

IS OUR CONSCIOUSNESS LINGUISTIC ?

“Given the fact that the consciousness of man is a linguistic consciousness, all models superimposed on consciousness, including art, can be understood as secondary modeling systems,” wrote Yuri Lotman in *Introduction à la structure du texte artistique*.¹

This affirmation, set forth as self-evident, is nevertheless far from being universally accepted as such. We quote it here as a proposition which we would like to begin by describing, which we would then like to examine in order to see in what manner it has met criticisms addressed to it; and finally we would like to reinsert the theory into the fragility of coincidences which guarantee it, located within a problematic which is inseparable from certain implications of a reflection on the nature of consciousness.

Is our consciousness linguistic? We should raise the question

Translated by R. Scott Walker

¹ Yuri Lotman, *La structure du texte artistique*, (*Struktura khudozestvenogo teksta*), translated from the Russian by A. Fournier, B. Kreise, E. Malleret, J. Yong, under the direction of Henri Meschonnic, Paris, Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines, NRF, 1973.

rapidly before it is too late, before we no longer have the courage to ask it, before the question becomes unthinkable in itself. We must ask it in order to expose all that surrounds it, what was and remains a certain experience of languages and speech. We must deal with this question while there is still time to do so.

Our consciousness is linguistic. This means that language is the primary model for acts of consciousness and that non-verbal languages are secondary models, the model being understood as a certain neuro-physical organization whose structures can only be determined from the effects of expression which are sometimes verbal and sometimes non-verbal.

This affirmation is based first of all on operatory considerations. The linguistic model is the most refined, the most economic, the best known, in general and common use and receives a new strength of polarization from the fact of being the certain model for artificial languages, not only the metalanguage of the sciences but also systems languages, which guide technical systems, and computer languages. It can then be understood why this affirmation was accepted as evident by Roland Barthes and that it remains the one preferred by semioticians who construct the semiologies of non-verbal languages on the model of linguistic structuralism. But consciousness should not be reduced to a network of operations, to the site of the most rapid and best controlled substitutions; consciousness is a locus of retention open to the infinity of the field of perception, the form, each time unique, reciprocal to each of its unuttered propositions. Vigilance encountering some chance coincidences.

It is possible to conceive a thought which is not totally conscious but an orientation, an expression of a preference, induction, non-reflected choice. Fluency in a fluid atmosphere, issuing from a situation of presence in the world; thinking proceeds from an exploration of the concrete condition of a body which is not a body closed in a program of instinctive behavior but the condition of a body returned to the depth of its image, to its virtuality, by the sight of and the naming of the other. It is in fact the naming, the call sent out and received

and inviting a kind of individual adventure, initially indistinct, which opens to human behavior the area necessary for an initial autonomy and the chance for the thought which governs it.

The activity of thinking occurs, then, in a field of communications in which there are, first of all, mimetic exchange, a sharing of passions, symbolic interpretation. Thought must be conceived as moving in a hinterland of representation or a field subject to the intimations of impulses but innervated to instincts fixed on first figures, desires provoked by first whims, myths sustained by first wishes.

But these fragile phantasms would have no future and would disappear at birth if they were not in their turn taken up into a system of living exchanges, free and unexpected, nevertheless always decipherable, the behavior of the other, the similar, the brother.

And so are interwoven on the *terrae incognitae* of an intact world, a geography of intentions, of recognitions which will progressively cover them over, of movement in every direction where the predictable will be mixed in with the unpredictable, of projects. Born, as we have just seen, of the interpretation from gesture and from an articulated appeal, of a game iridescent with desires, of song imbued with passion, thought acquires a few organizations, a few useful supplies, wins for itself the capacity of mentally representing the real, of making present to itself several particular configurations of the world.

It is the faculty of imagination and the areas of symbolic invention which must be re-examined once more. Observe a child's first games; they allow apprising how an object and its playful manipulation can be substituted for an emotion. In this way the tot who plays with its mother's empty sewing spool transfers to the rolling away and returning movements of the spool its own joy and anguish at the arrival and departure of its mother. In the vocabulary of Mélanie Klein, it expresses them by the two adverbs *fort* and *da*, near and far. This event touches on the world of learning symbolic languages and that of language itself, origin of a genealogy where symbolic order is produced and with it the possibility of mentally representing to oneself the parameters of a reality which is only projected.

