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STYLE IN PHILOSOPHY: PART I*

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I attempt to restore the philosophical significance of that nonformalizable, noniterable, "singular" element of natural language that I call "style." I begin by critically addressing the exclusion of such instances of natural language by both semantics-oriented logical analysis and a restricted variation of structuralist linguistics. Despite the obvious advantages – with regard to style – of "pragmatic" approaches to language, such pragmatism merely returns to rule-determination in the guise of "normativity." Although style by definition resists any kind of rule-determination – whether posed in terms of semantics or intersubjective regulations of speech-acts – there can be no consideration of language that ignores the persistence of style in natural language. In terms of cognition, any discursive agent understands *more* than allowed by either semantics or speech-act theory. I ascribe this element of excessive signification to the role of style. My principal thesis is twofold: (1) a hermeneutic approach (exemplified by Schleiermacher) to literature should reveal the heuristically decisive role played by style in philosophy; and, more radically still, (2) style, in fact, may be crucially determinative of philosophical discourse in general. I suggest that a closer scrutiny of the lesser-known works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, conventionally regarded as having dreamt of a "philosophy without style," may consolidate the restoration of style's philosophical import.

Key words: style, hermeneutics, Ferdinand de Saussure, semantics, structuralist linguistics, speech-act theory, Donald Davidson.

Preface

The following three essays, together entitled "Style in Philosophy," were originally delivered as lectures, in early October of 1990, for the Christian Gauss seminars in criticism at Princeton University. In the spirit of this institution, they are intended as *essais* in the original sense: *attempts* that have transcended the face of conception without, however, daring the claim of already fully fleshed *oeuvres*. "The aim of the Seminars is to serve as a forum

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and testing ground for ideas already clearly defined, but not yet having received their definitive formulation."

Thus, some readers might find too broad (as synonymous with language use) the concept of style that I am proposing. For others, my proposal may appear too narrow, since it only takes into consideration individual style – and that, merely in *status nascendi*. For some, I will go too far in my presentation of a "hermeneutic anarchism," which holds that the sense of expressions is indeterminable and which subsumes, even pushes in the direction of, what is allegedly to be the purely truth-related prose of philosophy under *literature*. For others still, my insistence on the obligatory force of arguments might seem inconsistent or even "scientistic." However, even though I am opposed to the view that the difference between literature and philosophy is strictly a generic one, I am not categorically denying *any* difference between them. Among other things, I am, however, opposed to the privilege accorded philosophical discourse as somehow more compelling for truth – in contrast to poetic language, which is then conceived as free from truth and correctness. I am convinced that what is valid for language as a whole cannot be invalidated for the language of philosophy. The language of philosophy belongs to traditions whose content can never be dissolved into transparent insight, and is influenced by a style in which ultimately a noninterchangeable individual manner of accessing the world demands a hearing. All understanding is based on this individual manner. Therefore, one does not get any closer to philosophy by extinguishing style; instead, by dispensing with style, one will be left without access to any understanding at all.

I. Toward a Philosophy of Style

I would like to begin by posing three questions. First, how can individual style, what is not formally iterable (of a speech-act or a text, whether literary or not) become the topic of philosophical inquiry – since, after all, philosophy is concerned only with truth and the general? Second, what would it mean for philosophy that it too bears a certain personal signature – that is to say, a certain style – and even occasionally makes use of literary devices? Finally, how might a philosophy of style become self-reflexive; in other words, can a philosophy of style become a hermeneutic of its own stylistic features? Only when the philosophy of style provides us with an illustration *in flagranti*, by revealing its own stylistic features, could it convince us of its powers.

All three of these questions require a preliminary consensus on at least a few initial points. Undoubtedly, the most pressing of these preliminary points is the problem of determining what might be the essence of style. Yet we also seek to determine in what manner, and for what reasons, not only philology and rhetoric, but philosophy as well, might be called upon to take a stance with regard to style. Moreover, of all the disciplines, why is it that philosophy has such difficulty with the question of style? That is to say, why does philosophy feel so threatened by this question? Recently, an old issue has been

revived and debated with great vigilance, an issue now centered around the question of whether the generic difference between philosophy and literature may be legitimately neutralized.[1] Based on the immanent logic of the history of philosophy, are there in fact reasons for the impossibility of a sharp distinction between these two disciplines? Finally, with reference to the great philosophical texts of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, it remains to be examined whether and how, and due to what motives, the generic distinctions between philosophical argumentation and stylistic *écriture* have been effectively suspended. I speak of neither Nietzsche nor Heidegger, of neither Adorno nor Derrida. Instead, no other figure appears to exemplify the aestheticization of theory more strikingly than Ludwig Wittgenstein. Frequently reputed to be the founding father of the analytical philosophy of language, Wittgenstein is said to have dreamt of an "écriture sans style."[2] In fact, not even while he was a logical positivist entertaining the notion of a Fregean *Begriffsschrift* did Wittgenstein have such a dream. In contrast to Wittgenstein, we find a thinker proposing a philosophy devoid of any style, a thinker whom Habermas for one would most likely consider a neutralizer of the categorical difference between philosophy and literature, a thinker whose thought would appear centered on his style. I am speaking of Jean-Paul Sartre, who in a discussion with Pierre Verstraeten defends the following point of view: "It is evident that in philosophy we do not need style. One must even avoid it. If I let myself go and give my philosophical text a literary twist, then I always have the impression of wanting to mystify my readers a bit: I abuse their trust."[3] In this interview, Sartre appears to immediately equate style with

[1] In his "Excursus on Leveling of the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature," Jürgen Habermas reproaches Derrida on precisely this issue. J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 185ff. Habermas has since returned to this issue (cf. "Philosophy and Science as Literature?" in *Post-metaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. W. M. Hohengarten [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992]). Habermas has even ventured into the field of textual interpretation with an analysis of Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, trans. W. Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981). In the final essay of his *Studien zum Epochenwandel der ästhetischen Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), Hans Robert Jauß has responded critically to Habermas's interpretation.

[2] Cf. R. Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. R. Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974), 5.

[3] J.-P. Sartre and P. Verstraeten, "L'écrivain et sa langue," *Situations* IX (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 40ff. The translation is mine. The citation then proceeds: "Once I wrote this sentence, which I maintain because it has a certain literary aspect: 'Man is a useless passion,' an abuse of trust. I have said this with some strictly philosophical words" (56). Also, compare: "the meaning of philosophy, as I understand it . . . is to revive as much as possible, by conceptual approximation, the level of the concrete universal which we have placed in the prose" (67). Further: "the necessity of philosophy might be called the steadfastness of consciousness, that moment when one could say that a man has a full consciousness of that which he says and of that which he feels as he says, 'I have been where I have been, I have gone where I have gone, and never further.' Such was not possessed by Rousseau. If he could, at that precise moment, retain the concrete density of real existence as expressed in literary prose in a mere conceptual knowledge, such would be the moment when he would have a relation to the other and to himself, not only definitively, but beyond all other concerns. That is to say, philosophy must always destroy itself, and

that dark profusion of sense proper to literary texts (in the romantic tradition, this means the identification of style with poetry, as opposed to prose). Hence, Sartre is following a linguistic convention particular to the French language, which is acquainted with style only as a concern of the fine arts. The word "style" originally meant a pointed stick used by the Romans for writing. It then became a substitute (metonymy) for every individual fashion of writing. Nonliterary speech-acts, therefore, also have style. Roughly speaking, "style" simply consists of the individual manner in which the speaker or writer selects, then uniquely combines, words from an internalized lexicon. Aesthetic standards find their expression through this process of word selection and combination. Traditionally, however, especially in rhetoric since Quintilian, style has been more loosely defined as that manner in which an author or speaker communicates his ideas.[4]

