<u>Punctuating Philosophy</u>

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<u>Introduction</u>

> "Elements for a philosophy of punctuation are, with the exception of the
> brief indication in Adorno's essay, almost entirely lacking."[1]

In his comment about a philosophy of punctuation which is yet to come, Giorgio
Agamben poses a more fundamental challenge: to revisit the importance of the
relationship between thought and its representation in signs, which is a long-standing
concern of philosophers. One of most long-standing philosophical controversies consists
of asking whether we think in loose, undefined and incommunicable concepts, after
which language materializes them (concepts preceding language), or whether language
preexists such concepts and shapes thought according to its own representational logic
(language preceding concepts). Which comes first, language or ideas? Are language and
thought inseparable, and if they are, which is dominant?

Philosophical arguments[2] and expositions, are represented through signs; primarily but
not exclusively, through writing and speech, since the written text (and before it the
spoken/dialogue form) is the assumed principle location of philosophical ideas (not
drawing, or photography, or film, or music, although all of these exclusions might be
challenged). Johanna Drucker reinforces the centrality of both the question, and
broadens its its location to being within both language *and* image, when she states: "The
attempt to understand the connections that link human thought to its representation
through the act of form-giving (in language, image or signs) is central to Western
philosophy and aesthetics."[3]

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[1] Agamben, Giorgio, 'Absolute Immanence', in *Potentialities* (California: Stanford University Press 2000). p. 222. The punctuation of philosophy or the philosophising of punctuation would begin with an account of which areas of philosophy are most impacted by the materiality of language.

[2] In the case of this paper, I will focus on Western philosophies and philosophers. However (and I am grateful to Adrian Holme for reminding me of this point), it is worth noting that punctuation (known by the name Judou) arrived in the East at a much earlier point in history, and the same issues around punctuation operating as a window into philosophy would be interesting to compare with the present examples. Western punctuation was introduced into Chinese texts as late as 1919, and the book: *Outline of History of Chinese Philosophy* by Hu Shi, is the first work applying this modern/Westernised punctuation system, which mixed Eastern and Western forms of punctuation, as part of the 'New Modern Culture' movement, and its attempts to raise literacy levels. This discussion lies outside the scope of the present paper, although its relevance is acknowledged.

[3] Drucker, Johanna. 'Digital Ontologies: The Ideality of Form in/and Code Storage: Or: Can Graphesis Challenge Mathesis?'. Leonardo, Vol. 34, No. 2 (New York: MIT Press, 2001). pp. 141-145.

To enter into this debate to any level of detail, would be to grapple one of the most complex and primary questions with which any philosophy which relies on signs for its manifestation, contends. These questions stand outside the scope of the remarks contained in this present paper and associated work, and yet they underpin (and potentially undermine), the entire project. However, I would like to take up both Agamben Drucker's challenge, by discussing some examples of where we might find evidence of the representation of thought through signs, in a previously unexpected place; within punctuation marks.

The argument I hope to extend here is that the full significance of punctuation marks is almost universally overlooked and under-examined in any discussions of language, especially within philosophy. I am in agreement with Agamben that we should look more closely, along with the numerous philosophers who have shared this path, at the ways in which such representation of thoughts/ideas, happens within philosophy itself, at the level of the individual marks and gestures which make that thought 'visible', and that we should be more attentive to the micro-material evidence of philosophical thought. Richard Shusterman describes this phenomenon as a question of paying attention to those instances when the 'visible is visible'[4], where we become conscious of what is before our eyes, whilst Arthur C. Danto acknowledges the difficulty of this, when he says[5]: 'We do not become aware of [language/time] in ordinary [reading] because too much takes place in [language] for [language] itself to become the object of consciousness. The sign can signify anything except that it is in the process of signifying."[6] To stop language in its tracks, and to use language itself, to examine the details of how and why language works in particular ways, is to foreclose its uninhibited use. To render it immobile within a moving reality is to make it strange, and [con]strained.

Despite these difficulties, these comments will highlight some of the instances where 'the visible' might be glimpsed, and tentatively point towards further evidence that material language is sometimes linked to philosophical thought in a deeper way than assumed.[7] In this case, the signs under scrutiny are punctuation marks, whose significance (as Adorno reminds us), in terms of the meaning within a philosophical text, is almost universally overlooked. However, as we will see, punctuation marks are signs,

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[4] Shusterman, Richard, 'Deep Theory and Surface Blindness: On the Aesthetic Visibility of Print', in *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001). pp. 159–174.

[5] My adaptation of the original text, in brackets, to relate it specifically to language.

[6] Danto, Arther. C., *After the End of Art* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 67

[7] This paper is the written counterpart to a series of print/mixed-media works on the same topic, being undertaken at the .918 press, London, E3. These are due for completion in January of 2018. I took close note of Agamben's comment that a philosophy of punctuation is almost entirely absent, and 'to come'. Within my own work, I am interested in how philosophies of language can be both illuminated and/or challenged by immersion in the micro-politics and particularities of a 'materialanguage'. Hence: this present group of works, which have been exhibited at 'The Wedding Space': Berlin in April of 2016 [part 1], at the 'Typographic Singularity' Exhibition at the Royal College of Art, Hockney Gallery in May of 2017 [part 2]. I initially spoke about this work, and these ideas, at the 'Face Forward' conference, in Dublin in December of 2015, and am grateful to have the opportunity to expand on those initial remarks, in this publication.

and as such they link human thought with its representation in those signs: they carry philosophical information, and (as we will see), they represent more than initially expected.

I will talk about the particular ways in which philosophers use punctuation as a way to explore, amplify, and inhabit certain philosophical ideas, within the work of Deleuze, Nietzsche, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Adorno.[8]. Agamben will provide the entry point to these ideas, and the questions circle around two main points: how could such small textual marks which we take for granted assume such significance within the concepts these philosophers are attempting to convey, and to what extent are their uses accidental or intentional? In what ways could these seemingly invisible (and predominantly non-verbal) aspects of language have a role in thinking which transcends their role as relatively neutral 'regulators' of the grammatical field of the written text?

