Allen Thiher

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Modern Language Theory and Postmodern Fiction

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Contents

For Ott and Gary

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Introduction

I begin this study with a question brought up by the French writer Roland Barthes:

> . . . by an initial rite the writer must first transform the "real" into a painted object (a framed one); after which he can unhook this object, pull it out of his painting, in a word, de-pict it. . . . All of this opens up a double problem. First of all, whence and when began this preeminence of the pictorial code in literary mimesis? Why has it disappeared? Why did writers' dream of painting die? (*S/Z*)

Barthes's question opens up a path of inquiry into understanding the nature of contemporary fiction and the historical changes that have accompanied its development. In one sense the entire work that follows suggests some answers to his question. Before turning to thought about language in the twentieth century, and to contemporary fiction, I should like, in this introduction, to make a few comments about the primacy of the visual in earlier thought about language and literature. How was it, as Barthes asks, that writers once believed that their task was to transform the real object into a painted one? Or, more precisely, how was it that writers, throughout much of the history of Western literature, thought in terms of a preeminently pictorial code? How did writers—neoclassical, romantic, or modernist—-come by the strange notion that they were to de-pict something? If not from Plato, perhaps from an Enlightenment philosopher. If they read David Hume, for example, they would have learned the following about their craft:

> *First,* all poetry being a species of painting, approaches us nearer to the objects than any other species of narration, throws a stronger light on them, and delineates more distinctly those minute circumstances, which though to the historian they may seem superfluous, serve mightily to enliven the imagery and gratify the fancy.

In his updating of the Horatian doctrine of *ut pictura poesis,* Hume is making literature a form of visual presence. Like Locke, like Addison, he is assuming that the visual world is somehow translated through language into an inner visual world. Poetry throws light upon the objects it illuminates—much as the sun illuminates objects in the world that are in turn seized by the eye for their

appropriation as knowledge. Poetry is painting, much as seeing is knowledge when ideas are organized on the canvas of the mind. And both are allegorical transpositions of the world.

The neoclassical consensus, and it was a remarkable consensus, about the primacy of the visual began to have its moments of doubt as the eighteenth century progressed. I mention, as an example, Lessing's critique of the thought that would ascribe the same characteristics to the ontology of a plastic artwork and the ontology of a verbal artwork. (Or Hamann's revision to the Renaissance belief in a Golden Age when man *spoke* in images). For our purposes of exemplary moments let me invoke the figure of Goethe. Goethe, it seems to me, is the kind of exemplary figure who displaces a tradition while essentially maintaining it. For if Goethe rejected the allegorical basis of the primacy of the visual, he reformulated its primacy in terms that would underwrite romanticism and modernism, and which only today seem exhausted. Goethe's rejection of *ut pictura poesis* and its concomitant doctrine of allegory in no way rejects the primacy of the visual as the foundation for the true or essential appropriation of being. For Goethe desires to maintain the motivated, visual relationship between language and some kind of image or *Bild* that underwrites the belief in pictorial mimesis. Goethe's symbolism thus retains the neoclassical idea that art is a making visible, though Goethe construes it as a form of revelation, an *Offenbarung*, that presents an image or *Bild* of an otherwise ineffable idea (*Idee*). The image found in writing is now a unique form of expression, not one of an indefinite number of visualizations that could express allegorical concepts; but the *Bild* the writer seeks is nevertheless an iconic expression of what would be ineffable without that image.

Goethe's aphorisms have been privileged by literary history as the locus where neoclassical views of allegory are replaced by modernist views of symbol:

> Symbolism transforms appearance into an idea, the idea into an image, so that the concept in the image remains unendingly effective and unattainable and, when pronounced in all languages, remains ineffable. [749 in the Hamburg edition] Allegory transforms appearance into a concept, the concept into an image, so that the concept in the image is always limited, can be completely grasped and laid hold of and in the same movement can be spoken forth. [750 in the Hamburg edition]

It is more than a little revealing that literary history has privileged these two aphorisms in which Goethe is probably speaking about painting. One can note how easily the discussion of symbol and allegory, reduced to variant expressions of the image, can be unquestioningly applied to painting or literature—for the fundamental axiom here is again the primacy of the visual as the center of knowledge, hence for the appropriation of being that art aims for, whether this appropriation is understood as the depiction of the neoclassical universal concept or the unique expression of the romantic idea.

Goethe's form of the primacy of the visual finds direct ramifications not only in the development of poetry but also in the development of realist and modernist fiction. Iconic revelation becomes, it seems to me, the goal of most serious fiction for at least a century after Goethe; the novel becomes a search for forms of realism in which, as Goethe phrased it, "the particular represents the general, not as dream and shadows, but as the living-instantaneous disclosure of the unfathomable." Whatever scriptural form it may assume, writing becomes a search for those moments of visual revelation in which, as Goethe put it in a letter to Schiller, "symbolic objects" allow one to read the world as a great book of pictures, or perhaps as an illuminated manuscript that the genius, by his special reading ability, can bring to full vision. There is such a seductive naturalness in this use of iconic terms that we hardly stop to ask ourselves how can it be that a scriptural form could take on an iconic dimension. How can writing be literally an image? Perhaps it is only after the epistemological displacements brought about by Wittgenstein, a certain structuralism, and post-structuralism that we can see the metaphysical axioms which declare that, since language clearly does offer knowledge, and since knowledge is ultimately vision, then language must be iconic in some way.

Let me turn now to two specific examples of the kind of writing I have in mind as scriptural forms that are determined in their practice by this belief in the iconicity of language: Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, then Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, which for our purposes can stand metonymically for the high points of romantic as well as realist and modernist fictions. The cultural consensus at issue here is to be found in the correspondence between Goethe's formulation of symbolism as the search for image and Flaubert's belief that fiction is justified by its quest for the iconic *idée*. In this perspective one can see that it is the Goethean quest for the visual that informs the rhetorical techniques in Flaubert's novel, a work which is the point of departure for an understanding of fiction for the next two or three generations. Flaubert works logically from the visual status ascribed to writing, for if the text is to exist as image there must be a viewer who sees that image. The autonomy of the artwork demands that a viewer be permanently inscribed within the text, one who, like Berkeley's God, is always watching the image, even when the book is closed. In *Madame Bovary*, for example, at the beginning of the famous agricultural fair, the *comices agricoles*, Flaubert presents a crowded "canvas" thronged with notables, bourgeois, and peasants who have gathered for the event. The rhetoric of presentation turns on a constant attempt to add indices of explicit visualization to the description. The passage is punctuated with a series of "on voyait . . . ," "on admirait . . . ," or "on lisait . . . ," the net effect of which is to suggest a constant act of viewing. The "one" of "one could see. . ." could be taken to be the third person of objective consciousness, though such an interpretation is a quite circular way of justifying the primacy of the visual. The third person is encoded as an "objective" God-like point of view because "objective" is defined as the third person singular.