But then the thought produces a conduct which determines

its orientation from an interpretative dialogue dealing with its lived environment. From one intuition to another, from view to view, it acquires its first convictions and then finally it becomes a committed judgment working from a verified experience of the real. Committed judgment, thought now acts from concretely lived situations, rooted in this world; it is incarnated in an individuality assigned to a place, a historic moment, to death. It is immersed in a "layer of brute meaning" in Merleau-Ponty's expression, from which it emerges in whatever way it can, using whatever means it has available.

To think does not mean to repeat the judgment of another. Although its adventure is associated with interpretative dialogue, with symbolic invention and with that exchange of passions which bears all, thought determines its orientations from a mental revision, from an imaginary representation of elements intervening in the process of possible conduct. Even more, the strength of thought can be measured precisely in this autonomy of representation and, consequently, of decision. This autonomy will depend in turn on experience which will be represented as organized, reflected and reasoned memory, of comparison with the real. Maturity, wisdom, and a sense of responsibility denote a thought taking form. And so we arrive at conscious thinking.

"To be conscious means at every instant to be aware of the relation between what one is thinking or doing with what one could be thinking or doing," wrote Paul Valéry in *Les Cahiers*.²

Paul Valéry, from 19 years of age, throughout his adult life, arose every morning between four and five o'clock in order to surprise his thought as it awakened, as it came to itself, as it discovered itself. *Les Cahiers* records this experience at the very limits of a poetic investigation to which the entire work bears witness but which was also pursued for the purpose of exploring the inventive mechanisms of languages in a jealous vigilance of procedures and resources. Paul Valéry has cast his nets deep into a particularly broad mental experience which gives such

² Paul Valéry—who answered in this manner, by other channels and without uncertainty, the needs of the transcendental ego of Edmond Husserl, latest theory, still incomplete, of conscious activity. *Les Cahiers*, Paris, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," NRF, 1973, vol. 2, p. 203.

fertility to an examination of the proposed definition. Let us look at that term by term.

“What one thinks one does.” That is thought committed to an action which it has mobilized, applying all its resources, expressing itself in value judgments with regard to a project of action, construction, original desire. But to be conscious in a significant manner means being aware in one’s mental representation of things, one’s projects, one’s action, no matter how finely organized they might be, “of their relation to whatever could be thought or done.” This means relative to the program which could be drawn up from the powers of the mind to represent absent reality to itself. To re-present it, to make it present once again. For itself as for others, based precisely on the model of linguistic communications.

This is a mental activity which is no doubt prepared by the dreams of a sleeping person, or by his fantasies when awake, the demanding constructions of a solid material, but which exercise can lead to a controlled representation, a construction or even a total reconstruction of the real by the anticipatory powers of the mind. A work for which Leonardo da Vinci, adventurer in painting, mechanics, science, architecture and even writing, represents not only the most striking example, but, determined also by Paul Valéry’s astonishing essay, the methodic model.³

What is of interest to us here is the mobilization, to their very limits, of the means of the imaginary, of interwoven registers of an extremely broad memory. The gamble here is to render conscious what lies fallow in the unconscious, what occurs in the most fruitful manner in the design of a work and from then on, inevitably, in the dialogue which encourages it and which accompanies its execution, which shares and perfects its realization. The work to be done requires verifying the suggestions of the imaginary so that they can enter an organized construction. The man who practices dreaming, imagining, planning and thinking in terms of precise instructions earns for himself a conscious thought. At each moment he will have the faculty of opposing, of activating in provocative contrast the precise program in which his action, his thinking are engaged and a reflected and

³ Paul Valéry, *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, “La Pléiade;” NRF, 1957, 2 volumes, vol. 1, p. 1153.

reasoned organization, with the ever more learned interconnections of a memory organized by experience and intimate asceticism. Provocative contrasts whose product will necessarily be an invention. The exceeding of a conditioning, of a given mechanism, in view of a richer structure. And this in every order of experience and of knowledge.