Many of the points I will raise, echo and share the concerns of the Post-Structuralist[9], post-modern traditions of philosophy. However, there is a reason for this emphasis within the work: the analytic tradition of philosophy tends to take language as something which is largely unaffected by its material manifestations. Language is metaphysical[10], and its meaning is abstracted from the physical 'event' of language. Sense hovers in an indeterminate space between the material and the mind, and so the typographic, graphic and material attributes of written language are relatively unexamined within this tradition. We look to Derrida and others, to supply an account of language which ties the concept to the material mark/trace/event or language. Derrida's acclaimed (and provocative) statement that ''il n'y a pas de hors-texte' ('there is no outside-text'[11]) is a marker and rallying –call for the (Structuraist) argument for the primacy of the text. There are exceptions to this rule, within the analytic tradition, but

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[8] Cf., In the order in which they appear in the text: Deleuze, Gilles, and Anne Boyman., 2001. *Pure immanence: essays on a life*. (New York: Zone Books). Originally published as "L'immanence: une vie," *Philosophie* 47 (Septembre 1), 3–7; tr. as "Immanence: A Life" in *Two Regimes of Madness*, New York: Semiotexte, 2006. Metzger, Jeffrey. *Nietzsche, Nihilism and the Philosophy of the Future* (London: Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy, 2009). p.173. Nancy, Jean-Luc.,trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. *Being Singular Plural*. (California: Stanford University Press, 2000). Adorno Theodor. W., and Weber Nicholsen , Shierry, 'Punctuation Marks', *The Antioch Review* Vol. 48, No. 3, Poetry Today (Summer, 1990), pp. 300-305.
Agamben,Giorgio., 'Absolute Immanence', in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999. p. 220-239.
[9] Post-Structuralism comes after Structuralism, which is the branch of thought which argues that signs constitute a language, and that they constructs identities on the basis of differences (Cf Saussure, Levi Strauss, Chomsky, and Lacan). These structures can be identified and form a system; they are universals, and not rooted in subjective experience. Post-Structuralism rejects the notion that there is an underlying system, and also rejects the binary oppositions which posing things in terms of this/not that, implies. It refutes the knowledge structures which are used to establish reliable truth (establishing itself as in opposition to structuralism, which involves a degree of irony). Slippage of meaning and indeterminate meaning are key concepts.
[10] The philosophy of Metaphysics concerns itself with first principles. These include being, knowing, identity, and abstract concepts such as time, and space.
[11] Derrida, Jacques., *Of Grammatology*, tr. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976). Original French published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, in 1967, as "De la grammatologie", 158-59; latter alternative translation by J.G. Merquior (1986). *From Paris to Prague: A Critique of Structuralist and Poststructualist Thought*. London: Verso, 129-2, p. 220

these lie outside the scope of the remarks I want to make here, and form the basis of a longer and more detailed exploration.

However, this paper is also not intended to be an exercise in an unexamined post-modernist rhetoric, which the Marxists and realists[12] objected to and for whom, Postmodernist idealism is intolerable: "Signs cannot be permitted to swallow up their referents in a never-ending chain of signification, in which one sign always points on to another, and the circle is never broken by the intrusion of that to which the sign refers"[13]. In contrast to an indeterminate field of signification, the materiality of these signs of punctuation will be seen to have a deeply grounded form of material meaning: one which is very much rooted in signification, and in fact, constituting an Ontology[14].

1. Some Initial Thoughts on Punctuation

> "To bring the word to a stop is to pull it out of the flux of meaning, to exhibit
> it as such" — Giorgio Agamben[15]

This body of work has a long history in my practice. In 2002, whilst a researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academie, I started to scan pages of text from the philosophers I was reading (Blanchot/Nietzsche/Adorno), and to remove everything but the punctuation marks. However this was no more that typographic 'play', or tinkering: a sort of philosophical parlour game. I was curious to see what extra-linguistic patterns emerged from the works of various authors, through their use of punctuation. The process also helped me to understand the texts better, and this is never a bad thing when tacking Adorno. This 'tinkering' led to a series of works, with no name, but which made their way into the books I made at the Jan Van Eyck, including 'Scripta Manet'[16]. (fig. 1) .

In the initial stages of this present and far more intentional phase of the work, I went in search of the original texts of those philosophers whose work has engaged with punctuation, based on Agamben's comments *Absolute Immanence*, seeking specific philosophers who had used punctuation as conscious 'agents' within their work. I was contemplating creating series of 'dos á dos' (back-to-back) books which visually explored the materialization of thought at the level of the hyphen, or the colon between

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[12] Realism states that there are some things which are beyond our conceptual faculties or perceptions: things which exist in their own rights, independently of us.

[13] Lovell, Terry, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure*. (London: BFI, 1983). p. 16.

[14] Ontology is the aspect of the philosophy of Metaphysics which deals specifically with the nature of being. To speak of an ontology is to speak of the nature of existence, reality, and the relationships between them.

[15] Agamben, Giorgio, 'Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films' (trans. Brian Holmes), in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (Massachussets: MIT Press, 2004) p. 317. Agamben makes this remark in reference to the films of Guy Debord, but takes it from Holderlin, whose "rhythmic unfolding of words and representations.. the caesura causes the word and its representation to appear as such". Agamben also cites Paul Valéry, who remarked: 'The Poem, a prolonged hesitation between sound and meaning' . Valéry, Paul, 'Une voix,' Hier régnant désert, (Paris Gallimard: Poésies, 1958) p. 166. Both statements return us to the process of language/us becoming aware of its movement and nature: self-reflexively.

