

# NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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## ART AND LANGUAGE

### PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1. What is art? —That which is common to all the arts. —But what do they have in common? —This (or especially this): their products invariably lend themselves to value judgements which stem from Aesthetics.

This reply, usually tacit but invariably understood, cannot, however, repress a further question, this time a rhetorical or an ironic one: and what does not lend itself to such judgements? The *consensus omnium*, acquired during the last two hundred years, can do no more than at best to mark an initial approach to the desired definition. But the very propensity, widespread as it is, to seek it in that direction—a perfectly comprehensible one since it is Aesthetics that one finds at the origin of the unitary concept of the arts—nevertheless appears on closer inspection to be aberrant—in several respects:

Translated by M. and N. Slater.

*Translator's note:* The English tongue does not have a precise counterpart for the dichotomy of *langue-langage* that is so important in this article. In translating, *la langue / les langues* has been rendered wherever possible by *the (a) tongue / tongues*, and *le langage / les langages* by *language / forms of language*. Where this was not possible, or where there was any doubt, the French form has been given in parentheses.

(a) The notional content of the term is thus reduced to an appreciative or laudatory concept, which forces users to establish an equation which is far from illuminating, between the things they condemn and those which do not form part of art, between the things to which their judgement does not apply and the things which they allow themselves the right to “condemn” (in the name of what, exactly?);

(b) These partisans of integral Aestheticism come to consider every work—be it pictorial, for instance, or architectural—not simply as lending itself but as destined in advance to be judged and “appreciated” aesthetically, which was far from being the case in many periods, principally in those works which are the most highly valued in our daywhere this is the case;

(c) By eliminating every criterion which cannot be justified in strict Aesthetic terms, they forget how to take into account the diversity of intention which is manifest in works of art, and little by little they come to neglect the difference between a thing which is a work of art and a thing which, without being one, presents itself to their appreciation;

(d) The result, for them, is an inextricable confusion between a work of art and an aesthetic object. The latter can indeed overlap and fuse with the former, where appreciation is concerned; but as I believe I have shown, (*Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d’Esthétique*, Athens 1960, pp. 608-10), the two are very far from being identical;

(e) To this, it seems useful to add that once the aesthetic object has been substituted for a work of art it tends to change into a *minimal aesthetic object* (only just acceptable), given that “pure” aesthetic judgements allow for no distinction in rank and also that the criteria according to which it is rendered can easily be reduced to a single one (but one which can be perfectly formulated only in two terms): the new and the striking. This becomes clearer every day.

2. After convincing ourselves that even before their recent slimming cure, Aesthetics could sense but could not effectively capture the hidden unity of the great family of the Arts, it remains for us to seek the key elsewhere; and here the most natural choice

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that springs to mind is to direct our attention towards language. Not only because it is the most human element—from time immemorial—in man, but also because the most cursory examination immediately reveals elements which take their place by right in the Arts; to begin with, in poetry, but also in music, and less directly, there are links with the image, *in the proper sense* of the word (and very directly in its figurative sense). These links are clear in the archaic writing techniques which translate thoughts *in a parallel manner* to their verbal expression, instead of restricting themselves as they did later, to signifying the elements of an idiom which are not in themselves significant (those which, following André Martinet's terminology, we can call the second articulation.) This is just what children do. They do not draw, they scribble before learning to talk, and to begin with they draw not what they see but what they think, the things that words have taught them to distinguish in their thought. As for music (to revert to philogenesis), it seems of some significance that it was not a musician but a linguist (the greatest thinker among them, Humboldt) who thought of calling man "a singing creature;" and that nearer our time, Révész<sup>1</sup> ingeniously saw in the "musical call" (*Ruf*) the common origin of language and of music.

Furthermore, since we cannot doubt that speech, be it audible or not, is for man the very life of the mind and of his mind (for he still speaks while he is silent, and does not cease from conversing silently with the living and the dead,) is it not self-evident that this speaking being will make shift to speak otherwise than with words or with gestures which precede words? Especially if he feels the need to say things which require to be said by the only means that suit them, which he has had to create to this end in the form in which he needs them, at a different level, and still to continue to create. Was it not these methods that were in the mind of Goethe when he wrote that art was a "mediation of the unsayable:" the communication of things that ordinary speech is powerless to communicate? And if song seems connected, and the dance is so naturally and spontaneously associated with

<sup>1</sup> G. Révész, *Einführung in die Musikpsychologie*, Bern 1946 (p. 283 f.), a far superior work to his book on the origin of language (very badly translated into French, Paris 1950).

