

Letters to the Editors

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Journal by Anna M. Szaflarski.

Letters from Editors: Florian Goldmann et al., "Survival of the Absorbed" pg. 8

A Language to be Destroyed

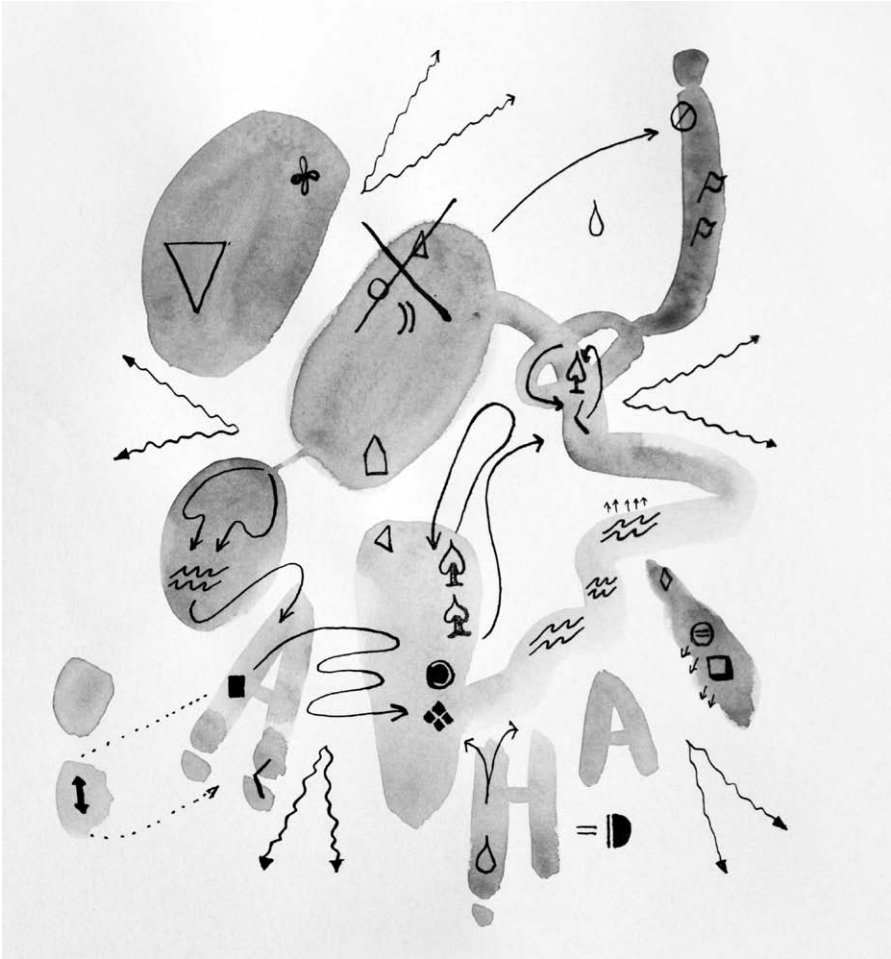
Growing up with parents who had not yet perfected the predominantly used language in the country they lived and raised their children in, brought about good-natured laughs. My parents were good sports about it too, and we, as their English speaking children, were invited to bring to attention their slips in syntax and grammar. One of our favorites was my father's persistence to insert articles, such as the word 'the' where it definitely did not belong. Dropping us off at front of the doors of the swimming pool everyday, he would call out after us, "Have it the fun!" genuinely wishing us a good time. And even as we teased him every day for years he continued to call out, "Have it the fun!"

Years later while sorting through my parents' office I found an essay my mother wrote for the local university many years previous. Throughout the five pages of carefully crafted arguments there was no 'the' to be found. I read it out loud, and we all had a good laugh about it. Despite of the small and seemingly slight omission the essay felt strangely vague and even playful.