Of course, consciousness is always consciousness of someone, even if of God. Or, the "one" who constantly sees, notes, or observes in *Madame Bovary* is more like any gallery viewer, ideal or virtual, who might place himself in the viewing perspective inscribed in the text. As in certain Renaissance paintings, the viewer is inscribed within his own field of vision.

The chapter in *Madame Bovary* presenting the juxtaposition of oration and Rodolphe's first seduction of Emma is a bravura attempt to achieve what Joseph Frank called spatialized form. The spatialization of form is another aspect of the writer's attempt to transform linguistic signifiers into iconic emblems. At this macro-level of textual organization Flaubert attempts through the practice of juxtaposition to achieve the kind of iconicity that complements the rhetoric of iconicity he seeks in the use of third-person pronouns. If the sequence making up the *comices agricoles* reads like a shooting script for a film, it is not because there is anything inherently cinematic in narration. Rather this impression results from the way the text is thought out visually in terms of a perceptual field that might correspond to a visual seizure of the events. This is true not only of the vision that might be attributed to the third-person *on*-—the pronoun coded to read as a viewing presence. Flaubert also feels compelled repeatedly, to describe what his characters are seeing at any given moment before allowing them to speak or act. The Flaubertian text is in this way crissed-crossed with a network of observation posts from which "one" looks at characters looking at characters who in turn become observation points from which the world is viewed. The Flaubertian world exists only insofar as it is viewed—which brings us back to Berkeley's God and the Western metaphysics that gives ontological primacy to visual perception.

Modernists from Henry James to early Joyce took the Goethean quest for the essential image, as refracted through Flaubert's example, to be the essential goal of fiction, and in their self-consciousness they made the central theme of the great modernist works to be the epiphanic revelation of that image. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse,* for example, unfolds as the quest for the image that, in its fullness, might offer some form of plenitude in a world otherwise given over to the absurd. Woolf's novel is divided into three parts, each of which presents a different moment in the process leading to that revelation. In the first part, "The Window," Woolf presents a single day in the life of a middle-class English family on holiday, the day before a planned outing that would take them to the lighthouse. As the title of this first section, "The Window," suggests, this day is a moment of fullness, illuminated by the light that passes through the glass. The day is the luminous paradise of planned childhood excursions. The second part's title, "Time Passes," underscores a generalized fall into time. This fall is marked by the decay of the family house and by deaths recorded by an omniscient narrative voice. And finally, the third part, "The Lighthouse," offers the illumination that art grants in the form of the vision that overcomes time. Not only does the protagonist, once a boy, now the man James Ramsay, sail,

after the passage of many years, to the lighthouse and complete the projected excursion; but the artist Lily Briscoe finishes at last the painting begun long ago. This painting offers the novel's final image of permanence. The pictorial revelation completes the book's iconic vision.

Reduced to this outline Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* stands forth as an exemplary modernist solution for the problem of salvation in a world bereft of either a transcendent or an immanent domain of values (the latter as found in Goethe's pantheism). Much as in the case of Proust's chance revelations of essence, Lily's completion of the painting is a kind of fortuituous iconic revelation that may or may not occur to all. As Woolf phrases it, it is one of the "little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark." The visual is, as in Goethe, still the only way to appropriate true being. In Woolf's work, however, the visual gives access to the mind mirroring its own desire, not to the mind mirroring the image or essence of nature as in Goethe and most of the romantics. Nature, as Woolf puts it quite explicitly, is a broken mirror that can no longer offer an essential image.

With the Goethean mirror of nature broken, the minds of men—those other "mirrors"—must create their own vision of permanence. The idea of creation, whatever its theological sources, would seemingly suggest that "vision" is an inappropriate metaphor for writing. But the primacy of the visual is so determining that Woolf cannot abandon her metaphor, even when her rejection of the mirroring relation of essence and mind should lead her in that direction. Lily's vision comes to her from different origins, from fortuitous encounters in railway carriages and omnibuses, but it must be "perpetually remade." For collecting and "reading" the visual essences of the world is a potentially infinite task.

In terms of narrative technique Woolf's use of a multiplicity of narrative perspectives to convey a sense of multiple viewpoints is another and perhaps final step in the visualizing of narrative space. After Goethe, we can trace this visualizing in a development of the rhetoric of fiction that runs from Flaubert through Henry James and culminates in the so-called stream of consciousness technique. Flaubert's indirect discourse had already suggested a sense of a world inhabited by the atomistic self, a world that could only exist as a function of the isolated vision of the solitary subject. I would suggest that the primacy of the visual again dictated this development of narrative technique, for novelists felt increasingly obliged, in the interest of "organic totality," to find rhetorical techniques that would suggest the unity of visual perception. Increasingly language served to report a series of images as supposedly observed by a single subject. In terms of the ontological aspirations of the modernist novelist, this psychologizing created problems. For example, was the locus of iconic revelation to coincide with a character's vision or with the work taken in its totality? Were images to have an "objective" ontological status, or were they merely privileged sense data?

Proust solves some of these problems by using a first-person narrator who is

ultimately not in the work but represents a transcendent point of view that allows for a coincidence between the work's revelation of essence as image and the inner space of the narrating self. Woolf, however, attempts to get around these problems by metaphorically equating the novel *To the Lighthouse* with the painting or work of vision that Lily achieves at the novel's end. Book and painting are joined as a common approach to vision. Mr. Ramsay reads his book ever more quickly as the boat approaches the lighthouse: the book must end with the arrival at the source of luminosity. The novel's final words belong, however, to the painter, to Lily, the artist who is a double for the writer within the novel and, I think, for the novelist Woolf outside the novel. Lily announces she has had her vision, and the novel ends. The novel has completed its vision in a modernist version of *ut pictura poesis*.

It is at this point in the history of literature that my study begins. In the following pages I wish to examine some of the philosophical thought about language that has made problematic our belief in the primacy of the visual; and then to consider the kinds of fiction that writers have created since modernism reached its high point in the works of Woolf and Proust. In the first three chapters I shall examine the thought of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Saussure, and Derrida, for these thinkers strike me as the most important for an understanding of how thought about language has changed our expectations about literature. These chapters are embedded in an unfolding history of literature and, I hope, will take us from modernism to a better understanding of contemporary fiction, or what many critics now call postmodern literature.