This imaginary scenario is verified at all stages of anthropological evolution. In games and the first arbitrary formations of time and space, in the elaboration of the operative process inserting the instrument into the warp of resistances and the facilities of the milieu, in the concerted exchanges of languages, it always is a matter of establishing a relationship with a sequence which is already underway, the rules of the game, the manner of using an instrument, the coded reference of a vernacular language with a field of possible elements systematically opposed to acquired solutions.

And so we reach the exercise of a conscious thought, assumed and deepened in its own possibilities and as specific experience. Tirelessly exploring the field of the possible, it is not only the worksite of data stored up by the individual memory of the experience, it is an appeal to and confrontation with the experience of others, of the memory which it has retained of it and which provides it with so many other horizons. The conscious thought is necessarily dialogue. It is not possible to conceive that it can be limited only to what is possible without the dialogue which immediately multiplies what could be thought or done by the infinitely multipliable coefficient of other experiences; and so conscious thought is a type of language, like a system of signs functioning for communication purposes, pushed to its limits.

But we can see in a first approximation that language, from touch to sight, is the site of numerous coincidences, the most significant and richest repercussions. Moreover, it is the site of self-awakening in the exercise of dialogue, the constitutive instrument of subjectivity. It is in configuration with the learning of articulated language, whether by preparing for it or by differentiating themselves from it, that non-verbal languages are constructed in their originality.

The primary characteristic of mime, dance, painting, sculpture, or music, in the sense which Freud gave to the kind of expression

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emanating from the impulses of instinct, are only revealed in their originality and their own structure of constituted languages following the learning of the spoken language. The first effects of differentiation—mime is not mime, dance is not dance, etc.—are seen only by the effect of the distance from exchanges in spoken language and receive their specificity from this distance.

However, this is not evident, and it can be guessed that our answer must be refined. The peremptory reason has already been noted once more by Yuri Lotman: “Spoken language is the earliest model.” This too is what we propose to examine in the history of the species and of individuals. We will then see that it is repeated in the collective invention of celebration and of art which is its continuation.

Spoken language is the earliest model in the history of the human race. Can we produce a decisive proof of this affirmation? No doubt it can only be a hypothesis waiting for verification, accompanied by a few probatory elements.

The first manifestations of art, sculptures and bone paintings, appear in human evolution with *Homo sapiens*, 40,000 years B.C.; the human race is known from about 4,500,000 years ago. These manifestations are associated with funerary rituals which themselves presume a linguistic exchange.

The agitation of consciousness before death, the effect of distancing relative to the experience which this agitation presupposes, the agitation of the memory in which it consists, requires this symbolic evocation of the absent object for which the word is the ineluctable bond. Mime, dance, painting, sculpture, music and architecture cannot themselves produce this distancing inasmuch as they are manifestations immediately associated with natural conditions. On the contrary, it must be reasoned that gestures, traces left in the sand, peelings, stones were only significant in reference to a mythic tale. It was necessary, then, that it be elaborated. In short, non-verbal languages did not enter a system of communications—did not accede to the status of languages—except as areas charged with a symbolic activity encountered by and in the practice of the spoken language.

Let us explain that. The articulated sound, the first one, was introduced as a relation which expressed through continuity of breathing and rhythm, the states of the body: perceptions, emotions, feelings, while at the same time finding a material which is proven to be a support for substitutions, by vocalizations, modulations, phonetic duplications, syllabic repetitions, so well noted in *Anagrammes* by Ferdinand de Saussure.⁴ In short, as a first vocal object in which situations experienced and the revelation of self to the other and to the enigmatic world could play and replay until appearing with the clarity of an independent representation, indefinitely adjustable, a structure of indefinite complexification of meaning, the support, the instrument, the vehicle of the first states of consciousness. These did not hesitate then to find as many secondary developments in games which were mimed, danced, painted, sculpted, musical and architectural; but secondary because they had no access to the functions of the differentiated exchange which form them in distinct languages other than by the provocation-evocation of the spoken language; but secondary because these non-verbal languages are available to the consciousness awakened to such experiences as doubled, to the borders of an area, a game, a memory opened up by the interrogating word.

