

## Language as Mimesis

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*Trees show the bodily form of the wind; Waves give vital energy to the moon.* the Zenrin Kushu 1

*I have a terrible lucidity at moments, these days when nature is so beautiful. I am not conscious of myself any more, and the picture comes to me as in a dream.* Vincent Van Gogh 2

1

This essay brings the idea that language is *mimesis*, in something like the Greek sense, into contact with certain Eastern images and ideas. Heidegger defined *mimesis*, well enough for my purposes, as the presentation or production of something in a manner that is typical of something else. (Heidegger 1991, vol I: 173) Keeping this image of *mimesis* in mind, I want to extend to language the inversion of traditional aesthetic theory that Nietzsche accomplished when he thought of art from the point of view of the artist--the *creator* of images--rather than from the point of view of the one who merely views or contemplates the so-called "finished work of art." (71) Just as Nietzsche elevated the artist to prominence in his theory of art, I make language into something that is above all an active *doing* from the speaker's or writer's perspective, and not just a passive receiving from the perspective of a hearer or reader. When Hegel wrote that "the act of dividing is the force and labor of the *understanding*, of the most wonderful and grandest, or rather, of absolute power," (Heidegger 1991, vol III: 223, citing Hegel *Werke* 1832-45, vol II: 25) he wrote from the perspective of a recipient--someone before whom the divisions made by speech appear as something else that they themselves are not. In contrast, what I mean by *mimesis* is very definitely *not* the linguistic picture that is made, taken by an observer to be an act of understanding. Still less do I take it to be a pictorial thing that stands in relation to what it represents. Rather, what I call *mimesis* is the creative energy of picturing itself. And while I do not deny that language is also *poiesis*, in the Greek sense of producing something in words. (Heidegger 1991, vol I: 165), I am far more interested in displaying the act of production itself as image-making--as a kind of *mimesis*--even, or rather especially, in those cases where a speaker or writer produces words that no one takes to be an image.

Derrida portrays *mimesis*'s history of interpretation in the West as always having been "commanded by the process of truth": either *mimesis* is defined as the presentation of the imitated "thing itself," or else it is said to set up "a relation of *homoiosis* or *adaequatio* between two [terms]." (Derrida 1991: 179) But I want to make a different image than either of these. The words and pictures in this essay will try to display an image of something resembling what Derrida merely said (in the language of an emphatically asserted truth, no less) when he wrote: "The Mime is *acting* from the moment he is ruled by no actual action and aims toward no form of verisimilitude." (Derrida 1991: 188) Action fills the moment completely. It squeezes out the space between this and that, and thus always makes "alterity" into a meaningless concept. That is why the problems of language's determinacy or indeterminacy, and of its truth or falsity, stand completely outside the picture that I will be drawing here. For mere recipients of words are the ones who bring these problems to language; it is from their point of view that language is transformed into an object with a truth value that is discovered on the basis of its sense or meaning. Even deconstruction is an activity that always proceeds on the basis of a prior reception of language. Whereas the creator of images in words transcends the very categories "determinacy/indeterminacy" and "true/false." The creator of images is the one who gives us, as her supreme gift, our chance to achieve both problems and solutions in the domain of language. For without her creation there would be no language to be parsed, and none to be talked about. Walter Benjamin once wrote that nature mourns because she is mute. (Benjamin 1986: 329) How small and insignificant are the problems of meaning and truth with which philosophers of language have traditionally busied themselves, when those problems are compared to the lamentable possibility that hearers and readers, left totally bereft of anything to hear or read, would be compelled to mourn in silence on account of what they have lost.

2

To speak or to write is to imitate, a possibility that hieroglyphic script, the gestures and body language that often accompany speaking, and onomatopoeic words all indicate in the way that the visible tip of an iceberg indicates what lies beneath the water's surface. When we say out loud "The bees are buzzing," the sound we make in pronouncing the word "buzzing" imitates the sound that bees make whether we mean it to or not. But over and above this obvious mimetic act, we also imitate the possibility of a situation. Following the lead of Nietzsche and Heraclitus, I will say for the time being that a "situation" is what we take to be true as beings who need to petrify the world of becoming in order to establish ourselves as stable in a sea of ceaseless change. But if beings (ourselves included) are involved in an unstoppable state of flux, what is it that "we" petrify--that "we" imitate--in the language that we call true? Answer: certainly nothing solid enough to be petrified, for otherwise "it" would not be in flux after all. I therefore cannot in good conscience posit a Leibnizian "rational soul or mind"--a monad that operates as "a mirror of the universe of created things"--because this picture stabilizes as essence something the essence of which is instability. (Leibniz 1934: 28-29) Although the following remark must remain obscure for the time being, I will foreshadow later developments by denying that a situation is a happening that occurs in a stable world, and affirming that it is a caricature. This implies that speakers and writers are always creating images of other images. It implies that language is like a hall of mirrors.

How the production of language could ever settle down as imaging, or as anything else for that matter, is a mystery. For if all is in flux, then speech and writing, being part of the whole, are also in flux. The law of becoming, taken as a characterization of the manner in which beings *are*, sweeps everything within its scope, language included. Benjamin acknowledged this when he took the leap of "presupposing language as an ultimate reality, perceptible only in its manifestation, inexplicable and mystical." (Benjamin 1986: 322) Even Wittgenstein, who generally avoided all forms of metaphysical gushing, once found himself "tempted to say that the right expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, though it is not any proposition *in* language, is the existence of language itself." (Wittgenstein 1993: 43-44) And of course, Heidegger's famous, and famously misunderstood, figure of language as "the house of the truth of being" (Heidegger 1998: 243) resonates deeply with the mystery of how words are able to exhibit or uncover anything at all. Nevertheless, I will try to take the mystery of language by the scruff of the neck in this essay, and will make an image of it, in language and in pictures, as the creative act of imaging.

The example of the unintended mimicry that occurs whenever onomatopoeic words are pronounced without any purpose to mime suggests a broader thesis: the *situation* that the creation of language depicts is not the same as the mental images that may be associated with speaking and writing. Of course, considered from the perspective of those who listen to language, when someone says "The bees are buzzing" she draws a picture in sound in which some of the creatures we call "bees" can be seen swarming in the mind's eye and heard droning in the mind's ear by anyone who cares to associate a thought with what the sayer says. A thought is the kind of picture that a creator of language may (but need not) make to herself as or before she speaks or writes, or that a recipient of language may (but need not) make to himself as he listens or reads. Generally speaking, if we do have thoughts of a situation, we tack them up against an indifferently drawn and cartoonish background. In thought and in language, bees usually do not buzz in a particular setting with all of the details filled in, but rather in the washed-out context of a generic "place." However, the relationship between words and the mental images that they may evoke, or be evoked by, is utterly contingent.<sup>3</sup> They may be alike or unlike, depending on the circumstances. This means that the *creation* of language can no more be reduced to the mimicry of any images that may have preceded it in the mind of its creator, than it can be conflated with any of the images that happen to follow it in the minds of its recipients. The idea that language is *mimesis* therefore does not mean that producers of language make copies of mental phenomena. For even if images do happen to float before the mind's eye of someone who is speaking or writing, the images themselves are just as much in flux as their venue--namely, the human body and its context.