After explicating Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Saussure, and Derrida, I discuss postmodern fiction in four chapters, each centered on an area of inquiry that the preceding chapters on language theory have suggested: representation, voice, play, and reference (the latter construed as reference to the order of the real or to history). My central proposition in this part of the study is that the writings of contemporary authors offer numerous homologies with the thought of theorists about language. An understanding of these homologies illuminates not only the practice of fiction but also the uses and limits of theory, for fiction often puts language theory to a kind of experiential test, the results of which at times threaten as much to destroy our acceptance of theory as to confirm it. The exposition of philosophical and linguistic thought that I undertake in the first three chapters finds its full justification in the way this thought is not only useful but often presupposed for an adequate reading of much contemporary fiction.

As for my choice of writers, I have necessarily been limited by my own capacities, both physical and critical. I would propose that the writers I discuss are among the most important of our time, though they are hardly all the important writers of our time. I beg the reader to bear this distinction in mind if he or she finds that some important writer seems to have been neglected. And I should hope that one of the pleasures of reading a critical study is to contribute one's own examples and to continue the experiment that the author has proposed. I

might add that limits of space and time have even obliged me to omit a few of my own favorites. This study aims at a certain exemplarity, not in order to find the "essence" of postmodern fiction but to identify a number of common traits that can be called, in Wittgenstein's phrase, "family resemblances." With a sufficient number of these resemblances in hand one can then sketch out an adequate definition of what we mean today by postmodern fiction. Such a definition hardly need be all inclusive to justify its usefulness.

More than one reader is probably asking at this point why I think that postmodern literature even exists. I defer the answer provisionally, trusting that the strength of demonstration in the following pages will convince him or her that this critical and historical notion is useful; that it proposes an economical way of making some necessary distinctions between earlier and later fiction in this century; that without it we risk not understanding much of what is going on in fiction written in the past two or three decades. One can define postmodernism as tightly or as loosely as one needs for one's particular purposes. My use is rather broad, and I intend to stretch the term back to include some works written in the 1930s. Postmodern is not an attractive term, and I have looked for a better one. But all recent competitors strike me as either misleading in their connotations or really rather silly. "Late modern," as art critics are wont to say about the plastic arts, strikes me as a good compromise, and, were I writing a book stressing continuities, I might have used that term. I am, however, more concerned with differences, since I think we have come to live, since approximately World War II, in a different world from from the one that the modernist inhabited. However, the reader may let Lewis Carroll be his guide to terminology in this study about language and literature: post, late, or not modernism at all, contemporary literature is on our bookshelves—at least a few bookshelves—with its challenge to understand the language we use to write it.

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein

I prefer to begin, in this first of three chapters on thinkers who have shaped our thinking about the nature of language, by considering the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. This beginning does not precisely correspond to a chronology of the works I shall consider. Saussure's work was completed before Wittgenstein began writing, and Heidegger died some twenty years after Wittgenstein. But this study is not a history of recent theories about the nature of language. And, if the work of all three of these men is in many ways rooted in, as well as a response to, ideas about language that developed in the nineteenth century, it seems to me that Wittgenstein's first work, the *Tractatus*, can be immediately situated in the context of the development of modernism that I have outlined in the preceding introduction. In many ways Saussure's earlier founding of structural linguistics seems to be a much more contemporary undertaking, especially in its break with earlier thought about language. History is not composed merely of dates; the way in which works of thought come to create their own history can be a complex process of overlappings and regressions that constitute orderings other than mere chronology.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, apparently written at least in part while its young Austrian author was in the trenches during World War I, has been one of the most influential philosophical works of the twentieth century. This influence was initially due to the reception given to the work by Austrian and English positivists after the war. Today it is also due to the kind of antilanguage mysticism that, paradoxically enough, many writers have taken from the book. But, perhaps even more paradoxically, the work's influence lies in the fact that one must understand the *Tractatus* before one can fully understand what Wittgenstein is attacking in his later writings. For Wittgenstein is unique in the history of philosophy in that his later work is a repudiation of his first work. Thus one turns to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* not only for its intrinsic interest as a seminal work in language theory—one that continues to haunt the contemporary mind— but also for a negative introduction to the later Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In many respects what one might define as the transition from modernism to a postmodern style of thought can be defined as the passage from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Published in 1922 in German and quickly translated into English, the *Tractatus* and its representational theory of language should be viewed in large measure

as a response to the nineteenth-century crisis about the status of language that was felt with particular acuity in Vienna. Viennese intellectual circles at the turn of the century saw a revival in empiricist thought about language and undertook the development of several types of critiques of the limits of language. The *Tractatus* is an expression of both of these developments. In a postmodern perspective it represents a magnificent dead end to the development of thought about language that, using a radically empiricist metaphysics, gives total primacy to the visual. As such, the representational theory of language Wittgenstein proposes in the *Tractatus* appears as the last serious attempt to view language in much the same way that classical metaphysics did, as a mirror of the world. In the *Tractatus*, however, Wittgenstein intends, like Nietzsche before him and the Viennese positivists after him, to put an end to metaphysics. It is not one of the smaller ironies in the history of thought that this brash young man should have accomplished his goal, but almost in spite of his intention, by demonstrating the impossibility of defending the metaphysics upon which a representational view of language is based. As Virginia Woolf lamented in *To the Lighthouse*, the mirror of nature had cracked. The *Tractatus* was in one sense an attempt to patch together enough of that mirror so that we could again see the world reflected in language.

To accomplish that task, as well as to put an end to metaphysical discussion that allows language to mirror too much, Wittgenstein proposes in the introduction to the *Tractatus* that his work will demonstrate the limits of thought, or, more precisely, of language and the expression of thought:

> for in order to be able to set a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit of the thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense [*Unsinn*].[1]

This introduction to the *Tractatus* already suggests a paradox about its central project, for if the task of setting a limit to thought would require that we think the unthinkable, then by analogy the task of setting a limit to what can be said requires that we say the unsayable. In short, the *Tractatus* sets out to say the ineffable, which is not the least of the charms of this antimetaphysical work of metaphysics. The desire to use language to say the ineffable suggests a kind of structural analogy with the aesthetic projects of modernist literature. This modernist side to the *Tractatus* illuminates its contradictory desire. Just as the modernist verbal artefact strives to abolish itself in favor of the ineffable image, so the *Tractatus* offers metaphysical language that will be discarded once it has led to an encounter with the limits of language: the limited mirror-image of the world.