We are not saying that there were no anticipatory gestures, dances, traces left prior to spoken language, which would be absurd; but we do hold that they were never able to be read as signs of an awakened consciousness, never as art, without the prior appearance of the exercise of articulated language. And so such activities are not manifested before the use of articulated language in the history of the species. They are not mimes, nor dances, nor paintings, nor music, nor architecture, but grimaces, leaping, noises, chance traces, accidental shelters. The ritual hand of Pech'Merle is significant because it works at the periphery of a mythic consciousness fashioned by language. It is in spoken discourse that it becomes a mystery and a gesture to be interpreted. By situating man precisely as the initiator of languages, confronting the enveloping experience of the world to the space

⁴ Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots* (Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure), Paris, "Le Chemin," NRF, 1971.

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of an interrogation formulated from its own references. However, the first of these to be composed in independent space by the play of the double articulation of the system of sounds and of the system of meaning are the signs of spoken language. The print of a hand on soft clay is a banal event, unless it is made in response to a question coming from somewhere else, from the word; in fact, to extend this agitation to the deafest of palpitations, to the vibrations of the most remote galaxies.

Leroi-Gourhan has shown how the production of tools is connected to the invention of articulated language. The tool is part of the creation of linguistic structures and its use requires their exercise. The invention of tools supposes an activity of memory and of imaginary projection which take place in connection with the invention of the spoken language. We cannot conceive of the birth of a technician's movement other than supported by the associative areas of the brain, those which preside at the invention of articulated language, between touch, hearing and sight. But there again, "the operatory synergy of the instrument and the movement supposes the existence of a memory in which can be written the program for behavior (producer)," writes Leroi-Gourhan.⁵

Let us imagine a group of hunters at the dawn of the era of words. The hunting operations are punctuated with cries, shouts, distinctive signals of every kind. The reduction of the jaw muscles has liberated the larynx; the sounds articulated offer multiple resources for modulations and can in this way accompany with their variations the most diverse incidents in the pursuit of game. But what do these incidents develop? An entire syntax throughout a complex action in which hunters are the subjects, where hunting is the verb, where the animals of prey are the direct object, where places, coincidences, moments are the adverbs of time and place, etc. This is how an extremely learned syntax can be invented for an articulated language. A syntax formed by the advance of the hunting group. *Invenire*: to arrive at, to come on. Our ancestors invented language, arrived at it, came to it, found themselves surrounded by words, a syntax, a dramatic

⁵ André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1965, 2 volumes.

discourse because their groups, their gestures, their calls, their signs, even the intelligence they used to associate them and modulate them, disposed them to finding it. This should be from now on the meaning and experience of invention for us! Here is how from now on the articulated language is associated with techniques, those of the production of tools and weapons, for politics, for cooking, for seduction and for celebration, all as a capital chance for progress and mastery.

Let us return to the moment of the invention of the language. As we have evoked it, it offers a reason for the complexity of syntaxes which organize languages in such a constitutive manner. In fact, the scholarly structures of languages are nowhere born of a voluntary production, they manifest against a background of constellations and of worlds the situation of the most favored invention in terms of length and conjunctions. An echo chamber offered to the field of perception and welcoming them all—from touch, of which we know that hearing is the most refined expression, to sight—articulated language associates the accumulated performances and, by the outline made in the air of an individual voice, by the plays of modulation of which the trick of double articulation delivers reflex repetitions, binds them into effects of consciousness. By effects of resonances echoed back on themselves, by the possibilities of repeating oneself to oneself. And, from then on, it is actualized in the universal experience and the exercise of consciousness, and the instrument of its continued invention, a decisive model.

Awakened to the effects of doubles, to symbolic activity, the human race could not develop secondary models or non-verbal languages other than with a passionate interest. From where did this stem?

It discovered there the paths of a consciousness of its own body as resonator of its being to the world. Like the indefinite provocation to refinement of spoken language. Mime, dance, painting, sculpture and music appear as exciting and fascinating manifestations of new linguistic virtuosity. And so to this theoretical demonstration can be added a statement of fact. These manifestations of communications by non-verbal signs, raised to the level of an art, are declared at a moment when morphological evolution of the species has for a long time pos-

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sessed the organic means—the anatomical mechanisms of phonation—as well as the cervical areas for language, signs of the priority of the linguistic model.