There is consensus on at least one point; namely, that style (in its literal meaning) is a feature of language. Thus, based on this observation, one should expect that philosophy, especially after the so-called "linguistic turn," would have little trouble providing a more satisfactory account of this feature. One proposal, which philosophy could hit upon, might be to unhesitatingly assign style to the domain of syntax, since syntax administers the rules that determine the combination of words from differing semantic classes, as well as their organization in parts of a sentence. Structural rules are very general, and many linguists (in particular, structuralists and Chomskyists) consider these rules as virtually immutable. These rules are resistant to change because they do not constitute the *causas per quas*, but only the *conditiones sine quibus non* of rule-abiding word combination. As the romantic hermeneuticist Schleiermacher contends, the forms of these rules "are not positive explanations [of understanding] but merely negative ones, because what contradicts them [the rules] can in no way be understood."[5] In contrast, style is the individual manner in which the author linguistically expresses his unique view of the world. The individual manner does not contradict the rules of syntax nor, conversely, is it derived from these rules. Thus, the uniqueness of style "cannot be constructed a priori (namely, from the a priori of an internalized syntactical competence)." Indeed, "grammatically one cannot summarize

equally, always be born again. Philosophy is thought insofar as thought is always already the dead moment of praxis; since, as that which has been produced, praxis always finds itself constituted" (69).

[4] Cf. F. Schleiermacher, "Über den Stil," *Jugendschriften, 1787–1796*, ed. G. Meckenstock (Berlin, 1984), 365: KGA I/1.

[5] F. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, ed. M. Frank (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 171f. All subsequent references to Schleiermacher's work, hereafter referred to as *HuK*, are to Frank's German edition. Recently, however, there has appeared an English translation: F. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism, and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Despite the importance of the translation to Schleiermacher scholarship in the English-speaking world, Bowie's edition is significantly different from Frank's. We have therefore decided to adhere to Frank's edition. *Ed.*

individuality in a general concept. . . . No style allows for its conceptualization" (ibid., 172).

Evidently, this verdict concerns more than mere syntax. Semantics, the meaning of combined linguistic concepts, is also affected. Concepts are terms of classification. They provide the rules governing the subsumption of "individuals." However, concepts themselves are not "individuals." Functioning as rules, concepts are concerned with uniformity. By virtue of these concepts, a potentially infinite number of concrete utterances – Saussure's *paroles* – may be reduced to a finite set of generative strategies: the grammar of a national language. This state of affairs has been more precisely formulated by logicians following Humboldt, through the distinction between "type" and "token." The "token" is the sign uttered in a concrete situation. It is an episode of the physical flow of speech. Due partially to the irreversability of time, and the unpredictability of the changing contexts of speech, the token can never recur identically. In order to scientifically master the token, it must be idealized until it has developed a "general language type" (as Humboldt calls it) resistant to iteration. Hence, uniform iterability is a necessary prerequisite for a scientific mastery of the empirical object, that is, "language." Every linguistic, or even more generally, every rule-governed, element must be uniformly iterable. Otherwise, the rules of the basic system of representation would find no specification or, in other words, would find no application to *new* occurrences of the phenomena specified by these rules. Humboldt speaks of a capacity to generate an infinite number of sentences by means of a finite set of rules. Instead of iterability, one also speaks of the recursivity of semantic rules. As structural linguistics (as well as Chomsky's universal grammar) has stressed, recursivity is one of the main characteristics of every (even nonlinguistic) system of signs.

Besides the areas of syntax and semantics, the field of pragmatics is, of course, also affected. Pragmatics is only superficially more amenable to concrete situations and individuality than its linguistic kin. Speech-acts are no less typified, or idealized, than are the rules for syntagmatic combination or the rules for the use of words. The actions codified by speech-acts are not noniterable or individual intentions; instead, they are "forms of intentionality," or intentional *types* – for example, *the* promise, *the* declaration of love, or *the* christening of ships. Otherwise, these actions could not at all be classified into what Searle calls "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts."[6] In this way, the code model does indeed overlap with the theory of linguistic action. If so, then for a pragmatist to "understand an intention" never means to understand an individual. Instead, it means to possess mastery of a convention, according to which the individual enciphers his intention. Conventions are essentially rule governed and, hence, as Searle puts it, iterable with semantically identical meaning.[7] (There is no question here of the wolves of undecidability: the

[6] John Searle, "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts," ed. K. Gunderson, *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 7 (1975).

[7] J. Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," *Glyph* 1 (1977): 207.

pragmatist shepherds have the conventions all under control, as Derrida once poignantly put it.)[8]

Therefore, if one were to analyze style in the pragmatist manner, the style would be little more than the application of a generally (or, at the very least, regionally) valid rule or, as many others have called it, "a function of pragmatic variables."[9] Nor would it be a solution to pass style off as a "multiple codification," as a rendezvous of several forms of intention. For what is multifariously or heterogeneously [*überzwerch*] codified would, nevertheless, remain codified. Rather, what we are looking for is an explanation of the individual and uncodified element.

One of the implications of the code model is the *idea of subsumption*. As particulars, linguistic events are fully grasped by the rules which form(ulate) them. It would be nonsense to imagine that particular linguistic occurrences could have repercussions on the underlying concept of the representational system. A linguistic type is what it is only in complete subjugation to the rule-concept that defines it. Despite the fact that the linguistic type may reproduce the rule-concept ad infinitum, that linguistic type could never modify it. Between rule and type, there is a relation of logical dependence or homogeneity. The type is "deduced" from the rule: the relation of both is analytical. For this very reason, a correctly used linguistic sign (or a correctly expressed intention) contains nothing that has not already been previously codified in the rules (or in the taxonomy of the forms of intentionality). The deduction is a completely one-sided relation, in which reciprocity (mutual interaction) is excluded.

Structuralist literary criticism, especially in the 1960s, subjected itself to the concept of science as proclaimed by linguistics. However, in the wake of Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, and Roland Barthes, it deliberated the following transformation: linguistic structures, as they had been described by Saussure, are arrangements of so-called "small units," which thus remain on this side of the sentence-boundary. In contrast, texts or discourses are arrangements of units that lie beyond the sentence-boundary. They are, thus, sequences of sentences or utterances. While keeping this distinction in mind, one can still describe texts in analogy with structures – that is to say, in analogy with the procedures of systematic linguistics. According to this procedure, to understand a discourse or a text ("text" is derived from the Latin *textere* or *textum*) would mean to reveal the principles of construction at work in the concrete interweaving of not only signs but also of its utterances, motives, symbols, citations, and intertextual references.

As for style? We said that style defies conceptualization and resists subsumption under rules. Rules are generalities, and hence, only what is

[8] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*., trans. S. Weber (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 75: "it is sufficient merely to introduce, into the manger of speech acts, a few wolves of the type 'indecidability' . . . for the shepherd to lose track of his flock."