song, why should not other attempts at intentional and organized expression be affirmed and consolidated into art-languages—bolder and more cunning, certainly, since they would involve yet other tools than the human body with its gestures, its movements, the vocal chords of its larynx and the whole of that skilfully constructed apparatus which makes it fitted to speak? The notion of *mousiké*—with all the support it had amongst the Greeks in the inherent music of their speeches, in the ritual of certain cults, and later in tragedy—does it not bear witness to the original and substantial affinity of the verb with the arts which develop in the dimension of time? And was not the cathedral, on the other hand, whose native land was the royal domain of France, the most perfect example of the interdependence, the union, the unity, of all the nontemporals arts, at the very moment when these arts were taking on, under the guardianship and according to the example of architecture, their most immediately “speaking” form?

3. Certainly, all these questions are merely ill-concealed affirmations. But in any case, for the moment, nothing is yet affirmed and what has just been said serves only to make more intelligible the choice of a hypothesis which is about to be formulated. This hypothesis tends towards the arts as a whole, considered not from the point of view of the positive or negative effect produced by their works, but from that of their ultimate or initial *raison d'être* previous to everything that makes one lose sight of man *qua* man. It consists in bringing together art and language, in attempting to conceive art as language. That is to say, it is situated in the framework of an anthropological approach which would neither allow itself to be limited to ethnology nor to dissolve into sociology. For neither language nor art is *uniquely* a social phenomenon, since both are *also* concerned with thought and the manipulation of thought, and since despite all the social implications or outcomes, these two activities do not belong initially and properly to society. They belong to the individual.

A hypothesis is not much, so long as a theory capable of confirming it has not been drawn from it; but ours is peculiar in this respect: many great minds tend to reject it without going into it at all, and many others (unfortunately less great) tend

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to accept it without the least objection. Moreover it is true that we are not the first to present this hypothesis—though perhaps we are the first to defend it as we think it should be defended. All we ask from objectors, then, is a little patience. As for the accommodating acceptors, we reproach them for accepting they are not quite sure what. Above all, this applies to those of them who have always spoken of the language of such and such an artist, school or period, of such and such an art, and of art in general, without ever asking themselves if this intrinsically inoffensive use of the word in its wide or metaphorical sense can be justified at a more rigorous level of thought, and if it really comes to the same thing to use the expression “the language of music” or to say “music is a language.” But there are also others who have existed for some time, particularly in France; their collective surname might be *Have-you-read-Baruch*; we have nothing further to add concerning them since we read Georges Mounin’s excellent little book *Clefs pour la linguistique* (*Keys to Linguistics*), Seghers 1968 (pp. 10-13, 36, 39), and his other short work which deals precisely with Baruch (same year, same publisher, pp. 79-81), and which is a no less excellent initiation into the authentic thought of Ferdinand de Saussure. Nothing to say, except perhaps that the application of functional or structural linguistics to the other disciplines of the conceptual apparatus (which we owe in large part to Saussure) seems to us somewhat premature, since it is only valid, even as far as language (in the proper sense of the word) is concerned, for one aspect, admittedly a most important one but still a sharply limited aspect of language. And we must add that a generalized semeiology remains an illusion as long as it is not built on the basis of a coherent and precise theory of symbols; such a theory does not yet exist, except (and here we are thinking of the works of Luis J. Prieto) as regards signals—symbols which are abundantly used by men but which by their nature are pre-human.

As for us, in this provisional clearing of the ground we wish only try to establish *how*, in what sense of the word “art,” but above all (for this is far less clear) in what sense of the word “language,” art can be conceived of as language and, more precisely, as a group of languages, interrelated and contrasting uniformly with a language which is devoid of the element which

makes them all akin. With each art, of course, the problem arises afresh, and it must be considered separately; but the best way of approaching this problem, we believe, is to examine the language (of words) and what is communicated, what is expressed, what takes shape in this language, from the point of view of whether it is art or non-art. Not, however, without having previously eliminated an obstacle which one scarcely notices but which prevents one—particularly when one is least conscious of it—from reflecting however unfruitfully on the manner and on the very possibility of applying the broader concept of language to art and to each one of the arts. So long as this cloud has not been dispersed we in fact only have the choice between irresponsible chatter and unjustified negation.