The learning of a spoken language is the earliest in individual history; this is the first language formed as a complete system in the child. Mimetic communication and early childhood games only function in order to initiate construction of spoken language. Play with a doll cannot become a puppet show; sculpture, painting, myth and theater cannot fully function as symbolic tools and means of nuanced exchanges except after having served for the learning of the language.

It is only when the spoken language is formed that gesture can be described as mime, as non-verbal language, pushing consciousness to its limits, *i.e.* to one of the limits of its linguistic expression.

From then on can be explained and accepted the idea that our consciousness is formed for a model of linguistic functioning and that, with regard to this formation-invention, the other models are secondary. This means that they are only produced and pursued in order to provoke and defy what is accomplished in linguistic exchange, that is in the completed circulation of meaning, from consciousness to consciousness.

What is the case of an art which does not aim at expression, as in the West, but at giving access to a certain quality of vigilance like certain ancient Chinese or Japanese paintings, the object of which is a quality of transparency attained simply in the act of painting, conceived as access to a certain experience of the unspoken, to the sacred for which there are no words?

Here we see a significant attitude of acceptance of language; the power of the word is suspended at this point in the exercise of thought there where, in its movement toward consciousness, it is retained for the benefit of perceptive fluidity which tends to become objective in the signs which control spoken language. This is an event which expresses in its own manner how far spoken language can be proposed as an inevitable model.

This is also the occasion of a reflection distinguishing thought

from consciousness; states of "nirvana" are an integration of primary states, a return to mental events which preceded the use of the word but which, this time, are tested in the imminence of its awakening. This immersion of consciousness into the original layers of sensation is inscribed in a regressive movement which retards both specific acts of consciousness and the advent of the word. *The knightly art of archery* pushes consciousness to be exactly equal to the interiorized perception of the gestures of the archer and is performed in this equality.⁶

In the realm of mystical experience, the word is made interrogatory, it is circumvented thought, surprise, inexhaustible interpretation. It is fulfilled in the poem which is the operation of language at the level of its structures of invention. Where parts of the linguistic model are subjected to a forge whose incandescence can no longer be excluded. *The Dark Night of the Soul* by John of the Cross, poem and poet's commentary, gave form to this exploit.⁷

Thought is a judgment which is expressed from its own experience. The sculptor who hesitates in his gesture of tearing away and the painter whose color-laden brush is held in suspense above his palette are in a state of intense thought. They think from the rich and diversified flow of perception; they are an instant of thought which is begun from the engulfing presence of the cosmos and of the body of resonance.

The oscillations of thought, its hesitations, its modes of intuition are thus natural to non-verbal expression; this really constitutes the humus of inventive thinking, of thinking introductory to paths and to new relations following vital progress, according to the accidents of its bio-cosmic derivative. With the very first movements of thought, what is in view is thus a determination, a forming of orientations tending to those reflexive organizations whose finished and general tissue will be spoken language. And so they derive their meaning from an expansion of the exchange.

What must be seen is how the unconscious, the primary

⁶ E. Herrigel, *Le zen dans l'art chevaleresque du tir à l'arc*, "Bouddhisme et Jaïnisme," Lyon, Paul Derain, 1961.

⁷ Jean de la Croix, *Oeuvres complètes*, "Bibliothèque européenne," Paris, DDB, 1959.

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movement, the impulse in the Freudian sense are called up from the very edges of the spoken language. From the linguistic exchange, from a consciousness which aims at, which can only aim at greater consciousness—that is toward linguistic perfection, for it is proper to consciousness to think at the very limits of what is thought or done—sooner or later, it selects as object an exploration of what is not thought or done in operations of exchange which are clear, useful, effective. It raises the question of the un-thought, this is its expressed territory. “What do we call thinking?” asks Heidegger.⁸ It is to think what is not yet thought, that what is to be thought has not yet been thought. It is to begin movement toward a conscious exchange of that which until then was not or was only less perfectly so.

With Jean-Jacques Rousseau we can imagine man still ungraced with articulated language, we can surprise him preparing himself in a great silence which, still according to Jean-Jacques, preceded the appearance of the word. We can posit language activity and find therein all activities of this man, forged from a word which puts them in the circuit of exchange and of continued invention of language.