I realized then that my parents' difficulty to grasp the usage of the words 'a' and 'the', required perhaps more than

a dinner table laugh, perhaps even serious analysis. Their slips were obviously not for lack of their intelligence as they both speak many languages and are an inspiration in terms of cunning and cleverness. The problem, I decided, must lie in an assumption that we English speakers take for granted. There is a basic understanding that when we say ‘*a* apple’ for instance, we agree that we are referring to the abstract concept of an apple among many. And when we say ‘*the* apple’, it is a specific apple that we all know or should know. By noticing their difficulty with those specific words, I reflected on how liberally the English speaking population assumes something so fundamental as shared understanding. Without him knowing it my father was talking about a very specific kind of fun (which I am not altogether sure was truly a mistake, and he probably did have a specific kind of fun in mind), while my mother opened up every noun in her essay to a world of infinite possibilities of abstraction. For them, during those early years in Canada the difference between the two articles was indistinguishable, and maybe rightfully so.

After years of living outside of Canada I find that my own native-tongue has been severely compromised. I sometimes rearrange English words in German syntax formation. I often write like a foreigner. When asked to edit texts for others for LTTE I have a hard time knowing what’s right and what’s wrong anymore. Or I feel that when correcting someone else’s writing – written by someone who grew up writing and speaking another language – I shouldn’t correct them at all, instead archive and conserve every aberration. Aside from the fact that the voice of the writer can be so easily erased by tidying up grammar or finding more ‘appropriate’ synonyms, every so-called mistake can give insight into how a person uses their own language, or how they came to speak English. Perhaps most interestingly for me, it can bring attention to how native speakers too quickly depend on predetermined rhetoric that is drenched in assumptions of self-evidence. So, I suggest that these mistakes not be erased but rather be left alone, perhaps analyzed. or at the very least as they are in our family: cherished (many of my



“AHA” or “ACHSO!”

parents' blunders have been corrected over the years, and we miss them dearly).

Yes, I am advocating for bad grammar, misplaced words, *Falsche Freunde*¹, awkward phrasings and mispronunciations. And I formally elect English for this bloody sacrifice, as the process is already in motion, so commonly used and torn to pieces throughout the world.

Speaking English as a [first], second, third, fourth or fifth language? Are you forced to use English from time to time to get your point across? Not feeling confident? Can't find the equivalent word? I say bulldoze away. And *have it the fun* with it too

My concerns with the state of the English language lie elsewhere. It's those who hide behind the guise of eloquence that often threaten language with a dumb paralysis, and perpetuate so many unclarified assumptions. Speaking so much, yet saying nothing at all.

In his 1946 essay, "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell criticizes exactly about the state of the Language used by English-speaking (most likely British) politicians:

Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way, but it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it. Our civilization is decadent and our language -- so the argument runs -- must inevitably share in the general collapse. It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.

Orwell goes on to argue for a return of precision in lan-

¹ *False friends*, words in two languages that look or sound similar, but differ significantly in meaning.

guage through education specifically focused on the origin of certain often-used metaphors. He describes how etymology and the origins of certain sayings are being overrun, dampened, dulled and by the puppetry of rhetoric. He was frustrated that intentional meaning gradually disappeared in the game of inferred meaning, and replaced by residual and superficial emotions generated as a byproduct during the cultural evolution of a word. His *beef*² was specifically with political writing, which I am sure we can all understand, as we come across and yet so rarely identify the skeletons of words and phrases used in politics everyday. The United States of America is an easy target as some political media cry out *Communism, Axis of Evil, Amendment* like misguided children who evoke fear without having to explain why. They are terrorists hijacking terms, words, phrases and idioms that were at one time so carefully forged, crashing them into the mainstream and leaving behind only senselessness. But they do it so cleverly, with their perfect syntax, and grammar, and slick rhythms. No wonder they so often go undetected.

It is not only in politics that this occurs, and perhaps we should feel particular solidarity with Orwell's argument when we scan the plethora of press releases in galleries and museums in this city. Pages and wall texts that are placed as ambassadors between art and viewer are equally full of words that are time and again repeated but never defined or questioned. We are not instilled with fear in this case, but with an allure of knowledge. Knowledge that the reader often does not hold, but also does not trust herself to question who the beholder of this knowledge might actually be.