The idea that language is a picture is most closely associated with Wittgenstein's early thought. When he wrote in the *Tractatus* that a proposition is a picture he meant this quite literally. (Wittgenstein 1974: Prop. 4.016, 19) Hieroglyphic script obviously depicts the facts that it describes, and according to Wittgenstein "alphabetic script developed out of it without losing what was essential to depiction." (Prop. 4.016, 20) What is essential to depiction, for Wittgenstein, is the depicting entity's capacity to show or display what it depicts. Showing is to saying as popular music is to avant garde music: the one *is* understood, while the other remains to be understood. This is what unites ordinary pictures and everyday propositional signs: as viewers of conventional paintings, and as hearers and readers of

ordinary language, we immediately grasp the sense of what confronts us without needing to have anyone explain it to us. (Prop. 4.02, 21) In the *Tractatus*, the sense of a picture or proposition is what it represents, (Prop. 2.221, 10 and Prop. 4.021, 21) and what it represents is a possible (i.e., imaginable) state of affairs--a combination of objects that, if it exists at all, is located outside the picture or sentence, elsewhere in the world. (Prop. 1-2.01, 5 and Prop. 3.001, 10) The decision between truth or falsity then becomes a matter of comparing the picture or sentence with reality. (Prop.2.21-2.225, 10 and Prop. 4.05-4.06, 23)

When he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein thought that there must be something that pictures (including sentences) have in common with what he called the "world" or "reality," or else they would be unable to portray anything at all. He called what pictures and reality have in common their "pictorial form."<sup>4</sup> He later came to believe that the idea language *had* to have something in common with reality was an "illusion" to which he had foolishly succumbed. (Wittgenstein 1958: 44e) I certainly won't call Wittgenstein a fool, but I will agree with his later thought. So the word "sense," as I use it here, appropriates Wittgenstein's earlier image of showing, but leaves behind his image of something called a "world." Thus, even if a picture or a sentence is not in itself what might be called a caricature, its sense is the *situation* (the caricature) that it shows, and nothing more pretentious than this.

The conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth cleverly displayed our capacity to grasp, in an unmediated way, what shows itself as sense in both pictures and language in a painting called *What is Painting?* (Figure 1)

Kosuth's conceit was to attempt to transform a so-called "work of art," which the Western aesthetic tradition assigns to the domain of the possibly Beautiful, into a non-poetic linguistic text, which that same tradition assigns to the altogether different domain of the possibly True. But his painting cuts both ways, for it also attempts to make a proposition "about" art itself into an element of a work of art. The painting thus offers to collapse, in one bold stroke, the Platonic distinction between Beauty (which is supposed to show itself *sensuously* in the subject's perception of the object) and Truth (which is supposed to show itself *non-sensuously* in the mind of the subject alone). And as for the study of these two domains, Kosuth's painting also intimates a dissolution of the traditional division of labor within philosophy, inherited from the Greeks, between *aisthetike episteme* (knowledge of human sensation and feeling in relation to the beautiful) and *logike episteme* (knowledge of the assertion as the basic form of thought). (Heidegger 1991: 77-78) Nietzsche once complained that many of the painters of his time merely designed scenarios for the various philosophical and scientific theories that intrigued them, and thus were "a thousand miles removed from the old masters, who did not read and only thought of feasting their eyes." (Nietzsche 1968: 437) But when Kosuth painted **ART IS A CREATION FOR THE EYE AND CAN ONLY BE HINTED AT WITH WORDS** as an element of a painting that became important enough to be hung in a great museum, he managed both to prove Nietzsche's point and to deconstruct it at the same time. While Kosuth's artwork is undeniably "theoretical" in motivation, it also shows, when viewed as a theory that happens to be framed within the four corners of a painting, that theory is no stranger to the world of the senses. For the written words that express the aesthetic theory that art is a creation for the eye and can only be hinted at with words, just like the paintings that the old masters made, must first give the eyes a feast of images before the second-order activity that we call "understanding" them can proceed.

I will not join Kosuth here in assaulting the conventional wall that separates beauty from truth, however, because that wall was constructed on the basis of language only after language had made its appearance on the scene. If language is *mimesis*, then the wall between beauty and truth was constructed, and is maintained, by means of linguistic acts that are themselves mimetic. These linguistic acts reproduce various vignettes of separation, as in Plato's image of the social distinction between "the sight-loving, art-loving, practical class" and those people who, being in love with the absolute beauty that shows itself non-sensuously in the mind, "are alone worthy of the name of philosophers." (Plato: 206-7) However basic it may be to philosophy, not to mention ordinary language, the idea of a *distinction* between this thing or class and that thing or class always first communicates itself as an image. The space that separates the sign "this" from the sign "that" in a written sentence, and the time that passes between their enunciation in a spoken sentence, both bear witness to the primitive image of separation that underlies every distinction that is drawn in language. (compare Derrida 1981: 81)

Consider the way that Nietzsche's early critique of Platonism evolved into his conception of will-to-

power. When the young Nietzsche described his philosophy as an "inverted Platonism" that held to the doctrine that "the farther removed from true being, the better it is. Living in semblance as goal," (Heidegger 1991, vol I: 154) he drew a picture in words that turned Platonism's traditional two-world doctrine upside down in a way that is essentially the same as the following picture:

Living in the sensual world of semblance ☺

*is higher and better than*

Living in the world of True Being ☹

So long as the "above and below" structure of Platonism is retained, however, Platonism itself is merely re-arranged in this picture, and not overcome. This is something that the mature Nietzsche, as well as Heidegger a half century later, must have literally *seen* in their mind's eye, judging from their words.<sup>5</sup> They knew that after Kant had successfully relegated the noumenal world-in-itself to the realm of the absolutely unknowable, this left the apparent world (Kant re-christened it the world of phenomena) still lodged within Plato's same old rickety two-world structure. Only now that structure visibly lacked any substance or even possible substance that could fill the niche that had been traditionally occupied by the true world. Left without any antithesis to the world of semblance that he had crammed into the top part of his picture of "inverted Platonism," Nietzsche later came to see that the whole image had to be abandoned, and something different put in its place. He thus created a new picture that reduced the so-called "apparent world" to "a specific mode of action on the world, *emanating from a center*." (Heidegger 1991: 305) Hence he began to draw the image of a will-to-power that reaches out beyond itself as if it were the center of a circle that determines, but is not identical to, its circumference.<sup>6</sup>

