FRAGMENTS

George Steiner

If we postulate, as I think we must, that human speech matured principally through its hermetic and creative functions, that the evolution of the full genius of language is inseparable from the impulse to concealment and fiction, then we may at last have an approach to the Babel problem. All developed language has a private core. According to Belimir Khlebnikov, the Russian futurist who thought more deeply than any other great poet about the frontiers of language, "Words are the living eyes of secrecy." They encode, preserve, and transmit the knowledge, the shared memories, the metaphorical and pragmatic conjectures on life of a small group—a family, a clan, a tribe. Mature speech begins in shared secrecy, in centripetal storage or inventory, in the mutual cognizance of a very few. In the beginning the word was largely a pass-word, granting admission to a nucleus of like speakers. 'Linguistic exogamy' comes later, under compulsion of hostile or collaborative contact with other small groups. We speak first to ourselves, then to those nearest us in kinship and locale. We turn only gradually to the outsider, and we do so with every safeguard of obliqueness, of reservation, of conventional flatness or outright misguidance. At its intimate centre, in the zone of familial or totemic immediacy, our language is most economic of explanation, most dense with intentionality and compacted implication. Streaming outward it thins, losing energy and pressure as it reaches an alien speaker.

In the process of external contact a pidgin must have arisen, an interlingua minimally resistant to current, predictable needs of economic exchange, of territorial adjustment or joint enterprise. Under certain circumstances of combinatorial advantage and social fusion, this 'amalgam at the border' will have developed into a major tongue. But at many other times and places contact will have atrophied and the linguistic separation between communities, even neighbouring, will

have deepened. Otherwise it becomes exceedingly difficult to account for the proliferation of mutually incomprehensible tongues over very short geographical distances. In brief: I am suggesting that the outwardly communicative, extrovert thrust of language is secondary and that it may in substantial measure have been a late socio-historical acquirement. The primary drive is inward and domestic.

Each tongue hoards the resources of consciousness, the world-pictures of the clan. Using a simile still deeply entrenched in the language-awareness of Chinese, a language builds a wall around the 'middle kingdom' of the group's identity. It is secret towards the outsider and inventive of its own world. Each language selects, combines and 'contradicts' certain elements from the total potential of perceptual data. This selection, in turn, perpetuates the differences in world images explored by Whorf. Language is 'a perpetual Orphic song' precisely because the hermetic and the creative aspects in it are dominant. There have been so many thousands of human tongues, there still are, because there have been, particularly in the archaic stage of social history, so many distinct groups intent on keeping from one another the inherited, singular springs of their identity, and engaged in creating their own semantic worlds, their 'alternities'. Nietzsche came very close to unravelling the problem in a somewhat cryptic remark which occurs in his early, little-known paper 'Uber Wahrheit und Luge im aussermoralischen Sinne': "A comparison between different languages shows that the point about words is never their truth or adequacy: for otherwise there would not be so many languages." Or to put it simply: there is a direct, crucial correlation between the 'un-truthful' and fictive genius of human speech on the one hand and the great multiplicity of languages on the other.

from *After Babel*

Leszek Kolakowski

The problem of the relationship between faith and reason has also taken on a modern form. We meet it whenever we try to find out how much experience and rational thinking can help solve conflicting cognitive situations and what role unprovable factors play in our image of the world. Disputes about the unprovable assumptions of the empirical sciences and about the existence of preferential criteria for contradictory sets of experience have inherited much from the theological tradition. If certain facts cannot be reconciled with a previously accepted body of coherent general assumptions that explain our past experience, to what degree may we ignore these facts or interpret them so they harmonize, though sometimes factitiously, with the system? These are the daily troubles of scientific thinking, akin to the ones that arose when revelation constituted the skeleton around which all our knowledge was organized in a compact "system." At the bottom of these disputes we observe the antagonism of the same two tendencies that expressed themselves in nearly all our earlier questions. On the one hand are the integrationist and monistic tendencies whose hope is, strictly speaking, to embrace the universe in a single formula, or at least to discover a single main principle to explain all reality. On the other is the pluralistic bent, not overworried about coherent knowledge, not ambitious to construct a forest out of single trees, but instead ready to accept each particular fact as an absolute even though, on confrontation, some facts contradict others. It was William James who, in radical formulas, took the antimonistic position in regard to knowledge. If the facts are mutually contradictory, we may accept each of them separately—without getting panicky because we cannot find a general principle or law to encompass them all without friction—for we have no reason to suppose that some inflexible elementary law governs every cranny of the universe and every one of its occurrences. We may admit that the way things happen varies, and the the attempt to collect this variety into a unity is usually gratuitous and artificial. Let every fact be its own explanation and let general knowledge become an elastic reaction to each separate situation. If in a series of experiences the world crumbles before our eyes like a heterogeneous agglomeration of haphazardly accumulated pieces, all we can conclude is that the world is precisely what it seems—chaotic, inconsistent, full of accidents, more like a rubbish heap than a library where every item has its defined place in a catalogued and inventoried whole.