The *Tractatus* has, of course, generated a variety of interpretations both as to its essential purport and to the particulars of its view of language. The work's

cryptic style and nearly hieratic way of proffering its truths are often responsible for interpretative doubt. There is a modernist side to this style. The *Tractatus* resembles, as befits a work that intends to put an end to the history of philosophy, an eschatological form of revelation. It is a table of the laws setting forth the atemporal conditions prerequisite for language's functioning if language is to be meaningful. With appropriate Kafkaesque irony about the law, one may note that all revelations must be interpreted and that it is already an interpretation to state that Wittgenstein's book is legislatively about how, in a priori terms, language must function. This interpretation is at odds with the one Bertrand Russell formulated in his introduction to the English translation. Russell stated there that Wittgenstein "is concerned with the conditions which would have to be fulfilled by a logically perfect language."[2] That Wittgenstein himself did not agree with this interpretation was made clear when he refused to allow Russell's introduction to accompany the German edition of the *Tractatus*. Historical distance enables one today to say that it is plausible to ascribe to these oracular axioms the intention of offering an a priori description of how language—real language—*must* function if it is to mirror the world. This interpretation does not exclude a recognition that confusion about whether the book offers juridical or empirical description of language has been a rich source of the book's suggestiveness.

The *Tractatus* is concerned as much with what language cannot do as with what it can do. Wittgenstein offers not only a description of the realm of the sayable but also posits a realm for that which cannot be said. This is the realm of silence, wherein dwell art, ethics, and the mystical. And it is also plausible to claim that Wittgenstein was as much or more interested in this realm of silence as he was in determining the status of logic. In the English-speaking world he is perhaps best known for having made of logic a propositional calculus; this leads many to suppose that he was some sort of unfeeling thinker without "human" concerns. But a better knowledge of Wittgenstein makes clear that the project of defining the status of the ineffable was proposed as a defense of it, hardly as an attack on such human concerns as religion and values, about which one cannot speak.

Wittgenstein's passionate interest in art and ethics shows what a curious cultural misunderstanding it was for the *Tractatus* to be taken primarily as a work of logical positivism. There is, to be sure, a positivistic thrust to the work's claim that only statements capable of empirical verification—statements that can be *seen* to correspond to a state of affairs in the world—have meaning. It does not seem to me, however, that he ever claims, in positivistic fashion, that the process of verification is a proposition's meaning.[3] As Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin have shown, these positivistic inclinations were characteristic of the Viennese milieu in which Wittgenstein grew up.[4] Positivism was a specifically Viennese reaction to the more general crisis about modernism that was lived with particular intensity in the last years of the Hapsburg empire. From this

background, I would say that Wittgenstein shared the positivist's desire to find some form of language that was reliable, but that he did not share the positivist's faith in scientific language in this respect. Rather than a faith in logic or scientific statements, the starting point of the *Tractatus* was the anguish that Wittgenstein, like other doubtful modernists, felt before the opacity of language, before the impurity and ambiguity that language introduced into attempts to express the essential. Russell's misinterpretation of the *Tractatus* is quite understandable, since the work is very suspicious of real language. It does distrust any language that does not have the formal purity of logic. Nevertheless, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein wants to bring order to real language by finding a kind of minimum security: this minimum is to be secured by the limits of what language can say.[5]

In this perspective the *Tractatus* is an a priori *summa* that attempts to reduce the realm of the meaningful to a series of axioms. The title and the axiomatic presentation recall Spinoza, but I can think of another and perhaps equally apt comparison. By reducing the world to a single book, Wittgenstein has achieved the book that Mallarmé dreamed of—a single work of pure, essential language that would be an Orphic explanation of the earth. The impossible beauty of the *Tractatus* lies in the way Wittgenstein's book has in a sense realized Mallarmé's dream, for the *Tractatus* describes the essential unity of being, thought, and language in seven pure axioms that never descend to examine the practical and transitory world of real experience and real language, the world of Mallarmé's *parole brute*.[6] And Mallarmé's dream of a poetic language of pure symbolism, of pure revelation untouched by language's contingent being, unsullied by the necessities of daily usage, is another side, I think, of the same kind of reaction that led Wittgenstein to seek in logical symbolism the transparent forms of pure thought.

Mallarmé's despair over the impurity of language and Russell's distinction between a proposition's verbal form and its logical form are two sides to a crisis about language that gives full resonance to the problems Wittgenstein wished to solve in writing the *Tractatus*. The uninitiated reader who first opens the work is most likely to be struck, however, by Wittgenstein's intent to elaborate the mathematical logic that Frege and Russell, among others, had developed. It is not easy to evaluate Wittgenstein's attitude toward logic. At the outset of his *Notebooks*, written while he was working on the *Tractatus*, he declares that logic must take care of itself. In the *Tractatus* he insists that the propositions of logic are mere tautologies that say nothing about the world of empirical, contingent facts. But if these timeless, necessary propositions can say nothing, they can seemingly show much: "The fact that the propositions of logic are tautologies *shows* the formal—logical—properties of language and the world [Eigenschaften der Sprache, der Welt]" (6.12). In a world of contingent facts Wittgenstein proposes logic as a kind of visual necessity that illuminates "the scaffolding of the world" (6.12).

Wittgenstein's attitude toward logic is nonetheless ambivalent. On the one

hand he seems possessed by a nearly mystical belief in the power of formal propositions to determine the formal conditions of language—and hence the world. On the other hand he denigrates logic for its incapacity to "say" anything. But perhaps the denigration here is really directed against the notion that "saying" could ever produce anything of interest. Wittgenstein himself recognized his contempt for real language and what it might say when, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, he offers the following description of what had been his attitude toward logic in the *Tractatus:*

> Thought is surrounded by a halo.—Its essence, logic, presents an order, in fact the a priori order of the world: that is, the order of *possibilities*, which must be common to both world and thought. But this order, it seems, must be *utterly simple*. It is *prior* to all experience, must run through all experience; no empirical cloudiness of uncertainty can be allowed to affect it—It must rather be of the purest crystal. But this crystal does not appear as an abstraction; but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is (*Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, no. 5.5563).[7]

"Saying," in contrast to formal logic, can only produce empirical cloudiness, an image that again recalls Mallarmé's attitude toward the impurity of everyday language. Logic can show pure form in crystalline purity, in all its adamantine hardness, as that which will never be subject to the sullying flux of the contingent world. And whatever be the uncontested ingenuity Wittgenstein displayed in developing mathematical logic, it seems clear that underlying this development is an attitude akin to the Platonic mysticism that placed mathematics outside the realm of temporal flow and ordinary language.