Orwell dissects overused and misused idioms and metaphors, and attacks imprecision. He even goes too far and

2 meaning finding problem with. Wikipedia.org: "As regards the etymology of beef, it seems to go back to the cry of hot beef! meaning 'stop thief!'; quasi-rhyming slang but more by coincidence than design, since it is far older than rhyming slang's first widespread use in the 1820s-30s; thus the 18th century cry hot beef, to raise a hue and cry"

becomes tedious at points in his demands; a wise self-defined dusty *sentimental archaist*. His rules are suffocating, each starting with a ‘never’ or ‘if’ (although he does lend you an escape plan! : *Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous*). I hold a more liberal approach and encourage savvy language, even when it is not necessarily pragmatic, but I agree with the core of Orwell’s argument that, “the great enemy of clear language is insincerity.” Now, perhaps I wouldn’t go so far to call it the *great enemy*, that seems to go too far, ironically in the direction of political rhetoric. I did, however, title this text as I did, so I can’t really criticize him there. But the point of his statement is the key: when insincerity becomes the motivator of language, it becomes flaccid, indirect, and the only meaning coming from it is atmospheric at best. And from my observations, nothing has ever made me more sincere (some have characterized it as a tad blunt or direct) than having to express myself in a language other than my mother tongue.

I once knew a man who worked for the European Commission in Brussels. The Commission is composed of a lovely community that seems to function very similarly to a oversized group of adult Erasmus students. Many of them complain of the hindrance of legislative or negotiation processes due to the language they are all forced to speak, known as International English. For some it’s painful to even consider discussing such important matters when not able to fully exert his/her linguistic abilities. I experienced something similar when I did my Master’s studies in German. The majority of my colleagues were international, and we bumbled along like children or maybe more like prehistoric peoples who might knock on stones and gather sticks in hopes to better illustrate our complex points. But there was something so liberating in having to reduce our vocabulary ‘back to basics’ while trying desperately to communicate something intelligently. It forced us to select our words carefully, to question what we actually wanted to say, and prevented some of us from falling into the same avenues of bullshit that we developed during our undergrads back home. However, these kinds of enlightening albeit frustrat-

ing phase are eventually overtaken by a certain disintegration of concentration. In our seminars and I have been told in the conference rooms of the European Commission a new shared vocabulary of umbrella terms and shop-talk is forged (ie. *Auseinandersetzung*, which can mean ‘examine’, ‘contest’, ‘argument’, ‘discuss’, and so much more, was picked up $\frac{3}{4}$ through my studies and was the savior of many unprepared presentations at the University). Eventually the group using the new terms feels more confident, intelligent, and yet, I was suspicious if our content at the university was also developing at the same rate, let alone our sincerity.

When speaking in our own mother-tongues insincerity occurs often and naturally. It’s not intentional, nor demonic. It’s even enjoyable to a certain extent, and sometimes atmosphere is exactly what one needs to get a party started. It’s also undeniable that when someone speaks well, its like listening to music, and when writing is as eloquent and beautiful as it is sincere it is truly like finding gold. Those who strive to push the English language forward on those terms, I believe will always do so, because they feel compelled to and should be praised for their good work. But there is another kind of work being done by the masses of people who are using English as a tool of pragmatism. They are conducting the large-scale, experimental linguistic field-study in speech, text messages, blogs, restaurant menus, subway announcements and applying methods of dissection, stuttering, faltering, mimickery, confusion, linguistic hybridization and yes, destruction. May the good work continue. ●

Florian Goldmann et al.

SURVIVAL OF THE ABSORBED

[NOTIFICATION]

concerning the exhibition piece “Survival of the Absorbed”
installed in Gallery Vkhutemas, Moscow Architectural Institute
developed in the context of the exhibition “Synthesis and
Integration”

as part of the street fashion and alternative art festival “Faces and
Laces”

realized by the artists Akim, Louise Drubigny, Gambette, Florian
Goldmann, Vincent Grunwald, Anna Herms, Clemens Hilsberger

invited by Dimitri Oskes, Organizer of “Faces and Laces”

open from the 8th to the 20th of August 2015

accompanied by the following text

СОХРЕНЕНИЕ ПОГЛАЩЕННОГО на на “СИНТЕЗЕ И ИНТЕГРАЦИИ”

То же самое и с сочинениями: думаешь, будто они
говорят как разумные существа, но если кто спро-
сит о чем-нибудь из того, что они говорят, желая
это усвоить, они всегда отвечают одно и то же.¹

В платоновском диалоге СОКРАТА с ФЕДРОМ выраже-
но недоверие к тогда достаточно новому искусству пись-
менности. В отличии от ораторства, письменный текст не
способен говорить со слушателем напрямую, но способен
донести его мысль до широкой публики. Диалог предпола-
гает, что с этим расширением аудитории повышается и риск
неправильного понимания содержимого текста. Ведь автор
теряет привилегию интерпретации, и письменный текст не
способен ответить на вопросы, появляющиеся у слушателя.