Here is another example: Nietzsche's strategy of projecting the will as a "center" of action is quite similar to Heidegger's appropriation of the Greek word *ekstasis* to indicate that man, existing in the form of Dasein (literally "being-there"), always goes beyond himself on the basis of himself. To say that something is the same as itself and also different than itself violates the laws of identity and non-contradiction in a way that threatens incoherence unless the nakedness of the words that express the contradiction is clothed in an image that somehow portrays the thing as itself *and* as alterity. So Heidegger's concept of human beings as the kind of beings that also go beyond themselves was rescued, if at all, from the status of a madman's doodle only because of the image of "standing outside" that the word *ekstasis* brought with it. This image allowed Heidegger to depict man's relation to time as follows:

Ecstases are not simply raptures in which one gets carried away. Rather, there belongs to each ekstasis a 'whither' to which one is carried away. This "whither" of the ekstasis we call the "horizontal schema." In each of the three ecstases the ecstatic horizon is different. The schema in which Dasein comes towards itself *futurely*, whether authentically or inauthentically, is the "*for-the-sake-of-itself*." The schema in which Dasein is disclosed to itself in a state-of-mind as thrown, is to be taken as that *in the face of which* it has been thrown and *to which* it has been abandoned. In existing for the sake of itself in abandonment to itself as something that has been thrown, Dasein, as Being-alongside, is at the same time making present. The horizontal schema for the *Present* is defined by the "*in-order-to*." (Heidegger 1962: 416)

With the help of the word *ekstasis*, his idea that Dasein could stretch itself into something more than itself--a "more" that Dasein could then be "outside of" at the inception of its moment of stretching beyond--thus could make itself visible as an image to the mind's eye. How? Well, Heidegger's idea *can* become visible to the mind's eye in much the same way that Marcel Duchamp's celebrated *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Figure 2) makes visible, to the physical eye, the artist's interpretation of motion as it is considered from the standpoint of the moment. In his painting, Duchamp depicts motion as a *plurality* of bodies that trail or emerge out of the *unity* of a body that, when it is in the very middle of its descent on the staircase, is seen to be literally "outside of" all its previous and subsequent positions. Thereby *this* becomes *not-this* in time, while still somehow retaining its claim to self-identity.

It follows from what I have just said about the nature of certain philosophical imagery that we would not make any progress towards understanding the general idea that language is *mimesis* if we were to hastily reproduce counter-images of the many ways that beauty and truth, seeming and being, will and action, and Dasein and itself are *not* separated. For images of separation and images of merger rest on

the common ground of what makes them all images. The twelfth century Chinese thinker Wansong Xingxiu thought this same thought about images in one of his remarks on the nature of morality. He wrote that right and wrong are "a narrow drum beaten on both sides." (Cleary 1998: 70) It is important to understand that Wansung did not create the image of a drum as a *metaphor* for right and wrong. A metaphor is a method of comparison whereby the image of one thing is offered to shed light on the real nature of another. But in an earlier part of his monumental *Book of Serenity*, Wansung made another image that announced his determination to prevent any of his subsequent images of right and wrong from sinking to the level of the merely metaphorical in this sense. He had written: "'Right' can affirm nothing, 'wrong' contains no real denial." (67) Wansung therefore did not project the image of right and wrong as a narrow drum beaten on both sides in order to offer a picture to be compared with something solid that was not an image, standing outside the image of a drum, that everybody knew under the names "right" and "wrong." Rather, Wansung's saying projected none other than an image of right and wrong *themselves* as a narrow drum beaten on both sides. In doing so he indelibly marked all other linguistic projections of right and wrong as belonging to the same order as the image of a drum. He marked them all as being the creation of images by speakers and writers, for his image of a drum that is beaten on both sides has no room within it for the additional image of someone who is merely sitting there, listening to the drum-beats.

M.C. Escher's drawing entitled *Hand With Reflecting Sphere* (Figure 3) makes the general import of what I am trying to say about Wansung's aphorism visible to the physical eye by means of a conventional picture.

While contemplating Escher's seductive drawing the temptation is to see what is shown in the picture of the reflecting sphere as merely an image, and to see the picture of the hand that holds the sphere as more or less real. Even if we "know" that everything contained within the picture is a representation, we have this peculiar inclination to say that the drawing represents a "real" hand, but that it only represents the "image" of the head, torso, arms, and room that are shown in the reflecting sphere. Nevertheless, the artist had to draw both the hand *and* the sphere on a piece of paper in order to accomplish this work, and this means that both the hand and the items in the sphere are created images. In Escher's drawing, as seen from the standpoint of its creator, the image of the hand and the image of the sphere imaging stand on exactly the same level. Which is to say, they stand together with Wansung's image of right and wrong as a narrow drum beaten on both sides in a vast realm of images.

As creative acts, Wansung's saying and Escher's drawing emancipate and democratize images: they depict a polity of form in which all images are created equal. But as I have just noted, those who merely *receive* images have a pervasive tendency to make the images into something other than what they are. Consider the phenomenon of the moon's reflection in a pool of water on a clear night. This phenomenon, a favorite image in Zen Buddhism, was described by the American Zen enthusiast Alan Watts in privative terms as follows: "When there is no water, there is no moon-in-the-water, and likewise when there is no moon." (Eicho: 119) Watts described the phenomenon in this way to get across what he took to be a metaphor for the relation between subject ("likened" to the water) and object ("likened" to the moon). (118-9) But a reflection of the moon in a pool of water is really just another image, after all. Clinging to it as a metaphor *for* the relation between two other things--things that are somehow distilled out of the world of becoming as undeniably solid and frozen entities that correspond to the words "subject" and "object"--is just another form of self-deception. The eighth century Chinese poet Hanshan exposed the great danger of self-deception lurking in the figure of moon-in-the-water this way:

A lonely moon is mirrored in the cold pool,  
Down in the pool there is not really a moon.  
The only moon is in the sky above.  
I sing to you this one piece of song;  
But in the song there is not any Zen. (Harris 1999: 68)

Another way to put this is to say that if language is *mimesis*, then what we call a metaphor is not really a comparison between this thing and that thing, or between a thing and the image of something else; instead, a metaphor is nothing other than the juxtaposition of two images.