[16] Calvert, Sheena. *Scripta Manet/Verba Volant*, artist's bookwork. (Maastricht: Jan Van Eyck Akademie, 2002).

'Immanence[17]' and 'a life', alongside the original texts[18]. Despite their stylistic differences, traversing Nietzsche to Adorno, the texts I encountered on this journey share two things in common: a profound love of *ideas,* accompanied by a singular attention to the micro-details of material language, as their vehicle. The back-to-back books gave way to a more fundamental investigation; something much more stripped back and simplified.

With respect to punctuation, in a very simple (and obvious) example, within spoken language, intonation and the way emphasis is verbally or typographically placed on a word within a sentence (such as *italicizing* a word for emphasis) can alter the entire meaning of a statement. The use of punctuation can affect the entire temporal and grammatical structure of a piece of text. However, this is a factor often not taken into account on a conscious level when considering the material text. This observations (gained through the practice of eliminating everything but the punctuation within the work of philosophers) required me to return to some basic ideas about punctuation, including a little history, literature, and typography.

Arguably, only in the literary world has any consistent attempt been made to explore the importance of punctuation to meaning. James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, ee cummings looked at punctuation closely, and attempted to either eliminate it, critique is[19] or use it excessively, or idiosyncratically, as a way to throw it back into focus. James Joyce moved very consciously into the space between signifier and signified, to confound the distinction and open out onto new linguistic experiences made possible only by the abandonment of such hierarchies. The 'Babelain' form(s) of Joyce's language are closer to the rhythms of lived experience than anything which traditional linguistic models could provide .He asks that we abandon, along with him, any pretence to the reliable symbolic/significatory function of language, in favour of the 'experience' of language. The way language is used in James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake bears close comparison with abstract painting and music, in terms of sound, colour and rhythm, so that where Schoenburg disturbed and confronted our normal tonal perceptions of musical form, Joyce turned our accepted perception of language as clear communication, upside down. He urges us to: "[Stoop] if you are abscentminded" and recalls "What curios of signs in this allaphbed"[20]. In a way in which Joyce would have recognized, the following example of Senecan inscription is enigmatic and draws us back to language as a material, in this

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[17] Immanence, as defined by Deleuze, is in relation only to itself and not to any external referent. To say that something is immanent to something external is to miss the point of immanence entirely. Immanence is inherent: it remains *within*. (requires further explanation TBC)

[18] As Agamben so eloquently explains in his essay 'Absolute Immanence', and to which I will return to later in this paper.

[19] Cf. Gertrude Stein, ''Gertrude Stein on Punctuation' (Goldsmith, Kenneth), from Lectures In America), Boston, Beacon Press, 1985), pages 214-222. Originally published in 1935 by The Modern Library, Inc. , as a transcript of Stein's lecture 'Poetry and Grammar'. Stein called the comma: "a poor period that lets you stop and take a breath but if you want to take a breath you ought to know yourself that you want to take a breath." Goldsmith's intention is to establish one of the central tenets of Concrete Poetry: the materiality of language. The reprinted remarks by Stein conclude with pages of her text, with all but the punctuation removed.

[20] Joyce, James, *Finnegan's Wake*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1976). Chapter 1.1.

case through a form of atonal unpunctuated pseudo-Latin, which is, nonetheless, readable:

> Prae laetis si apage ortu ova qui te di ferent esse.
> Noto contradictu in mi juge mentitis a veri fini dea.
> No quare lingat prae senti si.[21]

The function for which punctuation was created was purely rhetorical: it aided the classical reader in knowing when to pause and where to place accents and inflections of voice when reading aloud from a text. Marks of punctuation only signified different lengths of pause in a text. Classical Latin word order was so poorly defined that it would not have made sense to try to use a grammatical form of punctuation at this time. It wasn't until St. Jerome in the fourth century began the process of standardizing Latin syntax that it made sense to utilize punctuation as a syntactical/grammatical aid. Punctuation was related to oral reading, not silent, since silent reading only really became common after the invention of the printing press. This repertoire of marks, developed and added to over time, became a codified and regularized part of written language, moving, as did language, from the oral world into the silent, written one, and as explained, later reinforced grammatical roles, not just temporal ones. In short: the syntactical role of punctuation came to the fore largely as a result of the standardization and control of language made possible (and politically deemed necessary) by the new technology. This shift profoundly affected thought and reorganized our relationship to language (and language to itself) in ways which have profound implications for knowledge.

> "To convey meaning to their readers, printed texts operate with an established though little reflected upon vocabulary of visual non-verbal signs, ranging from spacing and page division to basic punctuation marks and the elaborate use of a printer's accessories. However, although letters are designed for no other purpose than reading (i.e. the transportation of meaning), typography is not necessarily only functional or utilitarian, neutral and non-interpretive."
>
> – Rudolf Nink, *Typography and Meaning*[22]

We can see from Rudolf Nink's account of punctuation that it is considered an unexamined and yet merely functional attribute of the text; one which relies on convention and system. Punctuation is usually seen as merely utilitarian, and yet Nink also acknowledges that letters possess more than a functional role: that they exceed the space of neutrality, and become implicit in the conveyance of meaning, through interpretive acts which take place in collaboration with the reader. Nink hints at one of the key aspects of punctuation; that the invisible aspects of typography take on

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[21] Bishop, John, 1986. *Finnegan's wake. Joyce's Book of the Dark*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press). p. 450.
[22] Nink, Rudolph, 1994. *Typography and Meaning. The Application of Analytical Bibliography in Literary Criticism*.[Literatur und Typographie: Wort-Bild-Synthesen in der englischen Prosa des 16. bis 20. Jahrhunderts.]Buchwissenschaftliche Beiträge, Band 45. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz

significance if examined with enough forensic intensity. There are two kind of punctuation, one which is rhetorical and based on pauses and breath ('voiced'), the other is grammatical and related to the interactions of parts of speech (silent).