from "The Priest and the Jester"
in *Toward A Marxist Humanism*

Johan Huizinga

Here, then, we have the first main characteristic of play: that it is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. Every child knows perfectly well that he is "only pretending", or that it was "only for fun". How deep-seated this awareness is in the child's soul is strikingly illustrated by the following story, told to me by the father of the boy in question. He found his four-year-old son sitting at the front of a row of chairs, playing "trains". As he hugged him the boy said: "Don't kiss the engine, Daddy, or the carriages won't think it's real". This "only pretending" quality of play betrays a consciousness of the inferiority of play compared with "seriousness", a feeling that seems to be something as primary as play itself. Nevertheless, as we have already pointed out, the consciousness of play being "only a pretend" does not by any means prevent it from proceeding with the utmost seriousness, with an absorption, a devotion that passes into rapture and, temporarily at least, completely abolishes that troublesome "only" feeling. Any game can at any time wholly run away with the players. The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid. The inferiority of play is continually being offset by the corresponding superiority of its seriousness. Play turns to seriousness and seriousness to play. Play may rise to heights of beauty and sublimity that leave seriousness far beneath. Tricky questions such as these will come up for discussion when we start examining the relationship between play and ritual.

from *Homo Ludens*

Philip Rieff

The older roles, of leader and teacher, can only be combined again—against that of therapist—in a culture of truth, where, by repetition, inderdicts continue to acquire the freshness of deep down attachments. Slowly prepared, as slowly accepted, only then can truths become forms of resistance to the assaults of experience and also to our own intellects, rightly limiting the emancipative sharpness of our own observations. Where the interdicts are alive, there teachers must tremble at the very thought of passing themselves off as leaders—and leaders, if they have a proper inner distance from their political selves, know how little they

have to teach. To fight is not to teach. Emancipation is not truth, which is more complex than any emancipative symbolic, if it is to recruit followers, can afford to be. War-prophets are nearer the leader than the teacher-type. No philosopher would make a good king. An ideal leader, like a good teacher, his distances preserved, would never depend upon the recognition of his followers (what we, in America, referring to reality as the use of cosmetics in front of mirrors, call his 'image'). But, in a theatrical culture, therapeutic role-playing becomes the major form of existence; reality becomes some temporarily preferred style, a pose the more preposterous the more likely to be adopted. Historical reality becomes a theatre of transgressions. That is what the existentialists mean, without knowing it, when they declare all decisive action 'absurd'; thus they spread their apologetic, in the spirit of terrible Tertullian, for the enactment of whatever is morally endangering.

from *Fellow Teachers*

Lionel Trilling

Hannah Arendt, in her book *On Revolution*, gives a subtle and impassioned account of the moral disposition of Robespierre, laying particular emphasis upon the theatrical character which he shared with all the men who, as she puts it, "enacted the Revolution". Their rhetoric was consciously that of the theatre, to which their metaphors made specific reference. It is of course the tragic or heroic theatre that Dr. Arendt refers to, yet when she says that the men of the Revolution conceived it to be their historic mission "to tear the mask of hypocrisy off the face of French society", it is a scene from comedy that springs to mind. The revolutionary preoccupation with the hypocrisy of the old French society resulted in an obsessive concern with the possible—the all too probable—hypocrisy of the individual, even of one's own self. The Revolution brought to its highest intensity the idea of the public, and established, Dr. Arendt suggests, an ultimate antagonism between the unshadowed manifestness of the public life and the troubled ambiguity of the personal life, the darkness of man's unknowable heart. What was private and unknown might be presumed to be subversive of the public good. From this presumption grew the preoccupation with sincerity, with the necessity of expressing and guaranteeing it to the public—sincerity required a rhetoric of avowal, the demonstration of

single-minded innocence through attitude and posture, exactly the role-playing in which Rousseau had found the essence of personal, ultimately of social, corruption. "One cannot", Andre Gide has said, "both be sincere and seem so."