Thought never ceases to emerge from experience; it is the result of connections which are established between one field of perception and another. Connections which ensure measured gestures thanks to messages composed from hearing, the eye, from touch, from smell, etc. Connections which are established through a play of the afferent and the efferent nerves. Relations of a cybernetic order, of retroaction from effect to cause are the permanent order of thought.

More difficult to explain is the role of the perceptive areas by which the world is comprehended in its inexhaustible originality. Reservoir of data relative to which our conduct is determined. The fields of perception in which consciousness is raised determine by its original style, by a certain degree of openness or a certain appearance or a certain temporality.⁹

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Qu'appelle-t-on penser?*, translated by Aloys Becker and Gerard Granel, “Epiméthée,” Paris, P.U.F., 1959.

⁹ Henri Van Lier, *L'Animal signé*, Brussels, De Visscher, 1980. See, in particular, the discussion of “the effects of the field of perception,” pp. 42-45 and 71-73.

They are affirmed in artistic creation; the style of writing expresses the texture, every time particular. Their absence notes a banal discourse in which the invention of language is not required but only the use of its codes.

The operations of interpretation of the perceptive flow place us at the levels of formations which are not always original but dependent on the original. Only patient labor, a minute enquiry can allow drawing near to its constitutive elements. The result is always an extremely scholarly and fragmentary work opening to areas of infinite fertility. These, for example, are in the area of poetic language, the *Anagrammes* of Ferdinand de Saussure, studies conducted more recently by Henri Van Lier on the language of Villon, Ronsard, Corneille, Pascal, Molière, but also on pictorial subjects.¹⁰ All these studies attempt to discern and indicate the rate of opening and closing through which a work breaks its trail as a perceptive synthesis of the world.

Histories of art could be remade working from fields of perception, noted Henri Van Lier once more, because it is from them that decisive inventions appear. Undreamed-of constellations, flows until then unknown, unseen formations. When artistic language exists, or the equivalent of a mnemonic technique, then a new operation, a new registration, a quiver in the eye appears which raises questions about the structures of this language for passing the original contribution, for recording the acquired flow of a new state of the cosmos gleaned from fields of perception of a sensitivity which has now changed. The chief characteristic of a work of art in a given language is to set this language in operation at the level of its structures of invention.

This supposes that the expression of the field of perception shatters the entire context of the language in which it is declared. It is necessary to have, on the one hand, a veritable language, in resonance or resistance, a community which speaks it and demands a code for its customs and ceremonies, its usual exchanges and, on the other, an experiment in new fields of perception which seek in this language the inevitable support

¹⁰ Henri Van Lier, *Les Arts de l'espace*, Paris, Casterman, 1959 and *Lectures historiques: Villon, Ronsard, Corneille, Pascal, Molière*, "Le langage et l'homme," Brussels, 1974-78.

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for its message, the first means of revealing it and communicating it. Thus begins the struggle with the angel, the "poetic" struggle *par excellence* "between tradition and invention," according to the expression of Guillaume Apollinaire. A language, and non-verbal languages which expand its area in sensitivity, vibrating with new shockwaves. Language and languages are woven together with new thread and move off toward other horizons. Horizons unknown to a people, for the history of its sensitivity, its spirit, tomorrow.

In Egypt and ancient China, in Byzantium, hieratic language supported art as language of a sensitivity pursued, under the violences of ritual, into unknown, unsuspected and always vibrant fields of perception. What our eye picks out in the enigma and openness, contemporaries perceived as the presence of the sacred. But that which forms the true experience of art has not changed: its object. This is the engulfing totality of the massive mystery, the insistent universe, incredibly near yet impossible to name, to sketch, to define. There it is and it is absent; every great work always sketches it. But the alternation of absence and presence, an interrogative stupor which sets off a work of art is recognized in its extreme contradiction from acts of naming in spoken language. Dionysian drunkenness offers new developments only to Apollonian states. The event, that can be nothing other than a consciousness which perishes, submerged, or another richer one aborning. Language is thus the locus of the first and last repercussions as if it were for it that non-verbal languages work unceasingly.