Within the limits of Wittgenstein's vision of logic, his theory of language is actually quite simple. It is essentially a revised version of a theory of representation that finds its classical source in Aristotle. It is not unlikely that the final significance of the *Tractatus* will be that, by its very self-conscious impossibility, it marks the closure of the Greek metaphysics of language that has dominated Western thought. Like Aristotle's, Wittgenstein's theory of language is based on the view that language represents the order of thought, which in turn represents the order of the constituent parts of the world. In propositional terms, elementary facts, made up of simple objects in the world, are mirrored by elementary propositions in language that are made up of names. According to the visual metaphor behind the mirroring relationship, language should be transparent. Yet, "empirical cloudiness" does steal into language, and one of Wittgenstein's central tasks is to explain how opacity can find a way into language. His problem is perhaps analogous to that of the theologian who must explain how sin comes to exist in a perfect creation. Wittgenstein must also explain how language can be a deceiver and allow the existence of such aberrations as the propositions of metaphysics. One solution to this problem is simply to declare in an appropriately

draconian fashion that, aside from the empty but necessary tautologies of logic, no proposition has meaning that cannot be empirically verified. Such a legislative decision does singularly reduce the scope of the problem. But like the theologian's explanation that evil is mere negation or illusion, it does little more than solve the problem by denying it.

This positivist thrust to Wittgenstein's thought should not cause one to lose sight of the way Wittgenstein fundamentally distrusted the messy stuff of language itself, especially when contrasted with the purity of logic or, perhaps more importantly, the transcendence of silence. Wittgenstein's attitude toward science is revealing in this respect: if the propositions of science seem to provide a model for meaningful discourse, if they offer a supposed example of a language without opacity, it is because they, too, have a circular, a priori purity and do not speak directly about the world. Such is the sense, for example, of Wittgenstein's way of describing Newtonian mechanics: "Thus it says nothing about the world that it allows itself to be described by Newtonian mechanics: except indeed that it does allow itself to be so described, as indeed is the case" (6.342). Opposed to the a priori rigor of scientific propositions stands ordinary language—*Umgangssprache*. It can deceive because it is subject to ambiguity: "In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification, and so belongs to different symbols—or two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way" (3.323). Confusion arises because we do not note that the same sign *(Zeichen)* can refer to different symbols.

For example, in the sentence "Green is green," the meaning changes according to whether "green" is a proper noun or an adjective. This determination in turn changes the meaning of "is": the verb can be either an expression of identity or an expression of existence. This example is, I think, a rather lame choice to show how philosophical confusion might come about, but it suffices for Wittgenstein's purposes in the *Tractatus*. By establishing an opposition between sign and symbol, he can dismiss the sign—the signifier of ordinary language—and postulate the existence of an ideal-language realm in which the symbol or idealized concept would function in purely univocal terms. This postulate explains why Russell saw in the *Tractatus* only a concern for a "logically perfect language." To get around the errors caused by the polysemantic nature of real language and signs, Wittgenstein claims he needs to invent a *Zeichensprache*—a sign language governed by logical grammar—that would avoid all ambiguity (3.325). Hence the recourse to the formalization of symbolic logic: if logic forms the scaffolding of the world, logic as grammar might describe how to use a language purged of ambiguity. Such a language would be a transcription of what must be.

This project demands, however, more than the mere formalization of the rules of logical operations. It also demands that one show the conditions of possibility that would allow the reduction of language to a system of univocal symbols that

would correspond to the simple constituents of the world. That the world is composed of simple constituents is of course a metaphysical assumption. This assumption justifies, in a circular way, all the theoretical considerations that demonstrate what are the conditions of possibility for language to be conceived as a univocal system of signs. If signs are to refer to only one "object," then there perforce must be simple objects to which they might refer; and if there are simple objects, then they must perforce be named by univocal signs. Wittgenstein's metaphysics and his representational theory of language are joined in an attempt to show that language must be unambiguously anchored in the world. For only if language is anchored in a transparent manner can words have single, simple meanings.

Ambiguity is one of language's sins, one aspect of a kind of ontological lack. Another aspect of this lack is the perverse way in which language often seems to refer only to language. Meanings can be expressed only in terms of other meanings; definitions can be derived only from other definitions, ad infinitum. From this viewpoint language seems to have a dubious autonomy, cut off from the world. It seems almost to hover above the world. To counter this autonomy, to anchor language solidly in the world and to offer a guarantee that meaning is more than mere verbal play, Wittgenstein declares that the world "divides into facts" (1.2). Moreover, these facts are made up of the relationships of simple objects—metaphysically necessary simple constituents that one might find analogous to Leibniz's monads. Mind must not be viewed as an arbitrary producer of meanings, since it is the world's facts that are reproduced as an image in thought: "A logical picture of facts is a thought" (3). Thought, in turn, is represented by language. Meaningful language is a representation of objects whose relations are given in *Sachverhalten*—atomistic facts—the totality of which constitute the world.

That one can give no example of these simple objects is beside the point from a logical point of view. If language is to be anchored in the world, then these simple objects must exist. They are the metaphysically simple or indissoluble objects that are not subject to further definition. To them correspond the univocal, simple names of language. With this one-to-one correspondence of names with things definitions come to an end. The dictionary may be closed forever.

Accompanying this view of language is a correspondence theory of truth. The visual still rules supreme in this theory, since the truth or falsity of elementary propositions—or the expression of the relationship of simple objects in elementary facts—can be *seen* by comparing the proposition with the world. Even the truth of complex propositions, those propositions mirroring a combination of elementary facts, is ultimately grounded in the visual, since their truth value is a function of the truth of elementary propositions. The truth tables Wittgenstein developed in the *Tractatus* give us the truth and falsity of complex propositions, but only when once we know the truth values of the elementary propositions that make them up. All in all, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein provides a powerful

metaphysical vision of how a world without ambiguity might exist in mythic purity. Reality, thought, and language are open to common inspection. All problems of meaning have disappeared—in part by being relegated to the realm of the ineffable.

Central to the theory of language in the *Tractatus* is Wittgenstein's view of language as nomenclature. Since he (as well as Saussure) later rejects the view, it is worth stressing that this biblical perspective on language underwrites the effort Wittgenstein made in the *Tractatus* to guarantee the determinacy of being. Language must be made up of simple names, since "The requirement that simple signs be possible is the requirement that sense be determinate" (3.23). The a priori demand for a univocal correspondence between language and the constituents of reality brings up in addition the problem of how words can represent these postulated constituents. To answer this question, which is a query about the ontological status of language as well as a demand for an explanation of how language functions, Wittgenstein offers us another variation of the notion that language functions visually, that language is a kind of image. (At this point I might also add that Wittgenstein's view of language as *Bild* seems more than a little homologous to the modernist vision of language as a form of partially motivated image.)

