: “in the evening there is feeling”—is exhibited on two adjacent walls forming a corner. From the passenger's perspective—given their similar syntax and articulation, as well as vivid colors and a glossy marble flooring underneath, which amplifies the blurring effect—this establishes a mirror effect of ambiguity, engendered by being (trans) located in between, exposed to the intensive power of each word, which is additionally strengthened by directional lighting. When a bare word is exposed to us and no protective shield of metaphor is given, and no translation is expected or imposed, language falls silent and every word reveals itself as a radiating intensity, becoming, indeed, “a slight. a sound. a universal shudder,” making us tremble convulsively. As Deleuze puts it, “[w]ords are genuine intensities within certain aesthetic systems” (*Difference and Repetition* 118). Aesthetically operating through series and by force, words—paradoxically enough—confront us with the beyond of meaning-ful language, thus the unthinkable and the meaning-less imposing upon us from outside, whereby novel mean(der)ings are yet to be made.

No longer signifying (in any redundant, presumptive, transcendent sense), the word itself is reclaimed as a sensory sign and threshold, and as such, as Guattari puts it, “is the site of the metabolism of power” (*Anti-Oedipus Papers* 224), expressing literally and intensively what it is. As a series of powerful signs, *A Universal Shudder* is not for designating or demonstrating anything. Conversely, signifying nothing—as the very title already implies—it is made to sensorially reverberate through language and air terminal space, causing “the sequences to vibrate, to open the word onto unexpected internal intensities—in short, an a-signifying, intensive utilization of language” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 22). Fowler’s Stein-fueled sublime art-wor(d/k) tears down the curtain of the dominant system of order-words governing the air terminal, thus availing us of “all the possibilities of language” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* xv), whose unspoken infinity is naturally experienced as “silence” (143). As such, Fowler’s installation is capable of translocating us beyond the linguistic rigidity of the airport here and now. This, indeed, is a “slight” to the dominant regime of order-words, causing a sobering “shudder.”

221

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As an immanent political-aesthetic process, translocation stands neither for translation (metaphor, condensation), nor substitution (metonymy, displacement), for it has done away with representationally established meaning consolidated by the understanding. Conversely, it is the intensive singular modification which—instead of subsuming the word under the abstract, and thus stripping it of its intensive power—logistically stimulates construction of new modes of sensing.²⁷ Afar from transmission or transport (metaphor), it expresses immanent construction, which can be adequately rendered as “transmorphosis”—a middle, transitory, intensive (trans)position which no longer has a point of departure and destination, remaining open to infinite recombination. Constructed immanently out of sensory entanglement, whereby the entangled elements exchange their determinations, translocation—far removed from the representational system of meaning—accounts for our political-aesthetic act of fleeing the linguistic regime of order-words and its dead designations, expressing a stationary flight into a foreign wordscape within one’s language—an imperceptible slip from translation into translocation. Thus viewed, Fowler’s intervention might at first glance appear to further intensify

²⁷ It is worth mentioning that in French “sens” stands for both direction, sense, as well as meaning.

the sense of estrangement correlated with the air terminal. However, by manifestly verbalizing the shudder universally experienced in anticipation of flight, and painting it in bright and cheerful colors, Fowler's art-wor(k/d) transforms the dreary area around the baggage carousel into an aesthetically appealing space. By infinitivizing language within the airport non-place of order-words, *A Universal Shudder* opens it to singular and transmorphic relations to the self-deterritorializing sign-word from which new meanings infinitely emerge. This has both restorative and empowering potential.

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224

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