The written text suppresses a great deal of information which is implicit (and explicit) in the vocalization of language. We use gestures and facial expressions, intensity, tone of voice, and other multi-sensory qualities, which are rooted in the histories of oral language and closely aligned to rhetoric. However, punctuation is also bound to grammar and structure within the text, and as such it both constrains language to the conventions of the written form, whist also relating to the living, breathing attributes of language which emanate from the human body in the act of breathing, pausing and enacting language in time and space.

I would argue that the ways in which the philosophers cited here use punctuation, operates in the space between these two modes, in the 'gap' which both separates and closes them. Within this 'gap', which draws our attention to the between-space operating within the constraints of the text and the act of performing language, as a live 'event', there is a place for a form of punctuation which is neither aligned neatly and invisibly with grammar and structure (tied to the written text), nor is it simply a residue of the expressive and time-bound, rhetorical attributes of spoken language, but is a form of 'materialanguage'[23] which conveys specific concepts which are neither speech nor writing, but something else. It is this 'something else' which points towards an entirely new way of thinking of punctuation: a form of micro-material-meaning; leading us back to those philosophers who have written about and used punctuation, differently, and with a sense that punctuation is no trivial affair.

Lyotard and the Discursive-Figural

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> "Whether connoted or not, intonation fails to translate into punctuation.
> This explains why text allows for interpretation in the sense of a comedian
> or an orator: through intonation, interpretation will bring out a text's
> expressive quality. On the contrary, punctuation always indicates
> significative intonation, and, in particular, the intervals. And it is often
> through the absence or displacement of precisely this punctuation that
> expression will erupt in the order of signification and communication."

> –   Lyotard, Discourse/Figure[24]

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[23] Calvert, Sheena. 'Materia Prima, text-as-image', *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 4: 3, (Bristol: Intellect, 2011). pp. 309–329.

[24] Lyotard, Jean Francois. *Discourse, Figure*. Introduction by John Mowitt; Translation by Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). p. 209

Examining the material significance of marks of punctuation at this level of detail, requires a commitment to self-reflexivity, and the possibility of what Lyotard describes as an 'erup[tion]' within the text. As he explains, by convention, both language and images are supposed to 'point', away from themselves, and towards another concept, reality, or object. By referring only to themselves, such matters become complicated, since when the 'surfaces' of the work itself are emphasised, and not their representational function, the usual distinctions between what Lyotard has termed discourse and figure[25], text and image, sign and the reality it seeks to describe, collapse in a vortex of self-referentiality.

Objects of language which self-refer, or take as a content their own materiality, constitute a 'crisis' in textual representation, since they break the assumed links between language, signs and meaning; becoming paradoxical and sense-less in the terms by which we normally use that phrase. When images and text take *themselves* as subject-matter, we are entered into a paradoxical space, where initially, it is not clear what signs *are* under these conditions. They initially seem to have no role, and, upset notions of transparency and instrumentality in communication, by pointing towards themselves, and nothing else.[26] They come to possess a full opacity, or material thickness constituting what Lyotard has also called a 'scandalous' form of materiality, which disrupts the conformity of textual relations. Punctuation marks are signs with no signified, unless contextualized. They need to be enacted. Once we draw them into the frame of reference of philosophy, we stop their usual (hidden) function, and cause a folding back onto the sign itself.

He also reminds us that, rather than being threatened by a lack of transparency, or speed of communication, where the sign is overlooked in the search for concrete meaning, after reflection, we can take a positive view of this situation, seeing that with the relative slowness of the figural (image), the persistence of the plasticity of form in text (discourse) brings us to a stop, creating another space of reflection, somewhere between the figural and the discursive: one where other considerations can take place. As he remarks: 'Once again it [plasticity] will slow down the eye, and judgment, forcing the mind to take position in front of the sensory.'[27] If, for the sake of the present paper, punctuation marks will be posed as linguistic entities positioned in the space between the figural and discursive (possessing no sematic attributes in and of themselves, but only in relation to the discourse with which they enter into dialogue), and if we deliberately strip them from the context in which they function, then the sensory, plastic qualities of these marks come to the fore, rather than only existing when enacted by the process of reading. This is the moment of self-referral.

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[25] Lyotard, Jean Francois. *Discourse, Figure*. 2011.
[26] Cf. Calvert, Sheena, 'Materia Prima, text-as-image', Journal of Writing in Creative Practice 4: 3 (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), pp. 309–329. Where these remarks were initially used to preface that article.
[27] Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*. p. 212

Some Provisional Thoughts on a Philosophy of Punctuation

> "Elements for a philosophy of punctuation are, with the exception of the
> brief indication in Adorno's essay, almost entirely lacking. It has been
> observed that in philosophical texts, not only nouns but adverbs can acquire
> the dignity of genuine terms... It is less well known that even punctuation
> marks (for example, the hyphen in expressions such as Being-in-the world)
> can take on a technical function (the hyphen is, in this sense, the most
> dialectical of punctuation marks, since it united only to the degree that it
> distinguishes and distinguishes only to the degree that it unites).
> Deleuze himself has suggested that punctuation has a strategic importance
> in his works. "
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> — Giorgio Agamben, *Absolute Immanence*[28]

A full philosophy of punctuation would require a detailed mini-history of both those individual philosophers, and philosophies, which have paid attention to punctuation, and who have contemplated its significance for the act of thinking itself. It would be outside the scope of the present paper. Giorgio Agamben points clearly and provocatively in the direction of the potential for such a work to be created, by identifying the lack of attention to punctuation within philosophical texts, and this is my starting point for the comments which follow. It is also the challenge, since to translate from the relative complexity of those texts to an account which summarises them is difficult at best, if not impossible.