[9] Cf. Abrahams and Braunmüller, "Stil, Metapher, und Pragmatik," *Lingua* 28 (1971): 1–47.

general in nature can be known or recognized by such rules. In order to more sharply accentuate this point, I distinguish radically between singularity or individuality on the one hand and particularity on the other. I call *individuality* that which exists without an inner double, is beyond comparison, and cannot identically recur. In short, the individual is what is absolutely singular and, therefore, can in no way be subsumed under a recursively defined rule. This agrees with the definition given by Kant in a late *Reflexion* (no. 3544 [AA XVII, 44]): "Unique is [that], more of which do not belong to the same kind."[10] In contrast, the *particular* is the specification of a general (of a rule). It can be effortlessly attained by means of deduction. The particular relates to the general as case does to the rule. A case could never modify a rule. It can merely instantiate, or fail to instantiate, a rule. Whereas there emerges an unbreachable type-gap between the universal and the individual (e.g., between grammar and style), there is a smooth or continual transition between rule and specification. This abyss between the general and the individual in the realm of speech has been called, by the great stylist Léo Spitzer, "l'écart stylistique," the "stylistic gap."

By definition, therefore, the individual is what, by virtue of its radical singularity, frustrates idealization to a linguistic type, since it is "that more of which do not belong to the same kind." This is so because types can be iterated without the loss of meaning – in the context of assertions, one would say, *salva veritate.* But it is precisely this criterion which is inapplicable to style; insofar as through style an application irreducible to rules is performed or, in other words, insofar as in style there is an application and transgression – of the rules – that cannot be deduced from these very rules, this criterion may not be applied to style. How could something be deduced or explained by rules when it contests or modifies the very scope of validity claimed by these rules? Moreover, if what it controls could not equally affect the same sign on at least two different instances, a rule could not have a field of application. A comparison must be possible, and this comparison must guarantee that the iteration of the case would not challenge the rule. But "the comparison never comes to true individuality" (*HuK*, 177), since, as we have already stated, the individual is unduplicated, unique, incomparable, and noniterable. The individual is nongeneral and nongeneric; indeed, the individual represents exactly that border of all idealization which cannot be transcended.

Thus, by "style," we mean strictly *individual* style, and only *in statu nascendi*. Once style has become an identifiable mannerism, its rules then can certainly be specified. Thereupon, style enters into proximity to a specific type of linguistic usage that is conventionally shared by several participants of the language. Accordingly, one may then speak of the style of some group, a social stratum, or of some class; in broader terms, one may also speak of "gothic" style or the stylistic features of the Renaissance. Such thematic treatment of

[10] This late "Reflexion" translates literally paragraph 77 in Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*: "Quicquid est, quod multa non sunt, est UNICUM (unum exclusive tale)."

style differentiates between several levels of style: the "simple," the "developed," and the "high" or refined style, the "poetic" style, and so on. (For instance, in *Meistersinger*, the boastful apprentice David delivers to the desperate Walther von Stolzing a confusing litany of such diverse "manners.") Alongside this, there are innumerable varieties of the style-type: the situation style, the function style, the textsort style, and so on.[11] In all such instances, style is not something individual, but something shared in common by several speakers. It is understood as a shareable and shared manner of linguistic usage, the practice of art, or of word schematization. Everything which is shareable in this sense can become the object of scientific (for example, text-linguistic) description and categorization. Science sets aside the individual elements and grasps the manifold under a single heading – namely, its concept.

In contrast, as originarily manifest, individual style is free of any conceptual ingredients. It is literally indivisible, irreproducible – and, strictly speaking, incommunicable. One must not, however, think of this individual style in terms of the classical atomistic model – that is, as the indivisibility of an infinitesimally minute substance, the *atonomon eidoi* of the Greeks, or the "*species infima*" of Leibniz. The individual is not a *genoi*, nor a genre, nor a species – regardless of how small it may be. *Genera* are conceptual entities, even if they – like Hegel's elementary concept "Being" – entertain relations "only" to themselves. (Since the development by Newton and Leibniz of the infinitesimal calculus, science has dealt principally with such dimensions; and Hegel's *Science of Logic* also copes with the notion "Being" in an immanently conceptual fashion.) Therefore, the individual is not an abstract or generic entity; rather, it is a "being" which, in its literal sense, exists singularly. It is neither "*eidos*," "*species*," nor a concept; it is unique and incomparable. Thus, the individual eludes the criterion of iterability and the demand for semantically identical meaning. What is crucial is this: to record an individual utterance and re-produce (or re-create) it in the act of reading does *not* mean to articulate, once again and with semantically identical meaning, the same chain of linguistic elements. Instead, reading undertakes a different articulation of the same chain of linguistic elements. As noted by August Boeckh, one of the great forgotten philological methodologists of the first half of the nineteenth century: "one can never produce the same thing twice."[12] Robert Musil is defending the same view when he speaks of "the individual something absolutely unique," that which is "unfixable . . . , even anarchical," what "permits no iteration." As soon as one talks about it, it occurs "in consciousness that a word cannot be stated twice without altering its meaning."[13]

Wilhelm von Humboldt had identified a century earlier what is responsible

[11] W. Sanders, *Linguistische Stiltheorie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & R., 1973), 93ff.

[12] A. Boeckh, *Enzykolpädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften*, ed. E. Bratuschek (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1966), 126.

[13] R. Musil, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. A. Frisé (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1978), 8:1404, 1151; 4: 1212. The translation is mine.

for this singular effect: in every instance of linguistic communication, even in special cases of the monologue or communication by writing, two modes of conceptualization collide with one another. During such a collision, only the conventional parts would overlap; on the other hand, "the more *individual*" parts would "s*tand out*."[14] A total coincidence of these two parts "in one indivisible point" is not possible. This impossibility can be attributed to the fact that each sign- or text-mediated communication produces a historically unstable fusion of the general with an individual *view* of the general – a view that cannot, however, itself be generalized: "Nobody means by a word precisely and exactly what his neighbor does, and the difference, be it ever so small, vibrates, like a ripple in water, throughout the entire language. Thus all understanding is always at the same time a non-understanding, all concurrence in thought and feeling at the same time a divergence."[15]

Schleiermacher concludes from these circumstances "that non-understanding can never be completely dissolved" (*HuK*, 328). The process of communication could attain objectivity and complete intersubjective transparency, if and only if one could somehow control the production of meaning from an Archimedian point beyond language, which implies a place outside our communication with one another. But we remain forever entangled in the occurrences of dialogue. And this entanglement implies that we can neither determine nor anticipate the way in which others deal with "our" meaning. As Sartre puts it: "Words live off the death of men, they come together through men; whenever I form a sentence its meaning escapes from me, is stolen from me; meanings are changed for everyone by each speaker and each day; the meanings of the very words in my mouth are changed by others."[16]

Due to this very reason, every individual articulation is not only re-productive (i.e., the iteration of a fixed convention), but is also creative in a systematically uncontrollable manner. It is inventive, even innovative. Individual style always alters the synthesis of signs that binds the material of expression with meaning. It always shifts the hitherto valid borders of normality. And even though I believe in being aware of these borders, meaning is something intersubjective, and I can control neither the usage nor the comprehension to which others subject my utterances. For this reason, a deliberation over the "true meaning" of an utterance has, in principle, only a hypothetical character. We find ourselves, as Schleiermacher says, in a continual state of experimentation as we attempt to judge whether or not the others construct that world, presupposed as common, in a fashion identical to our own (*HuK*, 460). Therefore, ultimately, every interpretation remains hypothetical. Sartre speaks of a "hypothèse compréhensive" that one must assert in order to nevertheless understand what is not yet disclosed to convention or, in other words, what is

[14] W. von Humboldt, *Sämtliche Schriften*, Academy edition, V:418.