The value of artistic activity is that it is located at the level of sensorial flow and that it maintains its organizations. Which ones? Those of a structure of participation and actions of interpretation of the perceptive flow. There is a double difficulty encountered here, then: that of explaining the structure of participation and the actions of interpretation of perceptive flow. The structure of participation is necessarily created at the level of a language which, like every language, supposes experiences which have already been exchanged and catalogued, the creation of a code or play of differentiation dissociating the perceptive layer into distinct, that is exchangeable, data. The actions of interpretation of the perceptive flow are the vibrating, essentially

dynamic, the totally significant material of a work of art. They are the ones which constitute it in provocations of constantly restudied interpretations, the site of the confrontation between language codes and inexhaustible fields of perception.

We say that the appearances of meaning in non-verbal languages occur upon appeal from a consciousness already formed by linguistic exchange.

A moment of cerebral development is there pushed to its limits. In fact this confrontation of language codes with inexhaustible fields of perception where the work of art takes place replaces its author in conditions for the invention of languages.

It is a matter of using language as an instrument of pure and simple interpretation, of delivering the unforeseeable. "To go further," said Picasso, "to go very far, to go even further still and make it work!" But such a conjunction continues the exploit begun by the invention of languages, of knowing a perceptive flow as an alert introductory to cervical areas and an attempt at signifying definitively to another consciousness. No doubt the challenge of the work of art today is to make the perceptive flow be borne by some new form, reciprocal to the totality of a language already worked out, but it is always to reinstate in it the same adventure of interpreting the unknown.

Matched to this continued creation of languages, the work of art, then, settles into the constitutive exploit of the species. But once again the species, we will affirm, is only the inventor of non-verbal languages in that it disposes of spoken languages in which the principle of double articulation can play. The modulated cry of animals does not constitute a language but a signal program ordered to programmed settings of the instinct. That which distinguishes non-verbal languages in the human species from whatever kind of animal behavior is the relation to associative areas of the brain which also control languages.

In the drawings of little children we do not observe the behavior of a little animal which is already at a certain external behavioral level but the preludes to an organization which marks the arrival of consciousness. It is this, until the appearance of linguistic exploit, which attracts us in the traces of his drawing. The brush in the hand of a giant ape has as primary meaning only the expectation which we have that he will give us a

meaning. But, due to a lack of consciousness in which the use of articulated language alone can awake vigilances, the program exhausts its meaning in an automatism reduced to reflex relays. An apprenticeship, even rudimentary, in articulated language would no doubt suffice for disengaging the animal from the reflex circuit, but is it necessary? It is, in fact, within the distance established between the automatisms of reflex and free associations of the brain that could appear the sign of a work of art, namely an expression which would polarize the virtual powers of a memory, which would awaken the resources of an invention of languages. These examples do not prove but merely indicate; the work of art has meaning only as inscribed in the line of conquest of articulated languages.

Apparently escaping the double articulation which in fact organizes languages, the productions of non-verbal languages are, it is said, more motivated than systematic. A structural play, however, buried in the neuro-perceptive system, controls their understructure. The observation of the functioning of vision leads to the presumption that at the neuro-physiological level there operates a selection of perceptive flow which, by a play of binary opposites, is in turn constitutive of distinctive units.¹¹ Distinctive units, signifying structures, relative to which the distribution of paint on a canvas can be situated as so many immediately significant units. And so we proposed, in this same review, in our article "The Place of Oil Painting in Art," a history of painting whose task would be, from work to work, from effects of field of perception to effects of field of perception, to exfoliate the distinctive units.¹²

From this it follows that the same structures as those which control spoken language also exercise power over nonverbal expression, from the level of distinctive units; but nonverbal languages work under the form of secondary models still engaged in the circuits of the nervous system, in relation with the perfectly objectified and instrumentalized model, and, as such, the primary model, of spoken language for which they receive the

¹¹ P. Fleury, "La vision," in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Paris, 1975, vol. 16, p. 897.

¹² *Diogenes*, No. 112, Winter, 1980.

justification for their organizations.