This work is very much rooted in the typographic and material dimensions of the argument[s], and aside from this paper, undertakes a practice-led trajectory, aiming to show how the 'image' of thought is aided and supported by the 'image' of punctuation as a non-semantic but richly descriptive notational language-in-itself; one which operates in the 'gap' between (in this case), punctuation as a series of rule-bound, text-based signs and the rhetorical, gestural qualities of speech, which punctuation aims to bring back into the body of the text. A series of simple, letterpress-printed typographic prints, complement these philosophical remarks.[29] These are offered as a way to foreground the significance of punctuation to thinking; acting as visual exemplars of the philosophical ideas under consideration, and reminding us of the simplicity of these typographical acts, while contemplating the profundity of the ideas they make manifest within the work of these thinkers.

To reiterate the claims of this paper, the full significance of punctuation marks is almost universally overlooked and under-examined in any discussions of language, especially within philosophy. Although they are integral to how meaning is established, and take on an additional significance when a text is read aloud, punctuation marks are all but

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[28] Agamben, G., 'Absolute Immanence'. p. 222
[29] These prints were produced at the .918 press, E3 during 2017.

invisible. Notable exceptions, where philosophy has acknowledged punctuation as a meaningful driver of the relationships between concepts and expression, follow.

Adorno's 'Playful' Punctuation

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In his essay 'Punctuation Marks'[30], Adorno playfully describes punctuation marks in terms of traffic signals, and codes them:

> "All of them are traffic signals; in the last analysis, traffic signals were modeled on them. Exclamation points are red, colons green, dashes call a halt. But the [Stefan] George Circle was wrong in mistaking them for marks of communication because of this. On the contrary, they are marks of oral delivery; instead of diligently serving the interplay between language and the reader, they serve, hieroglyphically, an interplay that takes place in the interior of language, along its own pathways. Hence it is superfluous to omit them as being superfluous: then they simply hide. Every text, even the most densely woven, cites them of its own accord-friendly spirits whose bodiless presence nourishes the body of language."

> — Adorno, *Punctuation Marks*.

His playful treatise on punctuation deepens over the course of the essay, but is still relatively light reading by Adornian standards. However, it's one of the only attempts by a philosopher to take punctuation marks seriously as an element of the typographic space, which drives thinking forward and has deeper implications, and he is characteristically critical; exposing the danger in uninformed use of punctuation. A remark by Adorno on the dash, illustrates how the minutiae of material language can have an impact on, or express, modes of thought:

> "Literary dilettantes can be recognized by their desire to connect everything. Their products hook sentences together with logical connectives even though the logical relationship asserted by those connectives does not hold. To the person who cannot truly conceive anything as a unit, anything that suggests disintegration or discontinuity is unbearable; only a person who can grasp totality can understand caesuras. But the dash provides instruction in them. In the dash, thought becomes aware of its fragmentary character. It is no accident that in the era of the progressive degeneration of language, this mark of punctuation is neglected precisely insofar as it fulfills its function: when it separates things that feign a connection. All the dash

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[30] Theodor W. Adorno and Shierry Weber Nicholsen. 'Punctuation Marks', *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 48, No. 3, Poetry Today (Summer, 1990), pp. 300-305

claims to do now is to prepare us in a foolish way for surprises that by that very token are no longer surprising."[31]

On a very simple level, punctuation marks are more than the silent regulators of text. For example, quotation marks wrench the statement they surround, out from under the 'neutrality' of the authorial voice, into the present, bestowing a speech-act such as "I hate you", with a powerful, affective resonance in time and space. This operates very differently at the level of meaning than the same statement presented as "she said she hated him". The punctuation marks here, cue and effect a sudden shift in context, from past to present, writing to speech, flat words to sound, absence to presence, neutrality to emotion. The exclamation point, used rarely, denotes a strong emotion or command, whereas the period functions more subtly than either of these, in its main function as closure of a complete sentence, delineating the boundaries between complete and incomplete thoughts.

Adorno also attributes a very specific significance to the period:

"The sacrifice of the period leaves the idea short of breath. Prose is reduced to the "protocol sentence," the darling of the logical positivists, to a mere recording of facts, and when syntax and punctuation relinquish the right to articulate and shape the facts, to critique them, language is getting ready to capitulate to what already exists, even before thought has had time to perform this capitulation eagerly on its own for the second time. It starts with the loss of the semicolon; it ends with the ratification of imbecility by a reasonableness purged of all admixtures[32]. "

The period, followed by a visual space, which translates in the reading to a temporal space, effects both conceptual closure and physical pause. The lack of appropriate period use would mean the loss, not only of temporal 'flow' in the text, but of the ability to establish when a thought is complete.

On the ellipsis, Adorno suggest that the three dots "suggests an infinitude of thoughts and associations.", while 'hack journalists' do not have use of them, relying on typographic simulation. He sees the ellipsis as a result of the commercialisation of writing, and as a way to establish an unfinished, hazy, vague and mysterious quality to the work[33]

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[31] Ibid., p. 93
[32] Ibid., p. 304
[33] Dr. Anne Toner, 2015. '... dot, dot, dot: how the ellipsis made its mark'. Cambridge University Research. Available at: http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/dot-dot-dot-how-the-ellipsis-made-its-mark

Nietzsche's Ellipses… and "Hesitance Caesuras'

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Printed Figure

Unlike Adorno, who suspected them of being evidence of a slippage of intellectual standards, Nietzsche uses the ellipsis extensively in his philosophical writings, and with explicit intention to explore the vagueness which Adorno rejected. For Nietzsche, the ellipsis was a way of establishing a core aspect of his philosophy: infinite deferral. Rather than the full stop, which closes down a thought; the ellipses creates a 'hesistant caesura', and avoids makes the kind of unequivocal commitment to the statement which precedes the period.