[15] W. von Humboldt, *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and Its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, trans. P. Heath (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 63.

[16] J.-P. Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. A. S. Smith (London: NLB, 1976), 98.

radically new in the utterance. Needless to say, the "truth of this reconstruction cannot be proved; its likelihood is not measurable."[17]

That language, used as the generic concept for any form of communication, cannot be equated with its conventional nature is also a conviction held by Donald Davidson: "Convention does not help to explain what is basic to linguistic communication."[18] Indeed, he also says, "there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases."[19]

In an unpublished manuscript ("Epistemology Externalized," Berkeley, 1990), Davidson criticizes as false the "social externalism" thesis, which he identifies as the presupposition that a speaker's meaning in speech rigorously discloses itself through the social code ("an elite usage"). This thesis implies that a speaker is only understandable "in terms of what others would mean by the same words" (3ff.). Certainly, the meanings of words are not privately determined. Nevertheless, the imperatives that emanate from the social code, onto the processes of the individual speaker's constitution of meaning, are never binding. With each speech-act, every speaker may potentially alter the meaning not only for herself, but for all other speakers, since a code, after all, is nothing more than a temporarily inert sedimentation of an active and free "social interplay with other speakers." The code is, as already mentioned, only a *conditio sine qua non* of intelligibility and *not* its effective cause. The symbolist tradition (above all, Mallarmé), the later Heidegger's mysticism of "Being," and the closely related (neo-)structuralist as well as the fashionable postures of deconstruction want us to see things as though language itself "spoke." But this is naturally an absurd fetishism. Instead, linguistic codes must be seen as the product of conventions; and, as is the case with all conventions, they must be viewed as subject to continuous alterations evoked by their users.

Davidson's position has been characterized by Akeel Bilgrami[20] as one of conviction in the irrelevance of lexical norms for the formation and conception of meaning. Ordinary linguistic codes, conventions, and structure – what Bilgrami calls "norms with a low profile" – are thus cut off from those "with a much higher profile" – the logical rules he is prepared to exclude. Accordingly, it is not that we follow rules whose precise definition we just

[17] "We should . . . forge a comprehensive hypothesis. . . . The truth of this reconstruction cannot be proved; its likelihood is not measurable." J.-P. Sartre, *The Family Idiot*, trans. C. Cosman (Chicago, 1981), 1:45ff.

[18] D. Davidson, "Communication and Convention," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 280.

[19] D. Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," *Truth and Interpretation*, ed. E. Lepore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 446. Cf. Bjørn T. Ramberg's *Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

[20] A. Bilgrami, "Norms and Self-Knowledge" (unpublished manuscript, 1991).

cannot identify with Cartesian certainty (Kripke's rule-skepticism, à la Wittgenstein). Rather, the very idea that normativity (whether secured or indeterminable) would make a contribution at all to the explanation of how meaning is understood is itself abandoned. We can neither induce with certainty the rules of our language use from observation, nor can we feel a mysterious obligating force emanating from them. There are no expressions that require only one specific meaning in some particular context but, nevertheless, the understanding of such expressions is not impossible. In other words, it is not the internalization of (quasi-causal) obligation to some normalized cluster of expression-meaning-reference that leads me to an understanding of someone else's intentions. For instance, Bert uses the word "arthritis" to denote a muscle ailment. Rather than insist that Bert is incorrectly using the word "arthritis," since the "correct" usage of this word must instead denote an ailment of the joints and ligaments, we should conclude that Bert is simply using the word differently. In fact, Bert may use the word as he likes, since no particular term prescribed by a norm of social practice is available for Bert. This does not mean that in interpreting what Bert means in the latter manner I have become free from all considerations of consistency. However, it is not by "deciphering" a code that I reach an understanding of what he means; rather, I will set his proposition in relation to other convictions and attitudes that I have understood him as having, regardless of the fashion in which he has linguistically communicated them to me. Bilgrami advocates a radically pragmatic position of linguistic correctness or normativity in analogy to what Kant called a hypothetical imperative: "if you want to be understood easily, make an effort to talk like everybody else." In contrast to the concept of an intrinsic – and, therefore, an a priori meaning-expression algorithm, normalized by a linguistic code – this (hypothetical) imperative governs a completely extrinsic combination of meaning and sign:

> if I want to speak like I have in the past or like others do, I ought to use words in some ways and not others. The point of these extrinsic norms is that neither intentionally conforming to others' usage nor even intentionally sticking to the past ways of one's own usage, is a sign that meaning has an essential or primary aspect of correct and incorrect usage. The notion of correctness is *entirely* secondary to the desire and intention to communicate without causing strain, which underlies the notion of meaning.[21]

Thus, for Davidson, the understanding of an expression does not depend in any way on the regularity or the alleged norm-conformativity of its usage.[22]

[21] Ibid., 20ff.

[22] I do not intend to develop here how Davidson takes into consideration a "radical interpretation" of the semantics of expressions, which is not determined by the code, but works in virtue of a preliminary familiarity with truth (*Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*). Understanding, conceptualized in a holistic framework, has to sustain itself by "observable

Nor does understanding rely on the representational achievements of language[23] – that is to say, on the semiological reproduction of sense-data or on an object-relation that overtakes any preliminary acquaintance with truth. Neurath had already pointed out the absurdity that exists for a person who compares her convictions or words with the world as it is "in itself,"[24] especially when the expressed "facts" can only be defined at the level of sentential or propositional truth. Invoking Davidson, Rorty proposes to regard convictions as "tools for handling reality . . . rather than as representations of reality."[25] If one accepts the additional (nominalistic) premise that convictions are linguistic expressions, then one is compelled to give up the distinction between linguistic schemata and contents as well. The world coincides with its (linguistic) interpretation and changes contemporaneously with alterations in the interpretive system. Davidson expresses this as follows:

> One can locate individual objects, if the sentence happens to name or describe them, but even such location makes sense relative only to a frame of reference, and so presumably the frame of reference must be included in whatever it is to which a true sentence corresponds. . . . [Thus] if true sentences correspond to anything at all, it must be to the universe as a whole.[26]

Obviously, this view is still not satisfying because it assumes that all true

success." To understand a language, then, means to know what is the case in the world disclosed by that language. "One can conceive what is, for the skeptic epistemologists, a peculiar supposition of a preliminary knowledge about truth in active speaking, in analogy to the hermeneutic principle of originary truth-disclosure in every complete language. Language is not an instrumental system of signs whose object relation is up for discussion and would have to be secured by extra-linguistic sense-data. Language has originally no other function than to make a world accessible. We have to presuppose this achievement when we want to clarify the semantics of meaning and denotation." Rüdiger Bubner, "Wohin tendiert die analytische Philosophie?" *Philosophische Rundschau* 34 (1987): 278.

[23] "[Rorty] sees clearly that for me this [Tarski's work of providing a way of discussing the understanding of language] is related to the rejection of a representational picture of language and the idea that truth consists in the accurate mirroring of facts." D. Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 6 (June 1990): 281.

[24] O. Neurath, "Protokollsätze," *Erkenntnis* 3 (1932/3): 204–14. Cf. Neurath's early critique of Popper, "Pseudorationalismus der Falsifikation," in *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung und Logischer Empirismus*, ed. R. Hegselmann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), 140ff. In that same book see also Hegselmann's instructive introduction to the problem of protocol-sentences (38ff.).