#### THE TEXTURE OF FORMS AND THE THREAD OF THE ARGUMENT

4. This is a fact: in thinking of art, we think in the first instance of works of art; but in thinking of language, we never think of works of language. The very notion seems worthless and contrived. But if linguistics, in their own proper domain, which is ever more narrowly (and, one might say, scrupulously) circumscribed, are right in detaching themselves from what does not concern them (the object of linguistics, to which we shall return, being tongues, rather than language), this need not in any way prevent us from noting, or rather becoming aware, that there is something that is common to the products of speech, spoken or written, though they be as different as the *Iliad* (not yet “edited”), a Russian *bylina*, the anecdote one heard yesterday, the *Elements* of Euclid, the *Essays* of Montaigne, a cookery book, and a treatise on linguistics. Whether we are dealing with products belonging—at the same time as they belong to speech—to what we call poetry, literature (in a narrow sense of the word or in the broadest sense), or (as the anecdote), to a domain which does not have any universally recognized name, we observe that there is everywhere a succession of elements that are distinct but not completely heterogeneous, a *constantly significant* thread of argument, although the character of this significance is not the same for minimal significant units, pronouncements that are (relatively) independent of their context, and for large-scale units:

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cantos or chapters, works and canons. Everywhere this thread, warp or weft (the thread of speech, as one says in linguistics) possesses this significance, which demands a comprehension that is not structural or causal, put semantic in the proper sense, and which becomes manifest long before one reaches the recipes for dessert, Hector's funeral or the culminating point of the anecdote. There is no passage of the poem, nor of the *Parfait Cuisinier*, that can be lacking in it; and this is the respect in which these two works of language resemble one another; as in another way these two *works* resemble one another, inasmuch as taken as a whole, each one is a *Form* (*Gestalt*) and hence satisfy the requirements of structural comprehension as well—which of course does not exclude semantic comprehension, with which it maintains a relationship of interdependence that may be more or less close from case to case, and may bear a different emphasis in different cases.

All this is no news to anyone; but it had to be said, for no one takes any account of it. The theory of art does not know how to manage to grasp the relationship between art and language, precisely because it remains indifferent to the evidence that one is already in the presence of painting, music or poetry, *before* the poetical, musical or pictorial work is completed or known in its entirety, and even if, largely destroyed or never completed, it exists for ever only as a few pages, a few lines, a few staves or a moderate sized fragment of painted canvas. The same is true as regards the dance, sculpture or architecture: with this sole difference between the arts of time and those of space, that in the former, what counts above all (if not exclusively—the simultaneous plays a part in poetry and a greater one in music) is the structure of the linear development (which one may call the warp or weft as one pleases,) while for the others it is their texture in two dimensions (warp and weft) or in three (the third being of necessity illusory in painting, when it makes an attempt to suggest it).

In a study published in this journal in 1957 (*Biology of Art*. No. 18, particularly sections 9 & 10), I have already attempted, apparently in vain, to draw attention to this "tissue" or texture of the work of art, while limiting myself—for I was speaking of biology, not yet of anthropology—to non-semantic aspects. I

said there that every work of art was a Form (*Gestalt*), but one which, besides having those characteristics that mark the Form as such, has others, which assimilate it to those peculiar Forms called living organisms; and presents these characteristics (and this is what concerns us most now) not only when it is taken in its entirety, nor even in those parts of it which one might call its limbs or organs and which are themselves Forms, but even in its microstructure, in its flesh of living cells which are as many units of tension (such as the alternation of long and short, of strong and weak tenses or the balanced coexistence of mutually opposed elements in a spatial work.) I should say today that every work of art is not only significant in its entirety, and its subordinate parts significant in the same way; it also possesses a continuous semantic texture, which does not coincide with the other, "living" one, and is not isometric with it; which, of course, does not prevent them from harmonising when they meet, indeed encourages them to do, so that life has a sense and sense is alive.

This is what I should say; this is what I say; but I shall not attempt for the moment to prove it. For the time being we are only talking about those works of language of which it is self-evident that they are not devoid of semantic texture. Some are works of art, others are not. The point is to know how they differ. That will no doubt enable us to grasp, at the very heart of language, this *other* language—and to meet it again later, elsewhere—...