The sixteenth century Japanese artist Tohaku drew a picture of the kind of receiver of images who takes images to be what they are not in a work he called *Monkey Reaching for the Moon*. (Figure 4) In Tohaku's drawing the monkey sees the reflection of the moon in the water and reaches for it as if it

were the moon itself. But of course, if the monkey ever stretches his paw far enough to reach the water, as one commentator puts it, "he'll get a wet paw and he'll destroy the reflection." (Tohaku: 92) And that is exactly what we do whenever we are beguiled, or repelled, by the images that philosophers draw in their treatises: we reach into a reflecting pool of words as if the images that we see there either were the world itself, or a distortion of that world. As receivers of philosophical language that appeals to us, we mistake the images that a speaker or writer makes for what we take to be the world, as it is frozen in the images. And if we do not like the philosopher's images, we mistake our *own* created image of a frozen world as being something true with which the rejected images fail to correspond. In the former case, we are like Tahaku's monkey, reaching for the moon that we see reflected in the philosopher's words. But we are like the monkey in the latter case, too, for then we reach for the different moon that we see reflected in our own words. In either case we destroy the images themselves by failing to recognize them *as* images. Nietzsche's ambiguous remark that "philosophers are prejudiced against appearance, change, pain, death, the corporeal, the senses, fate and bondage, the aimless" (Nietzsche 1968: 220) really ought to be firmed up and clarified. It ought to be amended to stipulate that only those people (philosophers included) who *read* and *hear* the words that philosophers make are the ones who are prejudiced against these things. For one can exhibit prejudice by reaching for an image only after it has been created.

### 3

Some of the pictures that we draw in language are like films. The most essential characteristic of a motion picture is that it unfolds itself in such a way that only some of it is perceived by the senses at any given time. Nevertheless, a motion picture mimes. It mimes a *situation* (a caricature) that unfolds itself in time. The movie *Casablanca*, for instance, reproduces a situation in which a piece of paper with printing on it called a "letter of transit" stands in a determinate relation to the actions of the film's leading characters. The letter of transit is depicted as the cause and ground--the *essential* cause and ground--of what these characters do. A motion picture, like a still picture, removes all contingency from the relations among its elements. If, as Wittgenstein held, "What constitutes a picture is that its elements are related to one another in a determinate way" (Wittgenstein 1974: Prop. 2.41, 9), then in a motion picture the relations of one frame to the next, and hence of one image and bit of dialogue to the next, are also determinate. No matter how many times you watch *Casablanca*, the letter of transit will still permit Ilsa and Victor Laszlo to escape to Lisbon at the end of the picture. The letter of transit will never fail to perform this function in the situation that is pictured in the movie. A motion picture is therefore the frozen image of a situation despite the fact that its characters seem to move, for they always move the same way and in exactly the same sequence.

Philosophy, to the extent that it manifests itself as language, is often mimetic in the way that a motion picture is. That is, philosophy sometimes represents moving pictures instead of ones that stand still. Spinoza's idea that every moment follows its predecessor as a matter of logical necessity is one example. (68) An even more spectacular example is Nietzsche's image of the eternal return of the same: "existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without finale of nothingness." (Nietzsche 1968: 35) The idea that philosophical language projects pictures, including motion pictures, should not be taken to mean the same as the thesis that philosophical language is metaphorical. Philosophy is only full of metaphors from the standpoint of its recipients. Readers of philosophy are the ones who discover images in it, and who then contrast the images they find with what the philosophical work is supposed to be "about." The popular if not trendy thesis that "metaphor suffuses all supposedly abstract philosophical language." <sup>7</sup> (Romano 1999: 27) could only have been written by a reader. For creators of images have no time to compare what they have said or written with something else. They are too busy speaking and writing.

Kant's theory of good willing provides a particularly useful illustration of philosophy seen as the production of motion pictures. In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Morals*, Kant imagined a will that first gives itself the maxim of its future action, and then follows the maxim that it has given itself. His words made a motion picture, because the will that he imagined needs a span of time to do what Kant said it ought to do. His picture of the way that the maxim--the so-called "subjective principle of action"--works is the condition of the possibility (in the Kantian sense) of the categorical imperative. For the will is supposed to be guided by the categorical imperative ("Act only on a maxim by which you can will that it, at the same time, should become a general law") in constructing the maxim that it should follow (187), and this presupposes that the possibility of a law-governed will has already been sketched in as an

actual element of the movie. Thus, Kant's motion picture of the essence of morality shows a will that is *doubly* compelled: compelled by the categorical imperative to construct just this subjective principle of action (instead of another one), and then compelled by the subjective principle of action that it has constructed to do just this deed (as opposed to some other deed). In drawing a distinction between subjective and objective principles of action, Kant admitted the possibility that the will might misread what the categorical imperative requires it to construct as its maxim.<sup>8</sup> But he omitted to extend the plot line that is drawn by this earlier admission into the later interaction between the now-constructed subjective principle of action and the act of will that *it* is supposed to compel. For example, Kant gave the case of a man contemplating suicide, and depicted the maxim that the man is considering as follows: "Out of self-love I consider it a principle to shorten my life when continuing it is likely to bring more misfortune than satisfaction." (187)

This principle of self-love falls short of what the categorical imperative requires, Kant said, because if generalized it would lead to a system of nature that contradicted itself.<sup>9</sup> But this is only because Kant read the man's maxim of action as *compelling* a certain kind of action: suicide when the right circumstances obtain. The image of the situation that he created does not portray the man misreading the maxim that he had constructed in an earlier scene of the movie, or reading it in a non-standard way--for example, to forbid suicide in this or all circumstances. And this omission cannot be explained on the ground that such possibilities were not among those images that had been deposited in Kant before he wrote down his theory, for it is hard to believe that he never witnessed anyone reading a linguistic sign to mean or require something that surprised him. Indeed, I am not interested in *explaining* his omission here at all--for the idea of language as *mimesis* does not explain language but depict it, and this means that it also sweeps within its scope all of the texts that we call "explanations." Instead, I am content to say merely that the historical Kant made "Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Morals*" with the plot line that it does have, as opposed to some other plot line, just as *Casablanca* was made with the Laszlos escaping on the basis of the letter of transit, rather than staying in *Casablanca* and turning the letter of transit into, say, an origami figure.