[25] R. Rorty, "Non-Reductive Physicalism," *Theorie der Subjectivität*, ed. K. Cramer et al. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), 287. Rorty continues: "On this view, we no longer have to worry about, e.g., the question 'Does physics correspond to the structure of the world as it is, or merely to the structure of the world as it appears to us?' because we cease to think of physics as *corresponding* to anything. The question of whether the heavens are actually laid out with the sun at the middle becomes equivalent to the question of whether Ptolemy or Copernicus gives us better tools for coping with the world" (287ff.). Similarly, this was already evident in W. V. O. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 44, n. 2.

[26] Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Thought," 303.

sentences stand in for the same thing (Frege's position). Thus, Davidson corrects this view with the following:

> The correct objection to correspondence theories is not, then, that they make truth something to which humans can never legitimately aspire; the real objection is rather that such theories fail to provide entities to which truth vehicles (whether we take these to be statements, sentences, or utterances) can be said to correspond. If this is right, and I am convinced it is, we ought also to question the popular assumption that sentences, or their spoken tokens, or sentence-like entities or configurations in our brains, can properly be called "representations," since there is nothing for them to represent. If we give up facts as entities that make sentences true, we ought to give up representations at the same time, for the legitimacy of each depends on the legitimacy of the other.[27]

Hence, Davidson regrets having, in his earlier publications, interpreted Tarski's truth-definition as a form of correspondence theory. In fact, unlike the early Vienna Circle, Tarski does not compare sentences (statements or expressions) with reality, but rather compares sentences with those of another language. (Tarski's definition is as follows: "*X* [a statement in the metalanguage] is true, if and only if *p* [a corresponding statement in the object language].")

What conclusions must we draw from this convention for the unpredictability of sense-effects? Davidson simply claims that we can make comprehensible for ourselves the intentions of other people, not through a deduction from a hypostacized "code" (a linguistic norm), but indeed individually through singular testimonies of conviction.[28] Hence, if we cannot find support for our meaning-assumptions in the language system (or in the speech banalities of the group), then we must seek such support in a theory of truth. This theory of truth not only describes the normalized linguistic behavior of a person whom I am attempting to understand, but also specifies the conditions under which the utterance of a sentence could be considered true. In this manner, the speaker and her interpreter are not connected by the internalization of a commonly learned system of conditioning, but by the shared knowledge of the truth-conditions of the utterance. Thereby, the theory does not make explicit what one speaker *knows*. It does *imply*, however, something about the propositional content of the speaker's intentions – namely, the propositional content of the intention that her statements are to be understood in this way, rather than any other way. In this direction, understanding can no longer be taken as something guaranteed. The interpreter need not have an explicit (i.e., propositional) knowledge of the theory. Davidson merely says (in contrafactual assumption) that this theory would be all that an interpreter would need in order to know the truth-conditions of the speaker's statements

[27] Ibid., 304.
[28] In the following, cf. ibid., 309ff.

– which is what amounts to an understanding of the speaker[29] – regardless of whether or not the interpreter manages to indeed understand.[30] In any case the prospect of successful understanding does not increase by an appellation of explicit or implicit rules of meaning. After all, these rules themselves can only be made comprehensible in terms of intentions and beliefs. "Conventions and rules do not explain language; language explains them."[31]

Davidson himself refers to Quine as a significant predecessor,[32] whereas Rorty ultimately compares Davidson with Derrida.[33] I would like to follow up on this comparison in order to avoid seeming as though romantic hermeneutics and Sartre could be the only possible points of reference for my assumptions.

Derrida shares two fundamental convictions with the hermeneutic – as well as the more recent nominalist – position. The first conviction is that the relation to subjective (mental) phenomena can only be considered as mediated by signs (Saussure speaks of "thought" that is, before its linguistic articulation by the *chaîne phonatoire*, just as amorphous as the phonetic material itself; not before the sedimentation into *unité pensée-son*, or units of thought-sounds, can the mentalistic bear contours.) The second conviction is that even then signs can never exercise a precise identificational function. Schleiermacher found reasons for this conviction in the dependence of each sign – which receives its meaning in individual acts – on interpretation. Derrida justifies his view by radically overriding Saussure's principle of differentiation, according to which each sign – since not articulated "by nature" – mediates its identity by distinguishing its signifying material from the material of all other signifying units. The identity of the sign *a* is therefore mediated by its relation of being-other-than, when compared to the signs *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*, and so on. Now there is no necessary reason to suppose that the phonetic chain, maintained by nega-

[29] "A theory of truth for a speaker is a theory of meaning in this sense, that explicit knowledge of theory would suffice for understanding the utterances of that speaker. It accomplishes this by describing the critical core of the speaker's potential and actual linguistic behavior, in effect, how the speaker intends his utterances to be interpreted" (ibid., 312).

[30] That the "divinatory" indication of the truth-conditions is the necessary and sufficient condition for the understanding of the utterances of others is of course not undisputed, as Davidson very well knows (ibid., 313, n. 1; 314). As commonly known, he supposes Tarski's so-called convention-T (when *T* stands for "Truth"), which says that the truth-predicate "*s* is true in a language$_L$" implicates for each sentence *s* of the language *L* a theory of the form "*s* is true $_L$ if and only if *p*," where *s* is to be substituted by systematic description of *s*, and *p* is to be substituted by a translation of *s* into the theory-language. These theoretical elements Davidson calls, for the sake of brevity, "T-sentences" (289); they contain the single place truth-predicate "true$_L$." A T-sentence says of a particular speaking individual, for each of her utterances, that these are true if and only if the provided conditions are fulfilled. "T-sentences thus have the form and function of natural laws; they are universally quantified bi-conditionals, and as such are understood to apply counterfactually and to be confirmed by their instances. Thus, a theory of truth is a theory for describing, explaining, understanding, and predicting a basic aspect of verbal behavior. Since the concept of truth is central to the theory, we are justified in saying truth is a crucially important explanatory concept" (313).

[31] Ibid., 316.

[32] Ibid., 306.

[33] R. Rorty, "Non-Reductive Physicalism," 295f.

tive opposition to the first signifying unit, is finite. Thus, the limits of semantic identity for a term are functions of an open system, a system of permanently new differentiation without possible presence of a term with itself. Following Derrida, we can somewhat histrionically formulate this by saying that the sense of each sign is separated from itself, that sign-identity is thus split, and that the assignation of sense to each sign is no longer determinable.

I hold this view to be correct. Furthermore, I think this position poses a threatening objection to the semantic optimism of the so-called "code" model of understanding, according to which signs are understood as *input* – a unit of a strictly closed grammar – internalized through some learning process, which is then externalized as linguistic *output* through rote repetition of identity.

If Derrida is correct, then dissent between conversation partners does not first arise during some discussion about the validity of the assertions made or during a discussion about the assumed normatives. Instead, the dissent has already occurred when determining the understanding of the elements out of which language systems are made. The sense of signs is simply indeterminable. However, Derrida takes it too far. If what he calls *différance* is total, then one can no longer say what he says – that is, that sense is always to be realized as an other – since a minimal sense-identity is required as standard for such alteration. It is performatively contradictory to claim in the form of a statement, presumably with the intention of being understood, that a sign could just mean anything at any time. It remains true, however, that no sign needs permanent sustenance in the interpretation that I may factually – in a historically and biographically motivated situation – have of that sign.