Nietzsche uses the ellipsis as a resistance to closure; marking his commitment to continued questioning of art, god, the status of the human. Nietzsche's extended use of the ellipsis extends throughout his work, as a way to suggest the fragmentary, ever deferred nature of thought and experience, and offers a prime example of how the kind of thought being promoted is aided by the material dimension of language: "Nietzsche's ellipses and long dashes indicate the continuing flow of a thought that should not be expressed, leaving the reader to imagine what is omitted…". [34]

Nietzsche also longed for language to be a musical event, which brought the same level of rapture he found in music. His writing aimed to *be* music, but using words instead of notes. Punctuation has been described as a kind of musical (rhythmic) subtext within written language. The 'rapture' which Nietzsche identified within musical form, was lacking for him in language, and his entire body of work can be seen as an attempt to replace the "authentic reality" and "colossal power" which for him was missing in the language, but evident in music. "Music penetrated the core of his being, and it meant everything to him. He hoped the music would never stop, but it did, and he faced the quandary of how to carry on with his existence" [35] Nietzsche himself said: "Everything that… cannot be understood in relation to music engenders… downright aversion and disgust in me".[36]

Referring to his philological background, and the limits and constraints he perceived in that activity, Nietzsche proposed that philology as a discipline be treated musically. This, however, involved more than engaging with musical themes, but of literally creating music: "which happens to be written with words instead of notes"[37].

Punctuation is a clear instance where material language affects the establishment of meaning in language, but I would suggest, in an atonal manner akin to musical form.

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[34] Nietzsche was also the first philosopher to use a typewriter: a Malling-Hansen Writing Ball (1878), a very strange instrument indeed.
[35] Rudiger Safranski: *Nietzsche, A Biographical Life*. (W.W.Norton, 2003). p.19. Texts taken from Nietzsche's Diaries B. 3,257; Dec. 21, 1871
[36] Ibid., Rudiger Safranski. p.19. Texts taken from Nietzsche's Diaries B. 3,257; Dec. 21, 1871
[37] citation to be completed

Punctuation cannot be called conceptual, since it has no meaning except in *relation* to words on a page, and it possesses no specific semantic content. However, it does have *meaning.* Punctuation marks reveal aspects of thought which are hidden, subconscious signs of the writer's thought process; rarely considered, but nonetheless meaningful material markers of intellectual activity. Deleuze remarks on this process: "Is it not possible that there are two distinct dimensions internal to language in general–one always concealed by the other, yet continually coming to the aid of, or subsisting under, the other?"[38]. Punctuation marks offer one example both of how the materiality of language gets placed in a background relation to the concept, but at the same time, and when we become *aware*, an examination of how philosophers use punctuation offers a way to see the significance of single marks in establishing an entire constellation of ideas [39]

Jean-Luc Nancy's 'Plural' Hyphen - (the 'Being-With')

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Printed Figure

"That Being is being-with, absolutely, that is what we must think."[40] In his book Being Singular Plural[41], Jean-Luc-Nancy consciously foregrounds a version of the unhyphenated title which later hyphenates the words, in order to support his argument for a new ontology based in the relations between these terms: inferring their integration, not their separation. He proposes a new ontology, and a new politics of community, founded on a conception of the "singular-plural" as the essence of Being. These ideas are reinforced through the use/not use of hyphens within the title., and subsequently throughout the book. He states:

> "In Latin, the term singuli already says the plural, because it designates the "one" as belonging to "one by one". The singular is primarily each one and, therefore, also with and among all the others. The singular is plural."[42]

Rather than thinking in terms of the individual/subjective/singular as the ground of the social and the political, he asks that we think 'being-with-one-another" as our fundamental condition; that the "with" of that term is privileged and that coessence (coexistence, contemporaneity) becomes the basis of community. In the title of the book, the absence of hyphenation between these three terms, establishes the terms of the later

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[38] Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) p.2.

[39] Punctuation cannot be called conceptual, since it has no meaning except in *relation* to words on a page. Jean Francois Lyotard, in Discourse/Figure, explains how punctuation is part of the infinite nuances of the printed page just as the speaking voice is infinitely variegated: "Diderot argues in the Encyclopedie, under 'Punctuation,' the pauses of the voice in speech always correspond to punctuation marks in writing; they also indicate the connection or disjunction of ideas, and stand in for an infinite number of expressions. It follows that it would be equally disadvantageous to omit or misplace punctuation signs in written discourse as it would vocal pauses in speech, for both serve to determine meaning." – Lyotard, Discourse/Figure 443

[40] Nancy, J. L. Being Singular Plural (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics. California: Stanford University Press, 2000). p.61

[41] Ibid. (check page no.)

[42] Ibid. p.32

relationship which he draws out within the text. Its politics and philosophic stance are revealed in this decision.

'Being Singular Plural' contains some very detailed remarks on the hyphen as an ontological statement of connection and/or separation. The material presence/absence of the hyphen is essential to the presentation of his new philosophical position:

> "Being singular plural: in a single stroke, without punctuation, without a mark of equivalence, implication, or sequence. A single, continuous-discontinuous mark tracing out the entirety of the ontological domain, being-with-itself designated as the "with" of being, of the singular and plural, and dealing a blow to ontology—not only another signification but also another syntax. The "meaning of Being": not only as the "meaning of with," but also, and above all, as the "with" of meaning. Because none of these three terms precedes or grounds the other, each designates the coessence of the others. This coessence puts essence itself in the hyphenation—"being-singular-plural"—which is a mark of union and also a mark of division, a mark of sharing that effaces itself, leaving each term to its isolation and its being-with-the-others".
>
> —Jean Luc Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p.37

In proposing 'with' as the very basis of meaning; that 'with' occupies the central position, in such a way that is the relation and the meaning. It follows that in order to imagine a new kind of community, and to reestablish 'lost' meaning, it is necessary to replace the 'I' (the individual, the subjective) with 'we' as the basic framework of all our thinking.