Like Locke, Wittgenstein knows that the relation between what he calls sign and symbol is arbitrary, but this relationship is not the locus of the picturing relation. For Wittgenstein the proposition is the picture, a *Bild* representing a state of affairs. A proposition is a picture by virtue of possessing the same logical form as the atomistic fact (2.18). Representation is thus achieved by a formal iconicity whereby language takes on the form of what is represented in the world. However, Wittgenstein's use of the term "representation" is not always clear, and in other passages *Bild* really seems to mean a form of pictorial representation. In any case it is clear that any theory that attributes visual and/or spatial qualities to language raises serious interpretive difficulties. Various interpreters have offered a range of possibilities about what Wittgenstein meant by "image," ranging from analogies with models used by physics to a quite literal iconic interpretation. The variety of analogies Wittgenstein offers in his *Notebooks* does not simplify the issue; there he was intrigued by courtroom maquettes for representing automobile accidents, hieroglyphs, and Maxwell's projective models. All these possibilities probably point to the simple fact that Wittgenstein was not fully certain what he meant when he said language could offer an *abbildende Beziehung*, literally a copying relationship (2.1514). These possibilities also underscore the difficulties any theory faces when it attempts to put representation at the heart of its ontology of language. Representation seems to carry with it a range of visual analogies that inevitably reduces language to a kind of colorless painting.

To return to an earlier remark, however, I should like to stress how much Wittgenstein's metaphysics overlaps the modernist view of language; both wish

in some sense to spatialize language and thus make it apprehensible in visual terms. Whatever be the exact purport of the notion of *Bild*, in Wittgenstein or Goethe, this choice of terminology, even if taken metaphorically, reveals a nostalgia for the directness of revelation that vision can supposedly grant. Wittgenstein's theory of truth again appeals to the primacy of the visual, for truth is a kind of pictorial revelation in which one sees if a proposition's *Bild* exists in a state of analogy wth the world. This kind of iconic theory of truth also comes into play, as we shall see, when a Heidegger attempts to revise the correspondence theory of truth by making it subordinate to the idea of truth being a form of unconcealment. Heidegger accepts, in part at least, the implications underlying such a visual theory and attempts to think them through to their full conclusion: truth is simply a making seen.

Whatever the basic problems involved in the theory of language the *Tractatus* proposes, one should not underestimate the work's continuing appeal, anymore than one should suppose that modernist aesthetics no longer works a continuous seduction on our imagination. Since the metaphysics of representation and the primacy of the visual have hardly disappeared from the cultural repository of our imaginative possibilities, what could be more alluring than a work like the *Tractatus* that both eliminates opacity from language and promises us, at least theoretically, the possibility of an exhaustive knowledge of the world. And which, moreover, in a way that can be both a cause for elation and despair, vouchsafes a transcendent realm of silence for art, ethics, and the mystical.

The realm of silence found in the *Tractatus* has a resolutely contemporary aspect to it, for silence has become one of the more recurrent postmodern metaphors. Related to this seemingly transcendental realm is Wittgenstein's exclusion of the knowing self from the world. No self need be presupposed for propositions to function:

> It is clear, however, that "*A* believes that *p*," "*A* has the thought *p*," and "*A* says *p*" are of the form "*p* says *p*": and this does not involve a correlation of a fact with an object, but rather the correlation of facts by means of the correlation of their objects. (5.542)

The logician or Samuel Beckett may point out that this formulation eliminates the aporia of infinite regression when an assertion is attributed to a subject (of the sort "I know that I know that I know" ad infinitum). But what interests us more is that the knowing self is in effect excluded from language and hence from being known. The knowing self is a transcendental eye that sees its world but cannot see itself seeing. Therefore, no metaphysical self is to be found in the world. Pursuing the analogy with the eye and its visual field, Wittgenstein states, "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world" (5.632). Wittgenstein's visual analogy comparing the subject to the eye that delimits the field of vision gives a kind of extreme formulation of the primacy

of the visual; and it does so by giving ambivalent affirmation to the kind of solipsism that haunts the contemporary mind.

According to the Wittgenstein who was struggling with these issues in his *Notebooks*, solipsism is justified, for its ultimate implications would coincide with the demands of realism:

> This is the way I have travelled: Idealism singles men out from the world as unique, solipsism singles me alone out, and at last I see that I too belong with the rest of the world, and so on the one side *nothing* is left over, and on the other side, as unique, *the world*. In this way idealism leads to realism if it is strictly thought out.[8]

But as the *Tractatus* shows, this "thinking out" is commanded by the visual metaphor that equates the eye with the self, so that "The I of solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point, and there remains the reality that is coordinated with it" (5.64).

The tension between the idea that the "world is my world" (5.641) and the idea that language is anchored in the world is not resolved in the *Tractatus*. Nor is it easy to see how men can use language to communicate if the equation of world, thought, and language entails that my language is my world. Or as Wittgenstein phrases it in one of his most seductive aphorisms: "The limits of my language are the limits of my world" (5.6). Pursuing this line of thought, one finds it difficult to see why one should not reverse the argument expressed in the *Notebooks* and declare that, on the one hand, there is only the self and its language, and that, on the other side of these idiolects, there is nothing. In any case, with this twist the *Tractatus* moves far away from positivism to open up on a metaphysical void of which Wittgenstein was quite conscious.

The final paradox about this book is that its author thought it to be a "metaphysical ladder" that the reader, once he had climbed it, should discard as nonsense. The book's concluding aphorism, perhaps the most famous in modern thought, should then be taken as a self-destructing statement that, acccording to one's disposition, leaves us with a world of meaningful empirical propositions or a realm of more authentic concerns:

> What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence. [Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.] (7)

Wittgenstein himself did put silence into practice for some time. But, with great honesty and courage, he came to realize that the *Tractatus* had to be done again. The result of that self-critique is to be found throughout his various later writings, especially in the *Philosophical Investigations*. To turn from the *Tractatus* to Wittgenstein's later work is, in effect, to turn from one of the most original and rigorous expositions of a representational view of language to a systematic critique of such a representational point of view. Perhaps "systematic"

is a bit misleading, since the goal of Wittgenstein's second body of works is not to be systematic in themselves. Rather, Wittgenstein's intent is to destroy the very idea that there can be a systematic view of language, especially the kind of system proposed by the *Tractatus*. In brief, these later works offer a series of insights that attempt to dismantle—perhaps one might prefer "deconstruct"—those metaphysical views about language that give rise to those errors that are codified in (or as) traditional philosophy. Common to both the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* is the desire to put an end to metaphysics.