Quine's position, of the indeterminacy of word-meanings and the unintelligibility of their object-relation, is no less radical an interrogation of semantic optimism. I can never assume with certainty that my interlocutor assigns the same meaning to the word-signs as I do. Quine developed the indeterminacy of translation (which occurs not only between two different languages, but already "at home") by radicalizing his thesis that all empirical theories are underdetermined. The latter is based on the combination of two presuppositions, the first of which is Peirce's proposed conception of sentential meaning as a syllogistic process that includes our capacity of interpretation and is dependent on its tribunal. The meaning of a sentence is what is supported by the sum total of the statements that prove its truth. This process of sign interpretation is empirically infinite; from this it follows that meaning and information, language and theory, cannot be separated. The second presupposition is the holistic function, which seeks to test, against reality, theories strictly as a whole, rather than as single propositions.

Is a linguistically articulated conception of reality a theoretically impregnated whole – and hence interpretation-dependent? In other words, does it no longer make sense to introduce a distinction between "the manner in which the world really is" and "our manner of talking about it"?[34] If so, then we

[34] Ibid., 282.

cannot exclude the possibility that one and the same empirical finding, secured by experiments, can be correctly interpreted by several theories that are, otherwise, incompatible with one another. "In a word, they can be logically incompatible and empirically equivalent."[35] According to which criteria, then, should one choose theories and languages? Quine admits, exclusively, the pragmatist reply (emphatically taken up by Rorty), according to which one chooses the theory and the language most useful for a life-practical intention. Thus, theories are not representations of an otherwise theory-independent reality; rather, theories are "tools for handling reality." Such a pragmatist criterion would be, for example, one in favor of the simplicity and transparency of a given theory.

However, as soon as we ask after the criteria that determine the communication of insights from one theory (or language) into another, even this purely pragmatic criterion (of simplicity and usefulness) gets stolen from our hands. In terms of communication from one language to another, theory remains not only *under*determined by empirical data (which can be, at most, boundary conditions), but is not determined at all. Just as one and the same empirical finding can be shared by different theories and languages, translating interpretations of empirical findings can be achieved by different translation manuals. Now, however, simplicity no longer leads us on the path of truth. Quine remarks:

> The simplest mapping of language A into a language B followed by the simplest mapping of B into language C does not necessarily give the same mapping of A into C as does simplest direct mapping of A into C. Similarly, the simplest mapping of A into B followed by the simplest B into A does not necessarily map every item A back onto itself.[36]

While the different possible theories and languages were underdetermined by empirical findings, the criteria for choosing the best translation are not even determined by the criterion of simplicity. While translating – which, basically, already takes place in understanding – a word or a sentence, we lost any contact whatsoever with reality and are now left to comparing two empirically underdetermined theories/languages with each other: "As Quine has put it in conversation, that there is nothing to be right or wrong about in translation means that several different translation manuals fit the same states and distributions of all elementary particles" (ibid.). For me, this seems to be again a description of a real hermeneutic emergency. Davidson attempts to alleviate this problem by introducing, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, his "principle of charity"; but if I understand it correctly, this

[35] W. V. O. Quine, "On the Reasons of Indeterminacy of Translation," *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): 179.

[36] Dagfinn Føllesdal communicates this utterance in his insightful reconstruction of "Indeterminacy of Translation and Under-determination of the Theory of Nature" in *Dialectica* 37, nos. 3–4 (1973): 295.

principle does not fulfill an epistemic but a purely pragmatic function, analogous to Quine's preference for simplicity of theories and languages. It gives us just as little guidance for finding a way out of the hermeneutic indeterminacy as Habermas's similarly motivated, but much more strongly instrumental, principle of consensus. Both work as merely (though certainly necessary) regulative principles for the orientation of our communication. They cannot dissolve completely the insecurity with regard to the correctness or incorrectness of understanding the speech of others.

Saussure (on whose linguistics at least one of the two language relativists – namely, Derrida – directly depends) was already at least as convinced as Davidson of the nonrepresentative character of language and of the merely imperative (thus, nondeterminstic) character of rule obedience. Saussure's conviction, however, is not based on the assignment of truth-conditions, but is instead (like Quine's) oriented along the lines of indeterminacy of the meaning of singular words.

Saussure, who is often mistakenly referred to as the founder of a rigid form of structuralism, held fast against the fetishists of *the* code or *the* discourse with a splendid declaration, that codes and discourses exist "à la merci de lendemain. . . . rien n'en garantit la stabilité."[37] If codes, for the sake of their own communicability, watch over specific relations between signifieds and signifiers, then the activity of individual style would rest on the permanent "shift in the relationship between signified and signifier."[38] Style derives this possibility from the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign: "The arbitrariness of its signs theoretically entails the freedom of establishing just any relationship between phonetic substance and ideas" (*CGL*, 76). Of course, the work of the context reduces and controls somewhat the arbitrariness of the sign (the famous determination of a signifier's meaning by its difference from other signifiers). But the work of the context is said to be creative precisely when it newly constructs linguistic types. Saussure states: "The creative activity is only an activity of combining, or, in other words, the creation of new combinations."[39] We should keep in mind that the activity of combining the material of expression defines what style is. Now, if each sign type can exist only in such unstable and revocable syntheses of signified and signifier, then the individual combination created by style could alter the code at any time. For

[37] Ferdinand Saussure, "Cours de linguistique générale: Introduction (d'après des notes d'étudiants)," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure*, ed. R. Godel (1957), 15:72. The book is hereafter referred to as *CFS*.

[38] F. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. W. Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), 75: "Regardless of what the forces of change are, whether in isolation or in combination, they always result in a shift in the relationship between the signified and the signifier." See also 140. The book is hereafter referred to as *CGL*.

[39] F. Saussure, *Edition critique du Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. R. Engler, vol. I, 2.77, et al., 2573. The book is hereafter referred to as *EC*. However, because the "individual aspect of language rests in combining" (*Entwürfe zu einem System der Stittenlehre*, critical edition by Otto Braun [Leipzig, 1913], 172; cf. *HuK*, 370), Saussure can also characterize the "liberté des combinaisons" as the "liberté individuelle" (*CGL*, 124ff.).

how could the code, which is a system of language types whose meaning is based only on reciprocal differentiation, be indifferent or insensitive to the work of the context, which is nothing more than an activity of incessant differentiation and redifferentiation?[40] Accordingly, the code would lose its imperative force over the speaking individuals and transform itself into a virtuality, into a power that first actualizes itself in real concrete speech.[41] That is why Saussure can say: "in *language* no force guarantees the maintenance of a regularity when established on some point. . . . the arrangement that the law defines is precarious precisely because it is not imperative" (*CGL*, 92). If language is a generality, and if one seeks to exclude as fetishistic the circular argument that *the* language can alter itself, then there remains only the possibility of appealing to what is not general but grants, or confers on, the general its alterity (otherness). That which confers on the general what is other is the individual. Saussure states this using similar words.[42]

One might object that there is, indeed, a unity and identity of a type. The very definition of a type is directly founded on this presupposition, and without this presupposition the scientific description of linguistic facts would appear completely impossible. Saussure was not quite so certain about this. At least two items must be noted: first, that which refers to the sense organs can never be more than a mere token (what Saussure calls a "sound-image": a graphic-acoustic phenomenon) that can acquire the status of a type only through an interpretation (an idealizing hypothesis); and, second, that concrete speaking unfolds in time. And it is unreasonable to expect what is given rhythmic order by time not to also alter itself.[43]

That linguistic signs are *not* mirrors of nature is one of the main prerequisites of Saussurian linguistics. Since linguistic signs do not reflect objects, the

[40] The interpretation on which alone this conviction is founded – namely, the conviction that we are dealing with this linguistic type rather than any other – is an activity that manifests itself in the distinction of units: "This interpretation will manifest itself through the distinction of units (from which follow all activities of language)" (*CFS*, 15:89). Compare: "the analogical creation (on which rests all innovation) appears as a particular episode, a branch of general activity, as phenomena of the interpretation of language, as the distinction between units" (92). The activity of being interpreted is here simply made analogous to the activity of the contexts, which is the principle of differentiation.