5. It is eminently clear that a manual of hydraulics or of ballistics, or even a thesis on the *Tribunicia potestas* in Roman law, is something quite different, both as a whole and in its details, from those works which we unanimously class under the rubric of literary art. However, one must not imagine that this line of demarcation is in general very clear. This is particularly so because the most indubitably non-literary works, even in a very broad sense of the word "literature," obey or attempt to obey certain artistic or—to use the word in a perfectly justifiable, because modest, sense of the word—aesthetic exigencies. This point is made clearer by a slightly more detailed analysis:

(a) It is well known that we tend to perceive all Forms (and

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unconsciously to correct them), and, where our own work is concerned, to produce them, as “good” forms. That is to say, we fit them into a “clear and distinct” order, and lend them a certain relief, the better to detach them from their background and surroundings. That is why the most futile of our tasks, such as sticking a stamp on an envelope, bears witness, provided that we are not too careless and hurried, to a certain concern for neatness, proportion and symmetry. It is also why the idea of a masterpiece originates in the world of the craftsman. And we are most appositely reminded by perennial exclamation at so many works of *savoir-faire* and application—“but this is a real work of art!”—firstly that the “and” in “arts and crafts” is not necessarily disjunctive, and secondly that the aesthetic object, be it minimal or not, is not obliged to be constituted by the approbation of the new and the striking.

(b) The texture of Form and the thread of language are subject to the same law. One pays as much attention to detail as to the whole when one cares about a work or a number of minor works. To breathe life into them is a different matter; it is this, in the last resort, that distinguishes the artist from the artisan; but a good level of form (*Formnivo*—or *niveau*—a term introduced by Klages in graphology) is not all that unattainable and corresponds exactly to the “good form” of the adherents of Gestalt. We do not have to think here of goldsmiths or lace-makers, nor of the “pearl-studded cadences” of the musicians (as outdated nowadays as lace). Let us rather think of the legendary pebbles in the mouth of Demosthenes: he was concerned for the good form of his spoken thread. But, without leaving the subject of language, what diction is for the orator or even for the simple “speaker,” writing must surely be for the writer—in the figurative even more than in the literal sense of the word writing. He will take pains, in however elementary a way, with its level of form, without ever dreaming of standing as a candidate for the Academy or for his *baccalauréat*, as he edits any old non-literary matter destined for the printing-press or the tape-recorder, and takes a sou for his pains. His good sense will be sufficient to steer him clear of repetition, of redundancy (in the human, not the technical sense, which existed

before information theory, before the earlier invention of telegraphic style); he will use periphrases in order to avoid repeating the same word<sup>2</sup> and in particular the same proper noun, according to the procedure which often produces ridiculous results and which the English somewhat ironically call "elegant variation." And on this point (as on others) he will not only seek to eliminate deformities; he will also take pains to make his discourse fluid, "flowing" and hence agreeable. This is completely independent of what he has to say, of what he communicates to us orally or in writing. It is that must be stressed: here we are at the surface of language.

(c) At the surface: outside significance. We are concerned either with the elements which, without having meaning, make the meaning easier to grasp; or in the domain of pure articulation, pure phonetics (an imaginary one where the written word is concerned, or a real one). This brings us to a concept, essential for the purposes of our demonstration, but which can lead one seriously astray if it is carelessly used: that is to say, *euphony*. Clearly the word simply indicates the opposite of cacophony. Equally obviously, these two elements have nothing to do with the meaning or expression of anything; and theorists and critics (especially English ones) who talk of euphony where phonetically expressive or meaningful uses of language are concerned, are guilty of a serious contradiction, particularly inasmuch as it prevents them from clearly perceiving the difference between euphony, properly speaking (which of course does include several nuances and which can be *allied* to the meaning of a poem as a whole) and the infinitely more important function of sound in which it becomes the bearer of meaning which would be quite different if the sound were to change. This latter function is by its nature allied to the art of the poet, to the *other* language which we shall be concerned with later, while euphony remains one of his peripheral methods, if he uses it at all—scarcely less peripheral than cacophony, which he uses more rarely but to more clearly expressive ends. On the other hand, the most ordinary language cannot be without a certain degree of euphony

<sup>2</sup> In Greece, orators were booed if they repeated the same word after too short an interval.

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(variable it is true, but also because the term and its antonym are quantitatively highly elastic), which comes out not only in the remarks and writings of every sort and kind, but in a much more general and imposing way, in what one would call the sonorous organization or the orchestration of languages. These are in possession of strictly asemantic means of preventing clashes or muddy confluences of sounds which would produce something which the users of the language would consider a cacophony. More than this, they provide readymade beauty. The beauty of each is different, of course; but amid the ones that I know best, Italian seems to me most advanced in this respect, wrapping its consonants so affectionately in vowels, and declaring that things which its neighbours use without remorse are hideous. Elektra, electron, octroi, dioptric, away with all these ptr-kr sounds! Even as I speak, *bel canto* continues.