In terms of social behavior, we can observe in passing that a non-verbal art which does not succeed in reaching a significant exchange would not in any way be present to consciousness. No more than works of Gothic art were to 18th century tastes. It can only disappear—suicide or madness—so necessary is this connection. When Camille Claudel, shortly before the mental health nurses came to take her away, destroyed the sculptures in her workshop with a hammer, she was showing to what point her work, unnoted by the social group, had lost meaning. And so, from the first blow of the hammer to the last, these are the significations which interest language that the sculptor inscribes in wood, stone, metal. This is the perceptive agitation whose consciousness must be broken from the moment when the artist has been visited by it.

The fascination exercised by sculpture has its place in the immediacy of the sensation and the experience which it proposes. But this fascination involves a state of distancing from exchanges in which consciousness returns commonly in spoken expression. Tactile, muscular, fully corporal, it sets off a shock which is still wild with impulses, desires, passion. And so the artist is incited to make his work; consciousness experiences the vertigo of a state which is foreign to it; it undergoes it, is surprised by it, comes back to it like a self-discovery, a discovery of others, of the world which it had not expected. And finally it experiences a separation which is all the more significant in that it escapes normal views.

Genius resides in this separation. Liberating, from audacity to audacity, an abrupt work but one which entertains a dialogue with other works, where all together and one by the other they do not cease gaining in significations, it offers to the generations increasingly clearer paths, increasingly conscious reasons to appropriate its singularities.

And so we come to say that the emergence of significations in non-verbal languages arrives from an appeal of a consciousness already formed by linguistic exchange.

It is this model which encourages the painter, the sculptor, the musician in their search for non-verbal communication which attains differentiated exchange. Even more, it is the tension

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thereby created which signals the entry into artistic activity and its experience.

If we observe the direction of evolution of celebration, what do we find?

That celebration, finally, has only mobilized non-verbal expressions in order to celebrate spoken language. From celebration to celebration peoples are trained in singing, in the production of myths, in poetry, in theater, the final term of language in celebration.

By welcoming written production, the theater—it was in Athens in the sixth century where this first occurred—the theater in turn signals a new stage in the coming to consciousness of a language. Other writings, poetry and mythology, language itself become objects of a critical coming to consciousness. Written with open eyes, legend becomes history, object of spectacle, destiny becomes subject for reflection, philosophy and science. Philosophy and science for which henceforth non-verbal arts will not figure any longer other than as stimulants for a reasoned investigation of the real.

We have defined art as the operation of a given language at the level of the structures of invention of this language, but this level of invention is only reached in whatever language if it operates with the goal of achieving or of further refining the most lavish creations of this language, of maintaining its attention, reciprocally to the multiple facets of perception. This is what occurs in a celebration.

It is dance, music, painting, sculpture and architecture of one day. Let a poem arise and immediately, without their ever being cancelled, there are also the steps, the dances which become the servants of a supreme deliverance of meaning and of the statement of the fine, fragile and supreme participation. But here too is language in the center of solicitations encountered from every language, born and expanded by them, obliged to renew themselves from moment to moment, to arise in moments of pure interpretation.

The adherence to these moments takes place out of the most

jealous fibres of consciousnesses, to the rarest exercise; the body is led to the final point of fusion with the celebrating group. Not only the group pressure on the individual is at its minimum, but the spontaneity of adherence, the act of a clear consciousness which is stirred is at the maximum of its play and freedom. This is the freest people, glorious in all its joy.

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on;” like them, our life is “rounded with a sleep”, cries Prospero in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, and this at the end of a play full of noise and furor. Song, dance, mime, music, painting, sculpture and architecture take part in the theater of Shakespeare, but who will deny that its size and its altitude, its fleshy matter, its power to agitate worlds are given in this little nothing, these two lines, at the summit of this incomparable work? Where, however, does the entire work not cease playing, opening its depths filled with the infinite? Let it vibrate entirely with this beat, the simple breath of a spoken word, supreme music, final measure at the borders of the world. And so the poem gives us the cosmos for a home. In the word which interrogates, mime, dance, painting, music and architecture complete their structures in final resonances. Our consciousness is linguistic, which means not only that our consciousness is fashioned by language, but that consciousness is dependent on the continued invention of language. Non-verbal arts unfold their mute figures for no other need than that of deepening the space of the word without which their expressions would be lost in unremembered agitation.

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