<div align="right">

from *Sincerity and Authenticity*

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Herbert Marcuse

Investigating the workers' complaints about working conditions and wages, the researchers hit upon the fact that most of these complaints were formulated in statements which contained "vague, indefinite terms," lacked the "objective reference" to "standards which are generally accepted", and had characteristics "essentially different from the properties generally associated with common facts." In other words, the complaints were formulated in such general statements as "the washrooms are unsanitary," "the job is dangerous," "rates are too low."

Guided by the principle of operational thinking, the researchers set out to translate or reformulate these statements in such a manner that their vague generality could be reduced to particular referents, terms designating the particular situation in which the complaint orginated and thus picturing "accurately the conditions in the company." The general form was dissolved into statements identifying the particular operations and conditions from which the complaint was derived, and the complaint was taken care of by changing these particular operations and conditions.

For example, the statement "the washrooms are unsanitary" was translated into "on such and such occasion I went into this washroom, and the washbowl had some dirt in it." Inquiries then ascertained that this was "largely due to the carelessness of some employees," a campaign against throwing papers, spitting on the floor, and similar practices was instituted, and an attendant was assigned to constant duty in the washrooms. "It was in this way that many of the complaints were re-interpreted and used to effect improvements."

Another example: a worker B makes the general statement that the piece rates on his job are too low. The interview reveals that "his wife is in the hospital and that he is worried about the doctor's bills he has incurred. In this case the latent content of the complaint consists of the fact that B's present earnings, due to his wife's illness, are insufficient to meet his current financial obligations."

Such translation changes significantly the meaning of the actual proposition. The untranslated statement formulates a general condition

in its generality ("wages are too low"). It goes beyond the particular condition in the particular factory and beyond the worker's particular situation. In this generality, and only in this generality, the statement expresses a sweeping indictment which takes the particular case as a manifestation of a universal state of affairs, and insinuates that the latter might not be changed by the improvement of the former.

Thus the untranslated statement established a concrete relation between the particular case and the whole of which it is a case—and this whole includes the conditions outside the respective job, outside the respective plant, outside the respective personal situation. This whole is eliminated in the translation, and it is this operation which makes the cure possible. The worker may not be aware of it, and for him his complaint may indeed have that particular and personal meaning which the translation brings out as its "latent content." But then the language he uses asserts its objective validity against his consciousness—it expresses conditions that *are*, although they are not "for him." The concreteness of the particular case which the translation achieves is the result of a series of abstractions from its *real* concreteness, which is in the universal character of the case.

The translation relates the general statement to the personal experience of the worker who makes it, but stops at the point where the individual worker would experience himself as "the worker," and where his job would appear as "the job" of the working class. Is it necessary to point out that, in his translations, the operational researcher merely follows the process of reality, and probably even the worker's own translations? The arrested experience is not his doing, and his function is not to think in terms of a critical theory but to train supervisors "in more human and effective methods of dealing with their workers" (only the term "human" seems non-operational and wanting of analysis).

But as this managerial mode of thought and research spreads into other dimensions of the intellectual effort, the services which it renders become increasingly inseparable from its scientific validity. In this context, functionalization has a truly therapeutic effect. Once the personal discontent is isolated from the general unhappiness, once the universal concepts which militate against functionalization are dissolved into particular referents, the case becomes a treatable and tractable incident.

To be sure, the case remains incident of a universal—no mode of thought can dispense with universals—but of a genus very different from that meant in the untranslated statement. The worker B, once his medical bills have been taken care of, will recognize that, generally

speaking, wages are *not* too low, and that they were a hardship only in his individual situation (which may be similar to other individual situations). His case has been subsumed under another genus—that of personal hardship cases. He is no longer a "worker" or "employee" (member of a class), but the worker or employee B in the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company.