Thus, be it form or texture, work or thread of language, men have always laboured to make them good and fair. Let Aesthetics then rejoice, for she is still that fair lady of the *belle époque*, that venerable dame who “loves beauty.” Art gains little from her, and we remain as uncertain about the nature of art. For this time our aim is no longer to establish its vital roots but to seek its origins in that which is truly human, in speech, in language. And we will not find it at the surface of language but at the more recondite level of that which has *meaning* in itself. We must now turn to words in their capacity as symbols. How should the *other* language differ from the first in depth, except in the use or the nature of its symbols? No doubt, it is precisely here that the great, one might say the decisive difficulty arises. Everything one ventures to say on the subject of these symbols will infallibly depend on the way one thinks of the language itself. One must, then, first examine the different ideas that one can have about language.

### THE TONGUE AND LANGUAGE

6. To use these two terms, and to be able to differentiate between their respective meanings, even if only gropingly, is one of the inestimable privileges of the Romance languages. It is true that in French one used to speak of the “*langage*

*françois*," but Vaugelas in his *Remarques* of 1647 was already only concerned with the "good and fine use" of "our tongue," without ever confusing it with language, whose "purity" he likened to that of style (Preface, p. ii), while observing that there was not one language but three; and while appreciating, furthermore, its "naïveté," which, he says, (p. 141 of the original edition or the 1934 facsimile) "is capable of covering up many faults and perhaps even of preventing them from being faults.

We instinctively make a distinction between the *language* of gesture and the language or *tongue* of algebra and the multiplicity of tongues becomes evident, when (in French<sup>3</sup>) we hesitate to use the word *langage* in the plural (which we do not regard as illicit but as belonging to an order of ideas to which we shall return later). Littré it is true also lists the *tongue (langue)* of colours and that of sounds, the *tongue* of the gods (poetry) beside their *language (langage)*; the distinction is blurred; but he himself defines language (*langage*) very well: "the use of a tongue for the expression of thoughts," and defines tongue (*langue*): "organ of speech" placing the latter, the "faculty possessed by the human species for expressing its ideas by means of vocal sounds," beside language (*langage*), which is quite correct, but without specifying the degree or the exact nature of this proximity, which, whether it be an avoidable evil or not, is certainly a lesser evil than that of not distinguishing either one or the other from *tongue*.

As for the deeper and above all more precise knowledge of the facts to which this latter term refers, in the sense in which it is generally used, the decisive step—that of extracting a tongue from language, and that of removing linguistics proper from the study of language (since the word linguistics, dating from 1833, was formed from *lingua* meaning a tongue and not language),—this decisive step was taken as all the world recognizes (for at most 20 or 30 years) by Ferdinand de Saussure in 1908, in the first of his three courses of general linguistics given at Geneva and built up on the idea that a tongue is a system, a "system of signs," a system like other systems of signs (or of signals), a system also somewhat like the game of chess. The notes of his

<sup>3</sup> Translators' interpolation.

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hearers give the date of the publication of these courses as 1916, as is known; this was a year of war, but also the year of the publication of another work by a famous Swiss author, which was destined to have a far more rapid success (except in France): the *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* of Henri Woefflin. Saussure's course aroused no surprise; this is the most curious thing about it. Georges Mounin shows very well in the little work already referred to in what somnolent incomprehension these ideas almost foundered: ideas that were very new but which, precisely, did not seem to be so new. I believe for my part that it was this very idea of a system which prevented people from grasping the other, corollary ideas in all their breadth. People thought that they had known this idea for a long time; and they were not altogether wrong in so thinking. As early as 1836, Humboldt declared that he could not admit of a natural origin, that is a gradual origin, of language, so convinced was he that everything is present in the *Sprache*, nothing can be lacking, and it only works and can only work as a system. But what was he speaking of? Was it language? It is here that a tongue, the French tongue, came to the aid of Saussure and of his notion of the tongue. Nonetheless this notion, with its hitherto unimagined rigour, is his own, it belongs properly to his own slightly schizophrenic genius, a genius that was all the more keen and trenchant for it. It could have wounded. People managed, unconsciously no doubt, not to notice it.