The creator Kant rejected moral theories that took consequences into account, for he saw that the will might try mightily to do the right thing yet fail to accomplish its purpose owing to factors beyond its control. He wanted to escape this *contingent* relation between the act of willing and what the will accomplishes as if it were quicksand--for quicksand is no suitable building site for a moral theory. So he built his theory on the site of a good will--a will that acts according to the maxims that the categorical imperative requires it to construct. Thus, Kant took the image of the case in which we follow a rule-sign like "*R*" as a ground of our subsequent actions in such a way that we feel compelled by "*R*" to do just what we do, and he made this image into a story about what the moral person always does. He omitted to say that there is no necessity--no absence of contingency--in feeling compelled by any rule, and moreover, no necessary connection between any rule-sign and feeling compelled to do this or that *particular* thing. From the point of view of a certain kind of critical *recipient* of Kant's words, his theory can be seen as reproducing an omission that runs like a thread that is visibly missing through all of Western philosophy: the suppression of the possibility of contingency in the relation between one state of affairs and another--in Kant's case, between a text (the maxim) and what a person does with it. In this respect, Kant's theory of morality even keeps company with many of the thinkers who are called "postmodern"--Derrida, for example, who lets loose with an image of determinacy every once in a while despite the fact that his work is usually overflowing with images of textual indeterminacy.<sup>10</sup>

As a movie-maker, therefore, Kant did not direct the actor that he called the "will" to mime uncertainty or contingency into the relation between the maxim and the way that the will reads that text as the basis for its subsequent act of willing. Well, so what? The element of the maxim, in Kant's movie, merely plays the same kind of role that the letter of transit plays in *Casablanca*: no matter how many times you look at Kant's motion picture of moral action, the maxim will always be set in a determinate relation to the act of will that proceeds on the basis of it and it alone. The rule-sign "*R*" will always be followed by the will performing the action *R*--an action, that is, that does not *surprise* us and leave us with the impression that the will acted contrary to what a standard interpretation of "*R*" required. For this is what *distinguishes* the relation between maxim and willing-on-the-basis-of-the-maxim from the relation between an act of will and what the will "accidentally" accomplishes-in-the-world in the motion picture of morality that Kant made: the one *never* surprises us, whereas the other so often surprises us that we have a name for it--the tragedy of unintended consequences. Moreover, the kind of snotty realization that people like Kant did not create a better (or at least different) picture of morality because of this or that presupposition that they held is always arrived at by someone who is sitting in the audience. Wittgenstein almost developed this point into a rule of etiquette for philosophizing when he wrote,

towards the end of his life: "It is true that we can compare a picture that is firmly rooted in us to a superstition; but it is equally true that we *always* eventually have to reach some firm ground, either a picture or something else, so that a picture which is at the root of all our thinking is to be respected and not treated as a superstition."<sup>11</sup> But whether or not their words ought to be respected by those who hear and read them, philosophers, just like everyone else who speaks or writes, always wind up creating *some* picture.

#### 4

As the previous discussion of Kant's theory of good willing may suggest, the picture of language as a picture that is drawn in the *Tractatus* and in Joseph Kosuth's *What is Painting?* will not be incorporated willy-nilly into the one that I am trying to draw here. For although these pictures of language were created, they were drawn from the perspective of the receiver of images--someone who takes or interprets a sentence, in the form of an inert linguistic sign, to represent or say something about something else that is not an image. This can be seen from the fact that both the beauty of a picture and the sense and truth of a statement are aspects of the picture and the statement that are beheld by an observer only after there is something for him to look at. I am keen to depict the prior act of creation that brings language into being, and will leave an observer's reactions to it for another day. Therefore, that the pictures we draw in language are not always, or even only infrequently, recognized or brought to mind by anyone is immaterial to my project, just as a solitary pantomime in the forest is still a pantomime even when no one else is there to watch it. One might even go so far as to say that speaking and writing transform the world into a vast tableau vivant, where everyone is pantomiming, as it were, even in cases where hardly anyone is watching. (Wittgenstein 1958: Prop. 4.0311, 22) Nevertheless, I say that when we speak and write we are like Wallace Stevens's queen, whose "green mind" and "major manner" make the world around her green. (Stevens 1990: 339) And lest this last point be misunderstood as an unaccountable shift in perspective, let it be repeated once again that it is not essential to the picture I am drawing here that there exists a person, or even a god,<sup>12</sup> who sees or understands the images that we make in language as image-making.

The activity of producing images in words is what Walter Benjamin called, in his essay *On the Mimetic Faculty*, the creation of "non-sensuous similarity." (Benjamin 1986: 334) The phrase "non-sensuous similarity" indicates that we do not see the situation that is imitated by sentences like "The bees are buzzing" with the eyes of our body. Indeed, we do not see the imitated situation even if bees truly are buzzing before our eyes, for the bees that we imitate are not real bees at all. Any real bees that come before us now are merely seen, as Stevens has it, "in the blind/Forward of the eye that, in its backward, sees/The greater seeming of the major mind." (Stevens 1990: 340) Language does not represent present beings in images, even though it would be perfectly appropriate to say that speaking and writing do respond in various ways to their rhythm. The creation of language could not depict beings that have emerged into the present unless the time that we call "now" has previously furnished them with a site that is stable and enduring enough for them to sit still for the execution of their portraits. But the gateway of the present is more than razor-thin--it is thinner even than the thinnest thing--and through that gateway beings keep on flitting in a ceaseless blur. Even the most adept portraitist and the most sensitive singer do not possess quick enough reflexes to draw or sing the images of ones that are as rapid and ephemeral as these. That is why Wittgenstein's first effort to understand language as a picture *of reality* will not be re-drawn here. (Wittgenstein 1958: Prop. 4.01, 19) A proposition is a picture, to be sure, but it is not a picture of a stable set of beings that are trapped and held immobile in the amber of a "world" that is itself at rest. My picture of language as *mimesis* unabashedly reproduces Heraclitus's doctrine that present beings are in a perpetual state of becoming on a ground that, although it remains (unaccountably) stable enough in itself to support the perpetual flux of beings, is not itself a being or collection of beings that could be copied.<sup>13</sup> The sentence "The blooming red rose *is*" does portray a situation, but it does not portray what corresponds to the word "is" in the sentence. It does not mime what makes blooming, not to mention miming itself, possible: namely, that there is *just barely enough time* allotted for them both to stand upright within the continuously and mysteriously renewed extrusion of space from time that we call "the present."

Language mimes, but it does not mimic what is going on *right now*. Does it reproduce past beings, then? Answer: No. If the present beings that rush through the razor-thin gateway of the now-time do not sit still long enough to be copied--if the most that can be glimpsed of them is the blur of their passing--then there does not exist even the blur of any past beings for us to find and reproduce in the activity of



speaking and writing. For past beings' moments of passing with us through the now-time are irretrievably gone. Past beings are never present in the form of a presence. What is past is gone away, and so even if we believe that past beings are somehow lodged securely in the past, it cannot be them that we imitate in speech and writing. For their place of lodgement lies in the deepest shadows, far behind us and beyond our line of sight. The utter absence of the past itself in the present means that an account of image and imaging is required that does not lean upon the past itself as the value of  $x$  in the expression "the image of  $x$ ."