Wittgenstein's second philosophy, if such an expression is permissible, did not suddenly appear on the cultural scene in the way that the *Tractatus* did. His second body of thought was slowly elaborated after he returned to Cambridge and after, among other experiences, he had been a teacher in an elementary school in Austria. His experience with children and how they learned language became of fundamental importance to his thought. His later thought was initially disseminated by his teaching and conversations in Cambridge throughout the thirties and forties as he wrote and rewrote drafts of various projects. Such subsequently published manuscripts as *The Blue and the Brown Books, The Philosophical Grammar,* or *Zettel* show how laboriously he worked over his ideas as he sought to overcome the *Tractatus* and its metaphysics; whereas the smaller collections of aphoristic musings such as *Remarks on Colour* or the masterful *On Certainty* suggest the wide range of topics that his thought covered during these years. In their totality these works have quite arguably provoked more original thinking in such varied fields as the foundations of mathematics, philosophy of science, or language theory than any other body of philosophical work in the twentieth century. At least such is the case in the Anglo–Saxon world and, to a lesser extent, in the German world (where the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* often appears better known than the later Wittgenstein). It is hard to estimate Wittgenstein's influence in the Latin world, though recent work in France suggests that Wittgenstein is rapidly becoming known there as well.[9]

The first statement one must make when attempting to offer an exposition of Wittgenstein's later work is that any overly systematic presentation must be in a sense misleading. The purpose of the repetitive pages of minute analysis and questioning in that work is to examine one concrete case of language use after another in order to see what the initial errors of usage are that give rise to the subsequent errors that become the basis for philosophical systems. This strategy is grounded in the refusal to offer any systematizing that might be taken to characterize the "essence" of language. Yet, these investigations do offer a series of views about language, what we can call a series of heuristic axioms, that cumulatively constitute a theory of language. Taking as his first axiom that language has no essence, Wittgenstein insists from the start that no unifying trait or principle underlies all manifestations of language use. One can scarcely underestimate the importance of this axiom, since it justifies the techniques of analysis that constitute one of the most radically antimetaphysical visions in the

history of Western thought. Indeed, I would argue that this emphatic denial of essence heralds as profound a change in twentieth-century thought as did the Cartesian revolution in the seventeenth century.

This rejection of essence is clearly set forth in the early *Blue Book.*[10] In this work Wittgenstein speaks of our "craving for generality" as the "tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term" (p. 17). Problems of analysis arise because we approach language with "contempt for what seems to be less than the general case" (p. 19). If we look, however, at the real use of ordinary language, we find that "there is not one definite class of features which characterize all cases" of using a given word (p. 19). In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein had attempted to draw the boundaries of language as narrowly as possible. He had wanted to find the essence of language, as it were, in the conditions of possibility of the pure proposition. Such a project had necessarily entailed his ignoring real language. By the time he wrote the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein had reversed himself totally, and when dealing with particular instances of real language usage, such as the meanings of the verb, "to wish," he was willing to pursue the endless variations of use that can constitute the meaning of a single word. Multiplicity of meanings is inherent in actual usage: "If . . . you wish to give a definition of wishing, i.e., to draw a sharp boundary, then you are free to draw it as you like; and this boundary will never entirely coincide with the actual usage, as this usage has no sharp boundary" (p. 19). Language has no essence, and thus no essential feature can be attributed to any given word. We are free to draw up definitions as the occasion and our purposes require. But we must not deceive ourselves by taking our definitions to be "complete," and hence as embodying a form of essence, the discriminating universal found in every application of the word.

If no word embodies an essence, if every word can be defined as sharply or as loosely as one needs, then how does one define that central word "language"? One might well ask at this point what kind of truth or generalizations can be offered about that series of phenomena we call language. If language is a series of sui generis manifestations that one can define arbitrarily, what kind of knowledge can we have of language? Or as Wittgenstein's adversary charges in one of the dialogues that Wittgenstein creates in the *Investigations:* "So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself most headache, the part about the *general form of propositions* and of language" (no. 65). In the later works Wittgenstein replies to this accusation by using the double-edged metaphor of games to describe and define language. First, to show what he means by games, Wittgenstein describes them as a series of variegated activities that share no single, essential feature but that can be grouped together in terms of their family resemblances or overlapping traits. The notion of family resemblances allows one in turn to apply the notion of games to language, for such a description of games suggests that they afford a singularly useful metaphor for describing all those various activities we mean by the word "language."

The notion of family resemblances bears a great deal of weight in making the notion of "language games" a plausible one. For the metaphor of family resemblances functions to describe how we can use generic words such as "language" or "games" to speak about the multiple specific things that have no essential commonality but that we speak of with a single word. To "see" these family resemblances that characterize all we call language, Wittgenstein asks us to look at what we call games:

> For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!—Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost.—Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with draughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared.

Which all leads to the following conclusion about family resemblance: "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing; sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (no. 66). Wittgenstein wants to displace the notion of essence or universal trait with this concept of similarities that make up family resemblances. We identify commonality not on the basis of a single feature, but rather in the same way that we identify common identity in a family when, looking at a family gathered together or present in a family photo, we note a number of common features. No single member embodies all the traits, and yet we know that any given member of the family is part of the household. In the same way the series of similarities and nonexclusive features shared to various degrees by various games make up the family resemblances that characterize what we mean when we use the word "game."

Wittgenstein has, as several of his critics have noted, proposed a way of getting around the idealist-nominalist antinomy with regard to the status of universals. There is no "idea" of game in some Platonic heaven, nor is there some abstract concept of game that our minds have garnered from multiple examinations of sense data. What we call games—or language—can be defined with a great deal of latitude. Our definitions will change as our needs change, or as new games or languages evolve during the course of our history. This refusal of essence means that language can be defined by very flexible criteria, though, I hasten to add, it is not immediately apparent why the notion of family resemblances, as exemplified by all that one calls games, should lead to the conclusion that language is a series of games or *Sprachspiele*. Wittgenstein does use other metaphors to describe language; he compares it to tools and to the great variety

of things we can mean by speaking of tools. But it is clear that games are the privileged metaphor for Wittgenstein, one that he uses throughout all his later writings.

