

IN BETWEEN. BETWEEN SPEECH AND SILENCE

Annie Mollard-Desfour

Linguist, sémiologist CNRS – Paris 13 Villetaneuse and Cergy-Pontoise Universities, France

Words, dictionaries... here is what links me to Cécile Andrieu whose interrogation on language, its importance and its traps is in the centre of her overall achievement. It is this “work” on letters and alphabet, words, dictionaries that is the source of our encounter and of our exchanges. The linguist-lexicographer, specialized in the dictionaries’ writing, could only be enthusiastic, fascinated by this original plastic “research”, and this desire to break “the language crust”, this kind of “skin” which recovers, hides, conceals the main part, and that we must break to reach the language truth. From dual culture, French and Japanese, she could only make this report: there is no objective reality but, in every language and culture, diverse and symbolic representations, a “vision of the world”; we think in words (Bergson) and the limits of “my” language mean the limits of “my” world, “my” reality, “my” perception (Wittgenstein). If the language is an essential communication tool, it is also ambiguities. The artist questions language and culture to make us “rethink the word’s existence in our life” and to recommend us the biggest vigilance.

Her mediums? Written language and communication tools: letters, words, dictionaries - those words collections that are speeches! - Newspapers... She “pulls to pieces”, cuts, slides a letter on the other one, makes them overlap, makes them illegible... Something is missing to the word and we know about this absence without being able to determine its nature. The message becomes murmur, mumbling, language rustle, silences...

In French, *mot* (word) is etymologically connected to “whisper”, “barely audible sound”. *Mot*, from *muttum*, “sound”, from *muttire*, “to produce the sound *mu*, to mutter”, was originally used most of the time on a negative way: *ne parler mot*, literally “do not speak word” (“make silence”), then “talk, speech”. Is it necessary to “make silence” to avoid the unclear, incomprehensible speech? Likewise, the dictionary (from *dictio, onis*, “the act of saying”) says, defines, informs us about senses and uses of one word... but in a culture, at one point of time and of space. Cultural mirror of a society, the dictionary reports stereotypes, reproduces the “standard”, it is a synthesis of the common culture, thus revealing the difficulty of the communication between languages which Cécile Andrieu shows by the confrontation of letters and words of different languages - in particular French and Japanese.

How can we find the Reality which lies dormant, is betrayed, hidden under the weight of the “language crust” which wraps us, protects us such as a second invisible skin, and at the same time blinds us? This meets the ancient concept of colour (in Greek *chroma*, “skin, colour”, and in Latin *colour*, which can be

associated with *celare*, “to hide”), skin-colour or make-up-colour, “surfaces seduction” (Bachelard), a trickery which hides the reality of things... How this Reality can be reached and translated by language? Then, would “neutral” colours allow us to approach this Reality, to avoid false appearances, betrayals and traps of words, talks and speeches? White-Black-Grey. White, like the paper and its silence (as the blank page), space, interstice. Black, like ink and letters, words, language. And grey, from the union of white and black, from their mixture in a “magma” which merge into each other... Grey, this in-between, this “neither nor”, neutral, centre... Grey, like open space, blurred, intermediate, the collision of contradictory elements which cancel each other out: “Rikyu grey”. Neither white nor black... Between black speech and white silence. Synthesis, moment of respiration, of thought, to avoid traps, false friends, pretences... From “*Silent point*”^{*} to “*Bursts of light*” via “*Well*”, “*Voice*”, “*Threshold*”, “*Standard word*”, “*Vertebra*”, “*Culture*”², “*Immolation*”, “*Interstice*”... the artist deconstructs, recreates a continuum, erases borders of words colours - of black and white-, language, persons, to understand and communicate better, with the help of words and beyond the words, in silence and reflection, as those “*Silent stones*”^{*} that echo to the “Zones de silences” (“Silent areas”) of the golden bamboos, Zen meditation place where we can let our eyes float, outside the symbolic fence of the speech, outside space and time.

(Translation Laurence Pauliac)

^{*} Catalogue: « *Silent point* » p.8, « *Bursts of light* » p.44, « *Well* » p.18, « *Voices* » p.20-22, « *Threshold* » p.24, « *Standard word* » p.28, « *Vertebra* » p.30, « *Culture* » p.36, « *Immolation* » p.34, « *Interstice* » p.38, « *Silent stones* » p.12