If we do not copy present or past beings in speech and writing, then what *do* we imitate, if language is *mimesis*? Answer: When we say things like "The bees are buzzing" we project a composite of pictures of bees buzzing that the past has deposited in us. Benjamin had something like this in mind when he referred to the images encountered in language as "dialectics at a standstill." In *The Arcades Project* he characterized the relation of what-has-been to the now as dialectical--as an "*image suddenly emergent*," rather than as a simple temporal progression: "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation." (Benjamin 1999: 462)

In language we make pictures of pictures, and unless we are poets they are usually pretty primitive pictures at that. The pictures from the past that we imitate in language owe their life to experience, but at the same time they are not copies of this or that past experience. For an experience, being past, is no longer here to be copied. To be sure, what has been deposited in us does not exclude those images that belong to the recent past--or even the very recent past. Nevertheless, the picture of language as *mimesis* that I am drawing here has no room within it for anything like Husserl's notion of our "retention" of the recent past as a "consciousness of what has just been." (Husserl 1991: 33-34) This is not because Husserl's brand of phenomenology is incorrect, but because the various ways in which images are deposited in us are completely irrelevant to my picture of language as *mimesis*. For thinkers like Husserl want to explain the conditions of the possibility of internal time-consciousness by introspection into what emerges in consciousness as a consequence of the subject's reception of sensedata; whereas I want to telescope time down to the very moment of creating images in speech and writing. If, as Einstein said, "the differentiation between sense impressions and images is impossible" (Einstein 1954: 291), then positing sense impressions as the ground of linguistic images comes down to saying that images are the ground of images. But more to the point, in the realm of language, at least, there is nothing that is not *first* represented as an image. This even includes the image of the sense impression as something that we "receive." In a fundamental sort of way, therefore, it almost does not matter for the idea of language as *mimesis* where or how we get the images that are deposited in us. The important thing is *that* we reproduce them in language. Stevens sings more or less the same thought this way: "everything we say/Of the past is description without place, a cast/Of the imagination, made in sound." (Stevens 1990: 345-46)

Without the linguistic bronzes that we cast from what already lies within us, we would have to stand mute before all of the beings that swarm in front of us and with us through the gateway of the now-time. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger famously portrayed this thesis in terms of our already Being-in-the-world *before* we articulate anything in language. He projected language as being "existentially equi-primordial with state-of-mind and understanding," and asserted that "the intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it." (Heidegger 1962: 203) Bees are intelligible as "bees"; roses as "roses." Language, in Heidegger's image of it, pre-oriens us to certain realms of beings--those with which we are already concerned in some way--and it pre-commits us to discussing them in terms that are already ready-to-hand for our appropriation in discourse. However path-breaking and important this way of thinking about language may be, however, it is still too obviously chained to the perspective of the recipient of language to depict what I want to say here. This is shown by the fact that Heidegger found the payoff for his way of thinking in the ability it gave him to decipher and go beneath the "hidden" ways of understanding that speakers reveal in their "idle talk" ("*Gerede*"). (211) And as for philosophy, he wrote that he wanted to "*destroy* the traditional content of ancient ontology" (44), thereby revealing a recipient's typical fascination with what philosophical language is supposed to be "saying." In *Being and Time* (unlike his later work on language),<sup>14</sup> Heidegger played the role of an angry recipient of other people's images, even though it is also true that he created his own spectacular images with the words that he wrote. Perhaps this feature of his thought accounts for why so many academics over the years have been able to disparage and sneer at the ideas that are reflected in common speech, and in that of their political opponents, with the help of Heidegger's words. For only those who are content to play the role of mere recipients of others' words

are able to interpret them as the expression of a point of view to be disparaged and sneered at. It takes *readers* and *hearers* to uncover the points of view, the ideological presuppositions, and the deep and surface grammars of those who speak and write, and these activities are therefore always parasitic on what must be taken as primordial by any philosophy of language that aspires to get to the root of language--namely, its *production*.

If you can imagine the production of language, even "idle talk," as a spontaneous act of creation--let it even be a joyful or hateful act, if that helps--then you will begin to get a glimpse of the picture that I am trying to draw. Something like this image of creative speaking and writing shines out hopefully from the following additional lines written by Wallace Stevens, a man who was probably the most philosophically attuned poet of his age:

Thus the theory of description matters most. It is the theory of the word for those  
For whom the word is the making of the world, The buzzing world and lipping firmament. It is a world of words to  
the end of it, In which nothing solid is its solid self. (Stevens 1990: 345)

To recapitulate in the form of a provisional sketch: The rhythm of the sensuous world of beings deposits pictures in us that we imitate in language when we say, in rhythm with the further rhythm of that restless world, that we are describing reality as it is. Instead of miming present or past beings, we reproduce what is in us when we speak and write. The pictures that we draw in language are no more pictures of a present or past reality than Van Gogh's painting *Flowering Plum Tree (after Hiroshige)* (front cover) is a picture of what Ichiryusai Hiroshige had before him when he drew the sketch that became the wood-block print *Plum Estate, Uedo* (back cover). Van Gogh had a copy of Hiroshige's print before him as he painted, but surely no one would say that his own composition "represents" what Hiroshige saw with his eyes over thirty years before. Indeed, it is not even right to say that Van Gogh's *Flowering Plum Tree (after Hiroshige)* "represents" Hiroshige's *print*. Van Gogh's creative work of making his own image of a plum tree did not merely mechanically reproduce features that were *frozen* in Hiroshige's print--for that print was also a being like Van Gogh, caught in the flux of becoming.

One could rightly say that we mime ourselves when we use language, but only so long as this is not taken to mean that we replicate some self-sufficient monad that is sealed off from the world. For the images that are in us, *as us*, correspond to what Yeats called *Spiritus Mundi*: "a general storehouse of images which have ceased to be the property of any personality or spirit." (Finneran 1989: 493) When we speak or write we mime the residue of living-with-other-beings that has made us into the beings that we are, hurtling through the gateway of the now-time with other beings as if we were all crammed together on some fantastic roller-coaster ride. Thus, for example, if I now were to describe summer as a fruitful time of year, I would be imitating a picture that lies within me of the many fruitful summers through which I have lived, or that others have recounted to me. The thesis that such a description is at bottom an act of *self*-miming is thus akin to what Arcimboldo made starkly visible when he painted the canvas he called *Summer* (Figure 5).