<div style="text-align: right">from One-Dimensional Man</div>

Roland Barthes

I

THE READERLY: "EVERYTHING HOLDS TOGETHER"

In other words, the discourse scrupulously keeps within a circle of *solidarities*, and this circle, in which "everything holds together," is that of the readerly. As we might expect, the readerly is controlled by the principle of non-contradiction, but by multiplying solidarities, by stressing at every opportunity the *compatible* nature of circumstances, by attaching narrated events together with a kind of logical "paste," the discourse carries this principle to the point of obsession; it assumes the careful and suspicious mien of an individual afraid of being caught in some flagrant contradiction; it is always on the lookout and always, just in case, preparing its defense against the enemy that may force it to acknowledge the scandal of some illogicality, some disturbance of "common sense." The solidarity of notations thus appears to be a kind of defensive weapon, it says in its way that meaning is a force, that it is devised within an economy of forces.

II

DELAY

Truth is brushed past, avoided, lost. This accident is a structural one. In fact, the hermeneutic code has a function, the one we (with Jakobson) attribute to the poetic code: just as rhyme (notably) structures the poem according to the expectation and desire for recurrence, so the hermeneutic terms structure the enigma according to the expectation and desire for its solution. The dynamics of the text (since it implies a truth to be deciphered) is thus paradoxical: it is a static dynamics: the problem is to *maintain* the enigma in the initial void of its answer;

whereas the sentences quicken the story's "unfolding" and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up *delays* (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse; its structure is essentially reactive, since it opposes the ineluctable advance of language with an organized set of stoppages: between question and answer there is a wholly dilatory area whose emblem might be named "reticence," the rhetorical figure which interrupts the sentence, suspends it, turns it aside (Virgil's *Quos ego . . .*). Whence, in the hermeneutic code, in comparison to these extreme terms (question and answer), the abundance of dilatory morphemes: the *snare* (a kind of deliberate evasion of the truth), the *equivocation* (a mixture of truth and snare which frequently, while focusing on the enigma, helps to thicken it), the *partial answer* (which only exacerbates the expectation of the truth), the *suspended answer* (an aphasic stoppage of the disclosure), and *jamming* (acknowledgement of insolubility). The variety of these terms (their inventive range) attests to the considerable labor the discourse must accomplish if it hopes to *arrest* the enigma, to keep it open. Expectation thus becomes the basic condition for truth: truth, these narratives tell us, is what is *at the end* of expectation. This design brings narrative very close to the rite of initiation (a long path marked with pitfalls, obscurities, stops, suddenly comes out into the light); it implies a return to order, for expectation is a disorder: disorder is supplementary, it is what is forever added on without solving anything, without finishing anything; order is complementary, it completes, fills up, saturates, and dismisses everything that risks adding on: truth is what completes, what closes. In short, based on the articulation of question and answer, the hermeneutic narrative is constructed according to our image of the sentence: an organism probably infinite in its expansions, but reducible to a diadic unity of subject and predicate. To narrate (in the classic fashion) is to raise the question as if it were a subject which one delays predicating.

from *S/Z*

Witold Gombrowicz

I. What a bore is the everlasting question: What did you mean by *Ferdydurke*? Come, come, be more sensuous, less cerebral, start dancing with the book instead of asking for meanings. Why take so much interest in the skeleton if it's got a body? See rather whether it is capable of pleasing and is not devoid of grace and passion. . . .

II. . . . at worst the book will pass unnoticed, but friends and acquaintances when they meet me will certainly feel under an obligation to say to me the sort of thing that is always said when an author publishes a book. I should like to ask them to do nothing of the sort. No, let them say nothing, because, as a result of all sorts of falsifications, the social situation of the so-called 'artist' in our times has become so pretentious that whatever can be said in such circumstances sounds false, and the more sincerity and simplicity you put into your 'I enjoyed it enormously' or 'I like it very much indeed', the more shameful it is for him and you. I therefore beg you to keep silent. Keep silent in hope of a better future. For the time being—if you wish to let me know that the book pleased you—when you see me simply touch your right ear. If you touch your left ear, I shall know that you didn't like it, and if you touch your nose it will mean that you are not sure . . . thus we shall avoid uncomfortable and even ridiculous situations and understand each other in silence. My greetings to all.

from the Preface to *Pornografia*