

NOTES ON LANGUAGE

Words come before seeing. Though a child 'sees' (privately) before talking, the child doesn't 'see' (publicly) until having heard the language of the tribe.

Language, providing a sentence-structure, imposes a plot on what the child has been seeing all along anyway. Languages that emphasize plot -- languages based on habits of subject-verb-object -- push an orientation toward epic poetry (myth-making) and the novel (the making of a bourgeois society). (Lyric poetry happens before language; lyric poetry is 'seeing' without sentence-structure.)

A mystic sees things; an insane person hears things. The first state passes language by, leaves language aside; the second state is caught up in too much language. Normality is the attempt to balance person and language; this balance is achieved in the form of written language; once a page of language is held up in front of a person, where it can be dealt with at arm's length, it is no longer inside a person, where it can grow like a cancer.

The urge to speak (sounds) is the urge to hear one's own voice as an 'other,' the urge to throw one's voice (the urge to put one's voice, and one's self, out into the world). The urge to speak (words) is the urge to join a community.

Language is the illusion of community. The dictionary stores a common language, and a system of conventions; in so doing, the dictionary affirms the dominant language, and the power-source of conventions. But there's no way of checking how each person uses that language; each participant in a conversation, speaking the same word, might all the while be thinking any one of a number of meanings for that word. Language provides a camouflage of 'public': using language as a cover, you can all the while be going your own way (the way of your own particular region, your own particular history).

Language is either subjunctive or imperative. No other modes need apply. Language causes either a thing to be or a person to do.

Language is the beginning of abstraction, which culminates in pornography -- the categorization not of things and ideas but of persons, the turning of 'persons' into 'bodies.' Language is the prototype of pornography: it makes the private public -- it puts the ungraspable in front of the eye and into the hand -- it brings what would have been neutral into the realm of metaphor and judgment.

Talking expresses the self; writing makes a thing outside of the self. If orality is dance and music, then writing is architecture.

## SPEAKING

Brecht's 'alienation effect' (the actor/as if reading lines) is a precursor of Venturi's 'decorated shed' (the house as a building with a sign in front of it). Each method guards against the confusion of language with the carrier of language. If the terms are confused -- if actor is inseparable from role, if house is inseparable from facade -- then the observer (the audience in the theater, the passer-by on the street) is not allowed to stay outside, and remain an analyzer. The audience is pulled to come inside the actor's mind (to become involved in the autobiography of an other), the passer-by is pulled to come inside the house (to become involved in his/her own need or desire for shelter). 'Public' is withdrawn into 'private'; language-as-politics is reduced to language-as-psychology.

ACE Oral language numbs. Written language demands. The listener dreams; the reader struggles.

Self-embedded construction (parenthetical phrases, subordinate clauses, inserted into the middle of a sentence) confines language to itself; the language builds from within. Additive construction (phrases and clauses strung on at the end of a sentence) sends language outside: the sentence-structure is not pre-determined, the string of addenda keeps changing the sentence-structure. But the line drawn by additive construction can never be drawn all the way, it can never make it out into the world; the covers of the book close the line down. Self-embedded construction, on the other hand, doesn't need the covers of a book; the construction itself provides closure, and functions as a book. Self-embedded construction, staying inside itself and not spilling out into the world, functions as a model of the world, or as a thing-in-itself, with rules analagous to those of the world.

Language on a page is small language; language on a billboard is large language. Small language is convoluted and over-structured, in order to draw a reader inside it. Large language is basic and non-structured; the reader is not really a reader but only a passer-by, a walker or a driver, who has other things on his/her mind. Large language pares 'reading' down to 'seeing'; large language is not so much language as it is a picture composed of the elements of language.

Large language becomes a thing, but not necessarily the thing it began talking about. Thingness makes language solid but, in so doing, destroys language -- which, in order to work 'normally,' has to remain transparent so that it leaves the world as it is. When language becomes solid, it prevents normal flow, from person to language to world. Large language can't draw a person in, like small language; large language forms a block that throws the viewer back, leaves the viewer out. Small language miniaturizes a reader, as he/she winds through words on a page. Large language exists face-to-face with a viewer, on the viewer's own level. Large language is as large as a wall; it contains a person, like furniture and environment.

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