[41] "Language is something merely potential, speech is that which is realized" (*CFS*, 15:10).

[42] Cf. *EC*, vol. II (Wiesbaden, 1974), 28: "In language, there is therefore always a double side that corresponds to it; namely, the social/individual. Thus, if one considers the sphere in which language exists, there would always be an individual language, on the one hand, and a social language. (Forms and grammar only exist socially, but the changes are derived from an individual.)" Also: "There is always this individual element, which is the combination allowed the choices of each for the expression of his thought in a sentence" (*EC*, vol. III, C 277, et al., 2022). This combination, in turn, can be innovative: "Creation towards the direction of a new combination" (*CFS*, 15:90).

[43] "Time changes all things; there is no reason why language should escape this universal law." "Language is radically powerless to defend itself against the forces which from one moment to the next are shifting the relationship between the signified and the signifier. This is one of the consequences of the arbitrary nature of the sign" (*CGL*, 77, 75).

temporal development of their semantics would also be independent of the properties of the signified objects. With reference to this fact, Saussure makes the following comment: "What has, thus, escaped the philosophers and logicians is the fact that the system, as soon as it is independent of the signified object, is itself, by virtue of time, subjected to distortions which cannot be calculated by a logician" (*EC*, vol. II, N 10, 13). But semantics is not merely independent of the objective world; it is also independent of the graphical-acoustic aspect (the physical substrate) of the vehicle of expression. Just as "thought" prior to differentiation by linguistic articulation would resemble an "uncharted nebula," neither can *masse phonique* alone constitute meaning.[44] It then follows that a linguistic sound, devoid of linguistic thought, is not yet significant, cannot yet constitute meaning. Consequently, the return of two identical, or graphico-acoustically similar, linguistic episodes cannot guarantee in any way the identity of meaning. "It is of interest," Saussure says, "to ask oneself upon what we base the assertion that the same word consecutively articulated two times may be identical. . . . This question is the most serious since it ultimately leads to an investigation into the unity of linguistic terms" (*CFS*, 15:38).

But is is precisely *not* in terms of the idea of an *original* identity of the sign that Saussure argues for his discovery of the systematic structure of language. Instead, in language, "everything consists of differences" (*CFS*, 15:16; see also 15:93). Responding to the "illusion naturaliste" of the *Junggrammatiker*, Saussure points out that if nothing in the phonic substance is of itself meaningful, then the unity and distinctness of a sign must emerge in a different way. More precisely, this happens on the basis of two principles: the temporal-linear succession, on the one hand, and, on the other, the counteracting process of idealization or generalization. Only through the flow of time can the elements be differentiated from one another. After all, the *chaîne parlée* rests, ad infinitum, on the relation of nonidentity, which can only be interpreted as an "other than" relation. If a term *a* is given, from which a second term, ~ *a*, is differentiated (and, therefore, recognized as *b*), then the negation of *b* would yield the continuum of all possible sound units.

Now, without a counteracting principle of a "memorization" (or "récollection des unités phonatoires successives" [*EC*, vol. II, N 15, 3318.6]), the pure negativity of the act of differentiation and of the temporal flux could never assure our *consciousness* of the unity and iterability of a linguistic type with semantically identical meaning. Similar to Kant's "Synthesis der Rekognition," the principle of "récollection des unités phonatoires successives" steadfastly retains the past element in one's memory ("récolligibilité" [ibid., 3316.2 ff.]). If one recalls the Saussurian premise that the identification

[44] "The unity does not pre-exist. It is the signification which creates this unity" (*CFS*, 15:41ff.). "Its vocal part . . . is the instrument of thought . . . without, however, existing independently of thought. . . . Its vocal part is, strictly speaking, merely a word, which is being constantly attached to some meaning" (7ff.).

of the phonetic structure of an element alone cannot induce the comprehension of meaning, then the creative activity of interpretation is required to enable the identification of the retained element *a* with the presently perceived element *a′*. This creative activity of interpretation must bridge a temporal gap: we are here confronted with a hypothetical judgment for which no other hermeneutic criteria are available. In other words, the linguistic occurrence and what Saussure calls the memorized "representative of this occurrence (*a′*) do not concurrently exist, nor can they be identified through their phonetic structure. As a result, what Peirce calls "amplifying" or "abductive" judgment is required in advance to ground the unity of meaning at the level of *langue*; and it does this in a way which remains unstable and permanently revocable through new interpretations. Everything in language is based on interpretation: "a grammatical fact . . . is the pure product of a past interpretation" (*CFS*, 15:100). Schleiermacher compared this conclusion, upon which all interpretation of something *as* something is based, with the production of an artist, since, as he puts it, "with the mere presence of the grammatical rules, the application is not yet given; or, in other words, [the application] cannot become mechanized" (*HuK*, 81). In addition, the totality of differences, by virtue of which I can identify *a′* as the representative of the type *a*, is infinitely exhaustive. Therefore, identification is *always* based on what Sartre calls *hypothèse compréhensive*. Its truth is not to be found independently of understanding; its validity must continuously demonstrate itself in social practice, through the assent of other interpreters.[45]

Saussure's position, that the endorsement of the sense of a sign is dependent on interpretation and, therefore, can only be achieved hypothetically, bears a conspicuous parallel to the conviction of a significant contemporary figure in analytic philosophy. (I will introduce him as a further, and last, evidence for the actuality of romantic-hermeneutical intuitions in contemporary analytic philosophy.) Hector-Neri Castañeda formulates two general premises about linguistic rule obedience:

1. A (genuine) rule to do an action *A* leaves it open to the agent to choose, or not to choose, to do *A*, and to do, or not to do, *A*.
2. The past is radically uncertain.[46]

Rule obedience is hence based on the freedom of an agent. The past usage of rules, in contrast to a logical or causal determination, does not bind my momentary understanding – the use I make at this moment of a rule passed on

[45] This is also Saussure's position: an originally individual and innovative speech-act first becomes a shareable type when the community of speakers, defined as the communicative medium of two individuals engaged in dialogue, accepts it. "It will become true, if it exists in accord with speaking subjects" (*CFS*, 15:95; cf. 15:8). An innovation "may or may not be adopted by the community" (15:90).