Тезис:

Индивидуум, совершающий графический жест – будь то со-

¹ Платон: ДИАЛОГИ СОКРАТА в 12 томах, ч.9 – ФЕД

творение текста, диаграммы, рисунка, или предмета одежды, способен сохранить силу интерпретации своей мысли в содержимом этого графического жеста.

Для утрированного примера: заявление (мессадж, посыл), написанное на майке, способно оставаться диалектическим, так как может стать предметом дискуссии между теми, кто его прочтет.

Антитезис:

Жест или заявление, ограниченные рамками поношенной майки, неспособно создать весомую дискуссию. Наоборот, поставив заявление на майку, автор уменьшает его до его эстетических качеств. Всё разумное или революционное, что заключалось в этом жесте становится скрытым, пригашенным и, через призму власти и подавления – качества, присущие любой одежде – полностью стерилизованным. Все подрывное в изначальном жесте сжимается предметом и становится логотипом. Логотип передает лишь образы и не является диалектическим.

В 1898 г. французская компания, занимавшаяся производством шин, представила в качестве своего логотипа карикатурного человечка под именем БИБЕНДУМ. Он был представлен в разных позах и ситуациях – обедая, распивая напитки и играя в спортивные игры – и менялся со временем и положением. Таким образом, БИБЕНДУМ считается первым так называемым динамичным логотипом.

СИНТЕЗ:

Осознавая материальность предмета одежды, связанную с властью и подавлением, также как и с духом борьбы против этой власти, индивидуум, носящий футболку способен активно выражать заявление, напечатанное на ней. Несмотря на то, что жест на майке уменьшен до состояния символа, он снова приобретает свои динамические качества. Таким образом, носитель футболки, оживляя собой дискуссию, сам становится знаком, динамическим логотипом.

SURVIVAL OF THE ABSORBED

And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing.¹

Plato's Socratic dialogue *Phaedrus*, expresses a mistrust in the relatively new medium of the written word. As opposed to speech, the written word would not be capable of distinctively addressing a recipient, enabling a wider, and inexact, dispersion. With this increase in audience, it is argued that the medium's content could potentially be misappropriated. After all, with the author losing his/her authority over interpretation, a piece of writing would not be able to respond to questions the recipient might have.

Thesis:

A statement written on a T-shirt can potentially be dialectical, since it can be contested by any of its readers.

An individual exposing a graphic gesture - be it in the form of text, a diagram or a drawing - on a piece of clothing, retains the power of interpretation of the graphic gesture over any previous content.

Antithesis:

A gesture or statement merely made within the close-fitting constraints of a worn T-shirt is ineffective in provoking a substantial argument. In contrast, by being applied to a T-shirt, the statement is reduced to its aesthetic im-

1 Plato: *Phaedrus*, in: *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925, 275d.

plications. Anything arguable or subversive is obscured or even muted since the threads of power and repression, inherent to the garment, pose as sterilizing agents. The subversive is enclosed and becomes a logo. A logo only ever conveys to its signified and is not dialectic.

In 1898 a French tire manufacturer introduced its new logo, the animated cartoon figure Bibendum. The mascot was depicted in many different contexts, such as eating, drinking and playing sports. Changing over time and from setting to setting, Bibendum is said to be the first so-called dynamic logo.

Synthesis:

By being aware of the garment's materiality, its threads of power and repression, as well as, potential threads of subversion, the statement-bearing, T-shirt-wearing individual is enabled to activate the statement. And despite it being reduced to a logo, the statement gains a dynamic quality again. The T-shirt wearer, by animating the argument, becomes the signifier, the dynamic logo itself.

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