The concept of play is a key concept for much contemporary thought; but it does not appear that Wittgenstein was interested in ludic activity as a kind of general explanation of culture, as were such theoreticians as Johan Huizinga or Roger Callois.[11] Rather, one might say that the play metaphor functions as another heuristic axiom for Wittgenstein, and in this respect it overlaps the formulations of other philosophers, anthropologists, and, as we shall see, novelists. And in terms of "family resemblances" it is striking that all three thinkers to be considered here resorted to ludic or play metaphors, especially chess and draughts, to talk about language. In the *Investigations*, when asked what a word is, Wittgenstein's answer is to say that the question is analogous to asking what a chess piece is (no. 108). Saussure had already used the analogy with chess to explain the nature of the linguistic system. And Heidegger came to use an analogy with draughts to offer an example of the autonomy of language. The comparison with chess in particular and ludic activity in general is a way of describing the autonomy of language that illustrates that it is a rule-bound activity that lies beyond the competence of any single speaker to alter. The recourse to ludic metaphors represents, throughout our cultural space, an attempt to rethink language in some way that does not make of the individual subject the primary locus for linguistic activity. These ideas will become clear, I hope, in the pages that follow.

The game metaphor and the attendant investigations into the following of rules and the criteria for the correct following of rules permeate Wittgenstein's later thought. There is, of course, more to a game than merely following rules. A broader, anthropological importance of the game metaphor is implicit in Wittgenstein's answer to his interlocutor in the *Investigations* when his adversary wants to know how many kinds of sentences there are. To which Wittgenstein replies that there are countless kinds. There are no fixed types, set once and for all, since new language games come into existence as others become obsolete and are forgotten: "Here the term 'language-*game*' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life [*Lebensform*]" (no. 23). Wittgenstein seems to be making an anthropological statement to the effect that language, much like play, is a natural activity, embedded in our human history of being in the world. Language is enmeshed in all our activities, since language is constitutive of the sense of the world we live in.

Of course the game metaphor also stresses the rule-bound side of language. It was probably this side of game activity that impressed the metaphor upon Wittgenstein, as is suggested in the early *Philosophical Grammar* where he states that he is "considering language from the standpoint of play according to strict rules [*nach festen Regeln.*]"[12] Like most games, language is bound (usually) by

rules, but following rules is only one, and not necessarily the most interesting, aspect of a game. As Wittgenstein later noted, rules may determine how far you can hit the ball in a tennis match, but not how high. Some aspects of the game are determined by rules; others are not.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the game metaphor is that it places language in public sight. The individual or inner subject cannot be the locus of meaning in language, for all the rules of a game must be a matter of common knowledge and publicly verifiable. Any appeal about what language may or may not mean, any question about the grammar of a given language game, is a matter of public perusal. In a sense there are absolutes in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, for if grammar is a convention established as part of the history of a given society's life form, the grammar of language games is nonetheless the final and absolute arbiter of disputes about meaning. The rules of the game exist publicly for all, and no one can deny them without ceasing to play the game, that is to say, without speaking nonsense. The import of such an absolute for modernist aesthetics would seem to be that the expression of the ineffable is an impossibility. Indeed, it is difficult to say what one might mean by the ineffable, since to say it would make it conform to the public grammar of language. The ineffable is truly the ineffable.

James Ramsay may have dreamed in *To The Lighthouse* of turning his private images into a secret language, but the force of Wittgenstein's analysis of the public nature of meaning would condemn that language to remain forever secret. Images may or may not accompany language as we speak it; but these have no influence on the way language works in the world. Wittgenstein's arguments against the possibility of a private language are motivated by his desire to show that what might take place in our "inner" self can have no bearing on the way language exists as a public and, in a game sense, absolute articulation of the world we share. With or without inner referents, a private language is an impossibility, for there would be no criteria for what this language might mean, either for the subject speaking it or anyone else. A private language might be seen to be as impossible as a private game, in that, if the rules of the game are not known by all, then none—including its inventor—can play it. Like the child who makes up the rules as he goes along in order to assure his chances for winning, the inventor of a private language cannot be given much hearing by his comrades. Moreover, insofar as modernist aesthetics made claims for the invention of private languages, for the expression of the ineffable inner world, it can be said that Wittgenstein's later thought is antimodernist, and such antimodernism is no small component of all that one designates by postmodern thought today. With the game metaphor Wittgenstein at once severs language from images and from its relation to the private self.

The ludic metaphor underscores the public nature of language. Consonant with the notion of family resemblances, it also allows Wittgenstein to stress the indefinite number of games—of types of language use—that go to make up

what we call language. There is something intoxicating about the plurality of games that Wittgenstein sees in the world and the freedom that this plurality offers one in defining the way language works. All the problems of thought seem to lie there before us, ready to be solved, if we are only attentive to the way we speak about them. The world seems no longer to contain hidden depths that language once could not reach. All lies on the surface, open to our inspection.

Yet the surface seems to be made up of infinite extension, and complexity has entered the world as its horizontal dimension. The indefinite number of language games entails an indefinite number of areas of investigation. This view of complexity can create great difficulty for the reader who wants some kind of delimiting principle to operate, since Wittgenstein's work often appears to mimic the complexity of language itself. Every verb Wittgenstein examines in these untidy investigations can enter into an indefinite number of games, the rules for which he elaborates by examining how the games are played. By describing the grammar of words, especially such "mental" verbs as to understand, to intend, to mean, to know, to believe, or to feel, Wittgenstein intends to lay bare those errors that have given rise to philosophical doctrines. The principle of the expansiveness of language and the indefinite number of games it can include is another heuristic axiom. Directed against philosophical thought that would privilege a few key meanings, this principle allows Wittgenstein to account for the wide play of meaning in language but also for the arbitrary and yet publicly verifiable ways we can frame definitions; and it accounts for the inexhaustible and often overlapping taxonomies that language proposes.

Such a view of the expansiveness of language could, of course, induce a mood of despair in anyone who was looking for a way to survey the totality of language. With reference to such a mood Austin jocularly remarked that one should not give up so easily in listing the uses of language, since, even if there were ten thousand of them, this would be "no larger than the number of species of beetles that entomologists have taken pains to list."[13] But this witticism misses the point, even if a list of ten thousand kinds of language use might seem adequate for most of our needs. (Actually a small dictionary, it seems to me, suggests many more thousand of usages than that.) In Wittgenstein's view the open-ended nature of language must be taken as an axiom that accounts for the changes that language constantly undergoes. Language changes as rapidly as does the world; it is as complex as the world, for our human world only exists as it is informed by language.

This relationship of language and the world may sound as if it is not too far from the view proposed by the *Tractatus*, and in one sense it is not. Wittgenstein's later work has, however, reversed the ontology of the earlier work. In the later work it is no longer the world that is mirrored by language. Language no longer performs a visual function. According to the later work, language articulates the space of all that we know as world. In the *Investigations* language is not in any