In this way, Nancy redirects us to consider at the most essential level what it means to be social/individual/collective/related, and the concept of 'singular plurality' necessarily invokes questions about simultaneity, multiplicity and relationship(s). Nancy argues that this ontology is so radical as to be unthought: "What is known as "society", therefore, in the broadest and most diffuse sense of the word, is the figure [chiffre] of an ontology yet to be out into play"[43] and in that sense it involves a complete revision of the usual relations between politics and philosophy. However, he also claims that the ontology he describes is already present in thought, is implicit in language and that his role is one of bringing it to light in a way which moves from abstract to concrete thought, and in doing so, renegotiating the relationship between politics and philosophy. He does this via the hyphen.

> "[T]he urgent demand named above is not another political abstraction. Instead, it is a reconsideration of the very meaning of "politics"—and, therefore, of "philosophy"—in light of the originary situation: the bare exposition of singular origins. Philosophy needs to recommence, to restart

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[43] Nancy, J. L., 2000. Being Singular Plural (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics. California: Stanford University Press). (check page number)

itself from itself against itself, against political philosophy and philosophical politics. In order to do this, philosophy needs to think in principle about how we are "us" among us, that is, how the consistency of our Being is being-in-common, and how this consists precisely in the "in" or in the "between" of its spacing".[44]

According to his larger line of argument, Nancy is not inventing a new ontology, but merely 'adjusting' the terms of reference in order to bring out what already exists within philosophical thought, but is hidden and subordinated, namely that being-with always precedes Being. He does this by utilizing the hyphen as a single punctuation mark, which expresses this distinction, and he is explicit about its use in this regard.A single punctuation mark is essential to how he enacts these political/ontological commitments.

We are, each of us, singular plural beings. The hyphenation in being-singular-plural renders the 'I' with the others; the hyphens being a mark of both union and division[45] Being-with–one-another reflects the fact that there are spaces between the terms (and between us), but ones which we can cross. It suggest a society and a way of being in which we are together but separately: [neither join nor abyss] we are both 'me', and 'we' at one and the same time.[46]

Being Singular Plural   Being-Singular-Plural

Printed Figure

Deleuze: 'Life', in a colon and an ellipsis.

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Printed Figure

Gilles Deleuze wrote, Immanence: A Life… [47]not long before he committed suicide. It is, therefore his final work, and this has particular significance . Georgio Agamben's essay, entitled 'Pure Immanence', includes detailed observations about the Deleuze's use of punctuation marks within the title: 'Immanence: a Life..'. Agamben teases out in a very

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[44] Ibid (page number)

[45] Ibid p. 37

[46] Serpell, Namwali C., *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014). p. 133.

[47] Deleuze, Gilles, and Anne Boyman. *Pure immanence: essays on a life.* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

subtle and inflected way, the implications of these two marks of punctuation, and considers their significance for Deleuze's late thought. He reveals how the layers and complexities of Deleuze's final philosophical remarks on life/transcendence and 'immanence', are implicit in the title; encoded in the punctuation marks of the title from the very outset (if we know how to read them as such). Within typography, the materiality of text is presumed to have significance. However, it is unusual to see the kind of emphasis placed by a philosopher such as Agamben on forensically investigating another philosopher's use of the simple colon and ellipsis, elements of punctuation which we would normally assume to have a functional, not philosophical role within the text. However, the title's punctuation is presented by Agamben as a matter of singular importance within Deleuze's last work, to the degree that it represented a commitment to way of thinking (and his final remarks on life).

This "philosophically provocative use of punctuation" has been described as the space where "Agamben creates a rich ontology of the punctuation mark as a dislocating move in the history of thought — what might be referred to as a "punctology."[48]. I will borrow this term 'punctology' to express how punctuation and ontology come together, creating a new expression of a way of being, one embedded within the material marks of punctuation as a system of signs. In Deleuze, we see a deep mediation on the very nature of life (existence), itself, and for Agamben, this is no accident: this meditation is performed/enacted at the level of the individual sign, and in the case of Deleuze, in the combination of the two signs (: and …).

In brief, Deleuze's last book 'Immanence: a Life…' is a mediation on life: both his own, and the life we all live. On the singular life and the shared life.: the particular and the general He wants to show how we are all immanent (which is to say, *within*) a life, and yet that life (with a capital L) is shared. Life is both singular and universal, unique and shared.

For Agamben, the use of the colon and the ellipsis in Deleuze's title, represents a decisive intention in relation to this subject matter. In the rules of punctuation, the colon serves to indicate a pause. However, this pause is also the intersection between two parameters. A colon is longer than a semi colon and less than the period. Semantically, it marks out the relationship between the meaning of the two terms which stand on either side of it. This relationship is "indissoluble" according to Agamben: one which remains partially incomplete, always in movement, shifting back and forth between those terms, never resolving itself. Compared to an equals sign, which establishes a simple relationship of identity between terms (this equals that), and a hyphen, which both separates and unifies/connects[49], the colon serves an intermediary function.

In short, Deleuze could have written Immanence is a life, or Immanence and a life, or placed a comma between the words, instead of a colon. However, he uses it

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[48] D'Hoest, Florelle and Lewis, Tyson E., ed. Eduardo Duarte. "Immanence: A Life…": An Educational Formula? (Urbana, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 2015).
[49] See Jean Luc Nancy, 'Being-Singular-Plural'.

intentionally, since the colon represents neither a simple identity between 'Immanence' and 'A life', nor a simple logical connection between them. The relation is more subtle; it refuses to establish connection (Immanence *and* a life), identity (Immanence *is* a life), or closure, instead opening out to the virtual potential of *a* life as a singular event, within a field of immanence (transcendence), represented by the whole of

Ellipsis dots (Agamben) "close (and at the same time leave open)". The ellipsis dots at the end of the title, both close and open it, to a deferral of closed meaning (as with Nietzsche). They transform the very status of the word 'life' in the title. The ellipsis dots are inseparable from it. The dots also suggest the virtual, infinite, and incompleteness... However, even more subtly, they also suggest that the indefinite particle 'a' is taken to its limit and redefined. Life becomes the 'indefinite as such', 'A Life (deleuze writes), contains only virtualities, events, singularities. However, what one calls virtual is not lacking in reality'. It happens, it exists. The ellipsis dots maintain the term 'life' in its ability to be a singular life, determinable and concrete (our unique,individual life as lived). The ellipses also function to regulate the 'A' such that the individual who lives that life is never dissolved in the general 'A' of the indefinite particle.