"The viewpoint creates the object" (Saussure's *Cours*, p. 22; I quote the second edition, 1922); "a tongue can be classed among human works, while language cannot" (p. 33); "a tongue is a whole in itself" (p. 25); "a speaking subject employs the code of the tongue" (p. 31); "a tongue is a system of signs (. . .) comparable [to other systems of signs]. It is merely the most important of these systems." (p. 33). "Not only can the science of a tongue do without the other elements of language, but it can exist only if these other elements are not interwoven with it" (p. 31).

Here we have Saussure's idea. All that follows can be deduced from it—although nobody except him would have known how to deduce it—or is of no importance. Our ears have been assailed by praises of the eminently "social" character of this conception,

but what Saussure says on the subject is either social in the manner of Huizinga rather than Durckheim (*homo ludens*: one more frequently plays with companions than alone), or totally lacking in originality; except in one respect. Most sociologists have in common with socialists as a whole (who can be more easily forgiven for this) that where the social element is concerned they consider only the present diversely illuminated by the problematical dawn of to tomorrow. They forget the dead, our links with the past. This is particularly inadmissible where language is concerned. Saussure is not so narrow-minded. Despite his firm choice of synchrony, which implies the idea of a system as he conceives it, he in no way forgets that the "social product" in the mind of each individual, that is to say their tongue" (p. 44) is not placed there by the society in which this individual lives, and at times he skilfully gives this "placing" its proper relief by rightly calling it a "heritage," without ever losing sight of the fact that it is a question of transmission by teaching and not by descent. He becomes intransigent only where he is concerned with the coherence of this "linguistics of a tongue" (*linguistique de la langue*)—and not of speech nor of language, nor of the history of tongues—which he alone has created and which is still to the forefront, more than half a century after his death.

The discontinuous linearity of the spoken thread, the strictly conventional ("arbitrary") and structurally differential character of the sign ("what distinguishes a sign is what constitutes it") (p. 168), but even more essentially the conception of the assimilated significatum—in a singularly wise comparison—on the obverse of a sheet of paper whose reverse is the signifier (p. 157), so that this reverse alone is immediately present (it should have been called the obverse!) and the significatum remains completely within the language, cut off *by its very function* from the real world, to which, however, it allows us to refer by means of words (audible or internal)—all that results from the initial idea of the tongue-system and predetermines the rest of the "viewpoints" which together make up linguistics as most modern linguists understand it. Troubetzkoy's phonology proceeds by way of the "abstractive pertinence" (*abstraktive Relevanz*) formulated by Karl Bühler on the basis of what one could call the differential principle of Saussure, and, to a lesser extent,

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by way of the ideas of the Polish-Russian linguist Baudouin de Courtenay, works known to Saussure, and whose essentials are worked into his *Cours*. That admirable work, so little known in France, Sir Alan Gardiner's *Theory of Speech and Language* (1932) owes as much if not more to Saussure than does Bühler's *Sprachtheorie* (1934). Danish glossematics, despite certain isolated intuitive ideas of Hjelmslev's, is simply a uselessly laborious construction, with numerous false windows for symmetry's sake, but built on solid Saussurian foundations. André Martinet, independent though he be, is nevertheless an heir and a follower-on of Saussure. It is true that in the English-speaking world we have had Bloomfield, so easy to assimilate, (and also a mind of quite a different calibre: Edward Sapir). But here, as everywhere, the "linguistics of a tongue" (*Cours*, p. 100), is in the process of becoming the only one to be recognized in academic circles. The French word "*langue*" has even become so indispensable, in its opposition to "*langage*," that it has been taken over by the linguists of the British Isles. This annexation has been ratified by John Lyons in the solid manual he has just published at the Cambridge University Press (*Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, 1968).

7. We cannot doubt that since Saussure we know much more about what a tongue is; but it seems that we know less and less about what language is. "It cannot be classed in any category of human works" (*Cours*, p. 25). Like man himself. Saussure adds: "because one cannot isolate its unity;" "isolate," here, means to delimit by means of definition, or better still, to work out as a system; but something which does not lend itself to (rigorous) definition and to systematization (so as to expose itself to attack by an exact or quasi-exact science) does not for that reason cease to exist, and often to be one of the things with which one is most reluctant to part. Such things preoccupy disciplines which are not exact (mathematical or experimental) sciences; and when they allow themselves to imitate the latter too closely, they find that they must substitute other things for these things. Words or less than words, for speech, connexions between rules or values (in a Saussurian sense) for their internal motivation, the storage (this seems the most appropriate word