The images of fruits and vegetables that Arcimboldo assembled as summer in the form of a man is a kind of self-portrait, and this remains so whether or not the historical Arcimboldo had himself in mind as the model for the man he painted. This rather dogmatic assertion about his painting may help to limn the idea that as I am writing down the sentence "Summer is a fruitful time of year" I am not depicting a present or past event outside of me called "summer." Rather, I am (or rather just was) depicting the caricature of a summer within me, drawn by means of the grammatical conventions that frame all of the linguistic images that we make. Heidegger put the matter this way: "The representing I is far more *essentially* and necessarily *co*-represented in every 'I represent', namely as something toward which, back to which, and *before* which every represented thing is placed." (1991: vol IV, 107) What comes into us from the past, in contrast to the past itself, somehow manages to abide just long enough to be copied. These pictures of and from the past thus provide an element that is stable enough to support the logical structure of *mimesis*--for copying must copy *something* in order to be comprehensible as copying.

## 5

To say that we copy images that are in us when we speak and write would seem to entail the view that the now-time yields pauses that last long enough for us first to take a backward glance at what lies

within us, and then to reproduce what we see. Derrida put the general form of this problem as follows: "Within the movement of the *mimēsthai*, the relation of the mime to the mimed, of the reproducer to the reproduced, is always a relation to a *past present*. The imitated comes before the imitator. Whence the problem of time." (1991: 176) But I have already said that the gateway of the now-time is thinner than even the thinnest thing, and this logically excludes the idea of a gap in time--a *chorismos*--that could furnish the necessary relation of distinguishability between a creator and a past that is somehow present to her. (Heidegger 1991: vol III, 58) The notion of pictures "in" us should therefore strike you as bad draftsmanship--way too committed to the view that subjectivity is a container that we can peer inside of, and hence inconsistent with the Heraclitean doctrine of perpetual flux that is drawn elsewhere in the picture. It would seem that the now-time that I have drawn cannot support the burden of the idea that language is *mimesis*, except perhaps in the way that the canvas of a Surrealist painter might show the most weighty thing being held aloft, impossibly, by the most diaphanous.<sup>15</sup> And it is true: the motheaten idea that language describes images, including memory images, in the way that a calculating machine reads data already located inside of it is not a picture that I want to re-draw here. My picture of language from the point of view of a creator of images therefore stands in need of the image of a kind of imaging that does not require even the slightest backward glance by the creator.

Fortunately, an image that suffices to this end is close at hand: that of the irregular reflecting surface. Such a surface--a convex mirror, for instance--has the felicitous property of seeming to simultaneously absorb the flux of beings that come before it and to send out their images in an arrangement that is transformed without having been preceded by an act of transformation. That the time of physics reckons a delay in mirroring measured by the speed of light is all the better, for this usefully displays the idea that the image emerging from a mirror will always have been preceded, however briefly, by something that was brought to bear on the mirror's surface in the past. The speed of light, being the fastest thing we know, is thus the best agent for creating the gap in time that *mimesis* requires in the image that I am drawing. Within this tiny gap lies the image of the only time to act that we will ever get. Moreover, the convex mirror responds to the dance of beings in front of it by throwing back a peculiarly reconfigured image that is unmistakable to observers as an image. This image is made in accordance with the geometric properties of the particular mirror, and it is comprehensible to us without our needing to posit an "act" of imaging that intercedes between reception and transmission. Parmigianino's painting *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (Figure 6) yields up a beautifully crafted image of this kind of imaging.

This picture is not what Parmigianino saw reflected in the glass that stood before him as he painted. It is the image of what he saw. This means that the portrait itself "Is the reflection once removed" (1986: 188), as John Ashbury put it in his epic poem about the work. The original reflection made its way to Parmigianino in a "recurring wave of arrival," to borrow Ashbury's phrase (188), and the artist created a reflection of this reflection in accordance with his own inner logic. This is why the poet Ashbury further sings, of the context in which Parmigianino performed his stupefying act of creation, "The glass chose to reflect only what he saw/Which was enough for his purpose." (188)

Ashbury's observation that Parmigianino's portrait is a reflection once removed brings out an essential aspect of the image of language as *mimesis* that I am trying to complete: namely, that speaking and writing make images once removed, reflected from the surface of a self that mirrors images into the brilliant yet unaccountably fleeting now-time. These new images are not fabricated in the sense of being explicitly copied imitations, but are closer to "image" as *phantasia*, understood in Heidegger's sense as the coming-to-presence of something new. (1991: vol III, 29) The inner logic of the self that mirrors the new image is that of a surface, not a solid, and I am content (for the time being, at least) to let Hume's critique of the Cartesian picture of the "I" that thinks represent the kind of surface that I mean:

There are some philosophers, who imagine we are intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuation in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity... For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular impression or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception... If any one, upon serious and unprejudic'd reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd, which he calls *himself*, tho' I am certain there is no such principle in me. (1739: Bk I, Pt IV, § 6)

Each self is an irregular mirror with its own peculiar structure, and this means that images from the past are always transformed in the present moment of speech and writing. Those who speak and write *speculate*, not in the merely correct semantic sense of conjecturing as opposed to positing, but in the richer etymological sense of making themselves into what the Latin language calls a *speculum*--a mirror--of what has been. We are Derrida's "strange mirror that reflects but also displaces and distorts one *mimesis* into the other, as though it were destined to mime or mask *itself*." (1991: 177)

We therefore do not make a "mirror of nature," in the sense that Richard Rorty disparages in his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (1979) For the image of anti-representationalism that Rorty created in the words of that book is merely the doppelganger of its opposite, the image of representationalism's aspiration to show the world as it really is. Both the body and the ghost haunt a now-time that is pictured as a site where images of stable present beings, at rest in the world, are being drawn. The body of representationalism says "yea" to the task--it is shown representing these beings--whereas the ghost of anti-representationalism says "nay"--it is shown defacing its opponent's canvas, which is itself depicted as a present being. Anti-representationalism, in whatever form it takes, thus gives us a new image--the image of the destruction of the possibility of representation--but it does not transcend imaging itself. Anti-representationalism is thus always knotted to what it negates, and cannot find its way beyond what it despises without dragging its enemy with it. The utter futility of this way of thinking can be seen in Liang K'ai's great thirteenth century drawing entitled *Patriarch Hui-Neng Tearing a Sutra Scroll*. (Figure 7)