[46] Hector-Neri Castañeda, "Self-Profile," in *Hector-Neri Castañeda: Profiles – An International Series on Contemporary Philosophers and Logicians*, ed. J. E. Tomberlin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1986), 6:94.

to me. Experience of a world (i.e., of a nexus of senses) means to identify, and identify again, objects of our surroundings.[47] If thinking equals speaking, then we refer, in thinking, to what we denote in our expressions. We identify and reidentify an object *X* through the expressions that we use for it. Therefore, to identify again an object as *X* means to apply once more the same expression for it, that expression by which we have referred to it in a previous presentation. How can we be certain the second time around that the object has kept all its properties that are relevant to our new identification? Or, more precisely, how can we be certain that the expression *A* does ascribe to the intended object the same as in its previous usage? We can be certain only on the basis of our memory; however, this memory does not offer any apodictic certainty in the way present presentations do. Epistemologically, the existence of everything that is ascribed to things past is prone to doubt. Similarly, Wittgenstein continuously argues that claims about the connections between present and past knowledge are mere articles of faith:

> Now, operating with the radical unavailability of the past and the fallibility of memory, Wittgenstein mounts an intermediary skeptical attack on the conformance and contiguity of past linguistic practices with current linguistic use. Linguistic intentions to mean the "same" by a symbol previously used lack, thus, verifiable metaphysical foundation. The trouble is yet more stringent given the fact that the semantic connection is not a natural one: any symbol whatever can be used to mean anything whatever. We need a linguistic rule to establish the connection. But as premise (1) registers, a rule leaves us free to obey it or not to obey it. We may decide to obey it and maintain our semantic constancy. But then we must be sure of its past applications, which alone could guide us. What guarantees that the memory of previous applications is correct? It is conceptually possible that there were no previous uses, or the uses were different from what one remembers them to be. Since the past, even if it existed, cannot be bodily brought to bear on the present use, "whatever seems to the speaker to be correct is correct." There is, therefore, no real chance of making, and, hence, of correcting linguistic error. This is a serious predicament which cuts deeply into the viability of *all* language – and, ultimately, of all thinking about the world.[48]

Let us, for the moment, consider a bit further the similarity Schleiermacher

[47] In the following, I will provide a free paraphrase of the thoughts presented by Castañeda (ibid., 94ff.).

[48] Ibid., 94ff. The conclusion drawn by Castañeda from this emergency is the same as that drawn by Schleiermacher and Saussure (and, certainly, by Peirce): the identity of a sign is a matter of social practice, of the statistic of the usage of the majority (97, n. 2) and is based on interpretation (since, due to the arbitrariness of the sign and of semiosis, nothing prescribes imperatively a certain usage for anything outside of practice). The (rule-determined) unity of the sign swims "in a Heraclitean chaos" (98). If the sign is the only way in which we can have a real relation to the world – that is, a relation mediated by experience – then we have good reasons for an "*internalistic* ontology" (cf. 99).

observes between art and understanding, which is the unity of an utterance. "It is not," Schleiermacher says of his own comparison, "as if the performance ends in a work of art, but rather that the activity of understanding bears only the character of art because with the mere presence of the grammatical rules, the application is not yet given or, in other words, cannot become mechanized" (*HuK*, 81). "Art," as he explains elsewhere, "in the more restricted sense, we term each composed creation where we are aware of the universal rules whose application cannot once again be controlled by rules" (*Sämmtliche Werke*, I/1 [Berlin, 1843], 56). Obviously, this characterization is very close to Kant's definition of reflective (i.e., "aesthetic") judgment. Aesthetic judgment always seeks but, due to structural reasons, can never find the concept or rule which can determine it. We also become aware of what is responsible for the fact that the rules, whose application one might define as "style," must remain unknown. It is not as though there were, in fact, no rules; rather, their application can be subsumed under rules at the cost of an infinite regress. For the rules of application to become scientifically controllable, they would themselves have to be subjected under rules – and so on, ad infinitum.[49] Thus it becomes clear, at least for now, why authors like Sartre would directly identify unruly style – because of its unintelligibility – with the dark meaningfulness of art.

The *tertium comparationis* between individual style and artistic composition, therefore, consists in the fact that we refer to both procedures as spontaneous yet not free of rules. However, when we are asked about the rules, we find ourselves in Siegfried's situation: though on its trail, Siegfried still cannot understand the language of Waldvöglein. Regardless, Siegfried feels as though the little bird would like to tell him something. And when the narrator of Musil's *Amsel* is asked what the meaning of the story is, the narrator answers: "Gracious skies . . . it all just occurred that way; and if I would know the meaning, I certainly would not need to explain it to you first. It is, however, as if you heard whispering or merely rustling without being able to distinguish what it is!"[50] It was precisely this "as if" which Kant considered as the unique characteristic of aesthetic judgments. In the course of aesthetic experience, we feel "as if" we have perceived the instantiation of a comprehensible rule, which remains nevertheless unspecifiable. This occasionally happens during a somnolent enjoyment of a fairy tale read aloud by a friendly voice. Though this fairy tale may appear clearly comprehensible as we are falling asleep, as soon as we are awake, though much may be said of it, we can no longer perfectly capture its coherence. Similarly, style may be understood in this way. The stylistic combination is not capricious, and we seem to

[49] In his Academy lecture, "Über Begriff und Einteilung der Philologischen Kritik" (held on March 20, 1830), Schleiermacher identifies what can be brought under rules only at the cost of an infinite regress directly with the artistic: "I would close here [he states near the end of his lecture] were it not for the uncomfortable question which still occupies my mind, whether theory could attempt to reveal the rules necessarily required in advance in the various cases, or whether this remains the purely divinatory aspect, for which no principles can be given."

[50] R. Musil, *Gesammelte Werke*, 7:562.

understand it. However, if one asks us for the rules, we are incapable of specifying them; and the mystery of understanding style is exercised by the "guessing" (or "divining," as Schleiermacher puts it), which may be motivated, but not required, by the code. Of course, in retrospect, we can eventually – after repeated iterations – specify the rules of some particular style. By then, however, the style has already ceased to be an individual occurrence; it has become a *genus dicendi*, a habit, or even a mannerism.

Now, in view of the title of this essay, one could no longer resist asking the following question: How can something whose rules are unspecifiable and whose terms cannot become recursively defined be claimed as scientific? That is to say, if philosophy is to be an *episteme*, can there be such a thing as a "philosophy of style"?

Certainly, would be my answer. Gilles-Gaston Granger, for example, has already made an attempt in his *Essai d'une philosophie du style.* When dealing with style, philosophy would refer to style as a metalanguage would refer to its object. If style should elude the procedures of science, then philosophy can demonstrate the reasons for this elusion without itself becoming affected. To believe that the philosophy of style must be considered unscientific solely because its object (style) resists scientific inquiry would simply be to commit a *category mistake*. It would be like charging Heisenberg's uncertainty principle with being "uncertain" – or like calling Kant's aesthetics unphilosophical because it demonstrates that there are no rules under which the beautiful could be conceived as the instantiation of those rules.

However, just as soon as these statements are thus made, doubts begin to emerge. Did we not begin this paper by admitting that style is a universal phenomenon of all natural languages and that not even philosophy can free itself from it? Consequently, we can no longer draw a clear distinction between object-language and metalanguage, between stylistic and philosophical prose. If the history of philosophy, especially since early German romanticism, has now found in itself reasons for disclosing philosophy as a phenomenon of style, then one of the deepest convictions of occidental metaphysics collapses: namely, that ever changing and never identically recurrent appearances can be opposed to the realm of ideal essences and that metaphysics deals only with the latter. The ideas themselves would then be "sicklied o'er" with the obsolescence of the phenomena: they would bear a permanent index of ephemerality and historical contingency. Philosophy would also be besieged by individuality. The demarcation between literature and philosophy would crumble. Its trace would become indiscernible.

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