on this occasion) of signals for the understanding of a discourse. No doubt all this is justifiable on a tactical level but not on the level of the general strategy of understanding. Let us reread a passage of the *Cours* which we have already cited: "not only can the science of a tongue do without the other elements of language, but it can exist only if these other elements are not interwoven with it." That may be, for this science, but if it is so, then these "other elements" nonetheless deserve to be studied in the framework of a discipline belonging to the "human sciences" (which are only "sciences" in a broader sense of the word). Such disciplines by no means reject all kinds of discipline, and they love precision though this cannot be the same precision that is found in algebra or in logistics. Historical linguistics was one of these disciplines, if only through its connexion with the problems and the methods of History. Must general linguistics remain (in synchrony as in diachrony), according to the powerful impetus given it by Saussure, as a linguistics of tongues, exclusively? It seems to us that the paraphrase of Terence's aphorism, which appears twice in Roman Jakobson's *Essais de linguistique générale* (Paris 1963, pp. 27 and 248) and which suits its author so aptly, "*linguista sum: linguistici nihil a me alienum puto*" could only be kept as a collective motto if it was applied to a linguistics not of a tongue but of language.

"Language is a purely human, non-instinctive, means for the communication of ideas, emotions and desires, by means of a system of symbols created for this purpose." This first definition dating from 1921 (*Le langage*, Paris 1967, Petite Bibliothèque Payot, p. 12), which brings out well the difference between language and tongue ("a system of symbols"—to which one ought to add: and of rules for their use), was subsequently modified by Sapir. In 1933 he wrote in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* "Language is primarily a system of phonetic symbols for the expression of communicable thoughts and feelings" (reproduced in E. Sapir: *Culture, Language, and Personality*, University of California Press, 1958, p. 1), but further on (pp. 14 and 15) he amplified this brief formula by two valuable remarks, viz: that language is "the vocal realization of a tendency to see reality symbolically" and that it is "the complex fusion of two pattern systems, the symbolic and the expressive, neither

## Notes and Discussion

of which could have reached its present state of perfection without interfering with the other." Of course, no definition of language has the slightest chance of being accepted as the definitive definition—precisely because language is not a system whereas a tongue is;—but Sapir's definitions at least hint at the breadth of what is to be defined as well as the interest of those "other elements" which Saussure rejected and which he *had to* reject in order to reach the goal which he had set himself. He had to reject them, but he thus rejected not only *de facto*—as Bally, the stylistician and his disciple, seemed to think, but *de jure*, all preoccupation with poetic language. (I use this expression in a provisional way; it only designated one aspect of the "other" language).

8. We believe we can discern, in the linguistics of today, two opposing tendencies; one, aiming at the definitive purification of its ideal object, the tongue-system, the other at unlocking the door to speech or language (which comprises speech as well as the tongue). The first is most brilliantly represented (to our mind) by the works of Prieto (his *Principes de noologie*, the Hague, 1964, his contribution to the *Linguistique* volume of the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*, Paris 1968, his excellent study *Messages et signaux*, Paris 1966) and by those of Laszló Antal (*Questions of Meaning and Content, Meaning and Understanding*, the Hague, 1963 and 1964, collected in one volume and very well translated into Italian under the title *Problemi di significato*, Milan 1967). As for the second, we can see signs of it in the most remarkable inauguration lecture given by Emile Benveniste at the XIIIth Congrès des Sociétés de Philosophie de langue française, *La forme et le sens dans le langage* (*Le Langage* vol. II, pp. 29-40, Neuchâtel, 1967) and also—*perhaps*—in what Noam Chomsky and others may be able to extract from his two concepts of "competence" and "performance," which are finally to replace "tongue" and "speech," and to bring those two Saussurian notions closer together, so that they would be opposed to each other only in the very depths of the consciousness or—if one prefers—within the skull of the "speaker." These two tendencies concern us equally albeit for different reasons. The second, because it seems to come half way to meet the *other language*, and the

first for an implicit negation which emphasizes, in our view, precisely the existence of that which it denies. Before undertaking a discussion of these problems, however, it is worth insisting once again on the necessity of keeping the ideas of “tongue” and “language” constantly distinct.

Saussure distinguished them so clearly, and stressed so many times that he was concerned with a tongue and not with language, that one would have thought any confusion on this point would long have been impossible. This is not so; and so long as the last traces of this confusion have not disappeared, we shall not succeed in establishing the proper relationship between the two terms.