This stretches our thinking, but in short, the use of the colon and the ellipsis dots in the title of this final work, are a way to suggest at the level of the punctuation, a kind of 'diagram' of the late deleuze's thinking. This includes his desire to speak about the singular and the multiple at one and the same time, and to place the human being before any abstract categories of thought. He called this 'transcendental empiricism'. Deleuze had suggested in earlier works, that punctuation has a place within philosophy, but did not elaborate to any degree. However, speaking of Beckett's work, he proposed that we consider Beckett to be operating within "A gap that punctuates nothing other than the silence of a final ending'. [50]

Immanence: A life…

Immanence & A life…

Immanence, A life…

Immanence is a life…

Printed Figure

Conclusion

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[50] Deleuze, 1997c p. 164

Artists, typographers, designers, writers, and photographers, frequently demonstrate the role of materiality in language and image as co-partners in the production of meaning, by exhibiting language/image 'as such'. They fully engage with John Dewey's remark: 'All language, whatever its medium, involves *what* is said, and *how* it is said, or substance and form.' [51]Dewey's comment reinforces the significance of medium, or the formal qualities of language, as an intimate partner in the production of meaning; making material, 'matter'.

Punctuation is both figure (image) and discourse (text), a point which Lyotard discusses in detail within his complex text Discourse/Figure (we could also discuss the use of the slash in this title). It occupies the midway point between writing and speech, and creates distinct dynamics within the discursive field, which are frequently invisible and yet significant once we look more closely. In a micro-investigation of how certain philosophers actively engage punctuation in concept-forming, we can see that they are engaging in a kind of micro-politics of the materiality of language.

This is where my own work began: with an investigation of these aspects of punctuation and philosophy, with a view to doing two things. One: to explain these complex, but frequently rich and beautiful philosophical ideas, through the lens of material language. Two: to understand these ideas better, via my own exploration of them, via typographic immersion. That work continues, as a print-led process. I am also interested to engage in a larger question. What if the realm of 'sense' (where language makes meaning), lies, not in the material forms of language, and not in a metaphysical space, outside the text? What of it sits between those two spaces, in a place which Derrida points to when he says (of the book): "Between the too warm flesh of the literal event and the cold skin of the concept runs meaning."[52]

Since this work was first presented, the terrain within which we speak about language has moved/is rapidly moving, and has accelerated at this point in history to require a broader remark about the identity and status of language/text in general. Language is moving to machines, and so we need a new philosophy to account for these shifts, but one which also acknowledges the deep and meaningful ways in which we use language as a system of communication and as expression of human 'agency'. The philosophical departure point for this paper and for the body of work it engages with, started out from the claim that self-referring material investigations of text are instructive in pointing out some of these larger questions about the status of text, image, speech, and language[s] in general. I call this a 'material philosophy of language'. The work produced under this title intentionally engages with philosophical questions which can be productively enacted at the level of the material text, and which (I would argue), suffer from a lack of more general exposure and clarity when restrained to the philosophical essay form (hence: the need for practice). There is an unresolvable tension in both writing about and making such work, since the two modes sit uneasily together. However, the productivity in this tension is best articulated by restating Giorgio Agamben's remark

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[51] Dewey, J. 1980, 'Substance and Form' in *Art as Experience*, New York: Perigree Books. p. (TBC).
[52] Derrida, J., 1978. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. (London and New York: Routledge). p. 92

about the temporal enigma of language, and the purpose of isolating it from its usual 'work'. The urgency of the situation with respect to technologies of AI/speech recognition, etc. is captured by Agamben's remark: need to stop language in its tracks and examine it closely if we are to reassess what we value in it, and what we want to retain in an age of technological change. We need to philosophise differently about language in a time when language is no longer solely made by human beings, but increasingly by algorithms.[53]

Finally, the question which has concerned me within this present paper, is how the kind of empirical-material knowledge gained through a close examination of punctuation marks and their links to philosophical thought, could contribute to an alternative approach to undertaking philosophy of language; one in which the role of material language as *information about* language, not merely as aesthetic experience, or illustration of textual concepts, is at the forefront. Such work (cl)aims to be largely independent of the straightforward communicative function of text; consciously forgoing its role as 'transparent' communicator, to speak directly about the *material* of language, without an explicit semantic content. In the present paper, and in the creative work which supports it, I focus on punctuation as a specific subset of this question and as a micro-field of inquiry, with a view to searching for a way to talk about these ideas in a more general sense. Language which takes language as its subject matter as well as its medium can tell us about language itself, and return us to its full significance, but also reflect back on us, as language-bound entities. It becomes an ontological question in the end: how does language relate to larger questions of Being, and how does language create a form of being for us? . . .

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[53] The present work resides within a larger project entitled 'Materialanguage' (the collapsing of the two words into one which shares an 'l' is deliberate, and indicates their inability to be separated at the level of materiality). The 'Materia' side of the equation refers to Materia Prima, which is a self-referring, figural/plastic language, before meaning is established. Materia Prima or Prima Materia, is the Latin term for 'primary matter' or 'first source'. It is used to suggest language that has no function other than to be an image of itself, or to refer to its own 'surfaces', possessing an almost alchemical quality, comprising formless, undifferentiated base material(s). Cf. Calvert, S. (2011), 'Materia Prima, text-as-image', Journal of Writing in Creative Practice 4: 3, pp. 309–329.

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