André Martinet, in his *Eléments de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1960), a little treatise which is yet a model of clarity, speaks of language as an institution (p. 12), and compares it to other human institutions. How is it that he does not see that it is not one, and that it is only tongues that can be called institutions? For him, it is true, tongues are “modalities of language,” and this is why he believes he is justified in applying to language a statement which is in fact applicable to tongues. But is “language” a simple generalization of the term “tongue”? In that case it ought to be a system, since every tongue is a system. Yet this it certainly is not. The child which has, for the first time, grasped the meaning of a word—the meaning and not the symbolic value it might have had for him previously—has virtually mastered human language, even though he does not yet know a single tongue and may never subsequently learn the tongue to which this word belonged. Nothing, on the other hand, could be more limpidly clear (and this is more immediately relevant here) than what he says, in his celebrated essay on the “double articulation of language” (*La double articulation du langage*, in *La linguistique synchronique*, Paris 1965, p. 33), on the subject of the elements of speech, such as energy, melody, quantity, which are “fundamental in language, but marginal and episodic in a tongue”—a tongue, which cannot therefore be subsumed in the idea of language. And he continues (our italics): “*But since it is a tongue, rather than language, that is the object of linguistics, one is justified in stating that the facts of prosody are less fundamentally linguistic than symbols and phonemes.*”

No indeed: they are not linguistic at all, or scarcely at all, if linguistics is the science of the tongue.

In his article on "Recent Definitions of Language" (*Diogenes*, No. 31, 1960, p. 89), Georges Mounin, though very aware of Saussure's thought and very faithful to it, does not always distinguish very well between those that concern tongue and those that concern language. He says of the first two definitions he quotes, which were quoted in the *Encyclopédie* article (of 1755), that they are richer than that of the *Encyclopédie* itself; this is true, but he forgets that this latter definition is the only one to define the *tongue*, exclusively: "A tongue is the set of usages characteristic of a nation, for the expression of thought by means of the voice." And when (p. 105) he comes to the definition given in the *Larousse du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1931), which is a double one (as he observes): "Language: set of terms of a particular idiom and of the rules for their use. Any means of expressing ideas"—how is it that he does not see that this is a definition first of all of a *tongue* (despite the rubric), and only secondly of *language* (in the broadest sense of the word)? But this is nothing. There is a sentence in *Clefs pour la linguistique* (p. 57) which struck us even more—and, in a sense, charmed us—coming from this Saussurian whom we admire greatly: "The idea of system will no doubt be of great importance in deciding whether—and to what extent—the plastic arts are forms of language (*des langages*)." So—is it then a characteristic of language, and not of a tongue, to be a system—in contradiction to what Saussure understood and demonstrated so clearly? I do not believe Mounin can think so. This is a simple slip, which is precious to us for two reasons: it gives the best possible confirmation of the fact that these two terms must be separated before one can think of uniting them; and it supports our intention of putting the tongue aside in future: for us, the arts, whatever they may be, are not tongues but forms of language—they may be capable on occasion of producing tongues; but this is not what concerns us for the moment.

9. Goethe was right, we are sure of it, with his idea of the *Vermittlung des Unaussprechlichen*. There exists a form of speech, a "way of expressing oneself" (a formula which misses its mark

through being over-simplified), which allows us to say what we cannot say in the words we use every day. Art is a language, or a group of languages (*langages*—and this is the proper context for putting the word *langage* in the plural), which are related to each other by the peculiar quality of the symbols they use. In order to demonstrate that this language exists, and to discern its nature, one must first separate it from language proper (this is the best way), and establish in what way, exactly, it differs from it. This is a far more arduous task than it seems at first glance. I read in A.J. Greimas' book *Sémantique structurale* (Paris 1966, p. 59): "Poetry is a language, or more precisely, it is situated within language." This, it would seem, is exactly what we think; and yet, if we look closer, it is just the opposite: the author's opinions determined by his ideas of language, we hope soon to be able to develop here. We have only just begun. And it is only by way of a programme that we add the following lines:

Poetry, or rather the whole of literary art, belonging to any particular tongue, comprises three languages (*langages*). A double distinction must be made here. The words of the poet are different symbols (but not necessarily different words) from the words we make use of for our practical or scientific ends. The symbols or signs used by the art of "fiction" (drama or the novel) are not words, and this art is not an art of the word in the sense that poetry is. The words it uses are only the symbols of symbols. Nonetheless it, too, is a language, which allows us to think in a certain manner and to communicate these thoughts to others.