Hui-Neng was a master of Ch'an Buddhism who lived in China during the seventh century. (Foster and Shoemaker 1996: 16-21) He is supposed to have said to his followers: "If you stop thinking of the myriad things, and cast aside all thoughts, as soon as one instant of thought is cut off, you will be reborn in another realm." (18) In Liang K'ai's image of him, Hui-Neng is ripping to shreds a sutra--a Buddhist holy text--thus exhibiting a kind of mistrust of language and its aspirations that we in the West have yet to experience, even taking the most noisy forms of late twentieth century postmodernism into account. Still, it is clear that if Hui-Neng were alive when Liang K'ai drew this picture, he would have ripped up this very picture of himself ripping up language. For he knew that one cannot say, in the language of truth or beauty, what stands opposed to all images. One can only make another image.<sup>16</sup>

In these the final brush-strokes of my picture, my words will invite you to imagine speakers and writers as creatures who are akin to Benjamin's angel of history. "His face is turned toward the past," Benjamin wrote of this angel; "Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet." (Benjamin 1969: 257) When we speak and write the pictures that we draw in words are reflections of the ever-growing mound of wreckage upon wreckage that history keeps hurling at our feet as long as we are alive. The main difference between us and Benjamin's angel of history is that his face is turned completely toward the past, whereas our faces are always turned at an oblique angle--away from the past, but at an angle that permits reflection toward the future. We reproduce images from the past because, as Heidegger put it, "man can represent, no matter how, only what has previously come to light of its own accord and has shown itself to him in the light it brought with it." (Heidegger 1975: 171) But our *act of representing* always arrives, in the now-time of the present, for the benefit, or the detriment, of the future.

## Postscript

Having rested from the labor of creating my picture of language as *mimesis*, I feel just enough energy to take up the brush again for a few more strokes. To assist me, I ask you to revisit Tohaku's image of the monkey reaching for the moon-in-the-water, and to recall what I said about it earlier. This essay is also a moon-in-the-water: it makes an image of language as imaging. I have not *likened* something called the self, metaphorically, to a mirror that makes images in language, for there is no conception of the self in language that is not already an image. We are always (in language) just how we are represented (in language). And as for theories of language, the problem with all of them is that there is no problem with them that we do not ourselves make when we receive them.

A famous story about a conversation that Wittgenstein had with the Cambridge economist Piero Sraffa will show what I mean. Wittgenstein was defending the idea in the *Tractatus* that a proposition and what it describes must have the same logical form. Whereupon Sraffa, as Ray Monk recounts it, "made a

Neopolitan gesture of brushing his chin with his fingertips, asking: 'What is the logical form of *that*?' This, according to the story, broke the hold on Wittgenstein of the Tractarian idea that a proposition must be a 'picture' of the reality it describes."<sup>17</sup> (1990: 260-61) Sraffa's gesture mimed contempt, but Wittgenstein must have seen that there was no *reality* corresponding to the gesture that shared its pictorial form. And that is how it always seems to be when we receive the gift of language from other speakers and writers: one picture in language breaks the stranglehold that another picture has been exercising on our minds. So we make a new picture--in Wittgenstein's case, the picture of language as an agglomeration of games that do not *have* to have anything in common except the fact that they all occupy positions in Wittgenstein's picture of language as a game.

The idea of language as image-making *is* an image, neither more nor less. This way of thinking about language explains why Ch'an Buddhist tradition recounts that Hui-Neng--the one who is shown tearing up a sutra scroll in Liang K'ai's drawing--also *rejected* his predecessor's representation of the mind as something "like a clear mirror" that could gather dust.<sup>18</sup> It also explains why, in the *Book of Serenity*, a master named Yangshan is shown first leading his pupil to the same realization that Hume came to when he introspected and found nothing stable to call his "self," but then *going on* to say of this realization: "This is right for the stage of faith, but not yet right for the stage of person."<sup>19</sup> Both of these stories recount images of people who did not *cling* to images. What this means in the present context is that to cling to this essay's image of language as true in the Western sense of correctly depicting the nature of language, or to reject it as false in the sense that it is not in accord with the "facts" of language, would be to act as Tohaku's monkey acts.

So is there anyone who is not a monkey? Permit me to offer, by way of the image of an answer, Geiami's sixteenth century drawing called *Jittoku Laughing at the Moon*. (Figure 8) Jittoku does not imagine that he is seeing the moon as it *really* is, through eyes that have shed all linguistic and cultural incrustations. On the other hand, neither does he imagine that it is the semblance, the illusion, or the aporia of a moon that he sees. That is because Jittoku does not *imagine* anything at all in this picture. He is just looking at the moon. And taking a rest from language. That is why he is laughing, for he knows that when he returns to language he must always be prepared to say something to prevent his silence from being misinterpreted as indifference. For silence, earnestly maintained in the face of a direct question that is heard and understood, is also *mimesis*: it imitates the absence of fixity and form, and hence is the image of the absence of images. This kind of silence is therefore no stranger to language.<sup>20</sup> So when Jittoku returns to language, as he knows he must, he will do so earnestly: when he takes up language to affirm something, he will affirm it totally; and when he takes up language to deny something, he will deny it totally. But in doing these things he will not *settle down* in affirmation or denial: for he knows that his own words, and the words of others, are images--and who in his right mind would ever choose to settle down in a picture?<sup>21</sup>

## Artwork

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Hiroshige, *Plum Estate, Uedo* (1857)

Vincent Van Gogh, *Flowering Plum Tree (after Hiroshige)* (1887)

Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527-93), *Summer*, 1563. Photograph (c) 2000 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Reprinted by Permission. All rights reserved.

Parmigianino (1503-40), *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, 1524, tempera on panel, Photograph (c) 2000 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Reprinted by Permission. All rights reserved

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## Footnotes

1 This two-line poem comes from an anthology of some five thousand of such poems compiled by Toyo Eicho (1429-1504) in a book entitled *Zenrin Kushu*. The English translation is from Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 119.

2 The letter is quoted in *Van Gogh: Paintings and Drawings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1949), 10.

3 Compare Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 109e. ("The imaged is in a different *space* from the heard sound.. The seen in a different

space from the imaged. Hearing is connected with listening; forming an image of a sound is not. That is why the heard sound is in a different space from the imagined sound.")

4 Wittgenstein 1974: Prop. 2.17, at 9. ("What a picture must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it--correctly or incorrectly--in the way that it does, is its pictorial form.") Form is the possibility of structure, and structure is the determinate way that objects are connected in a state of affairs, and in pictures. *Ibid.*, Prop. 2.033 and 2.032, at 8, and Prop. 2.15, at 9.

5 Nietzsche: "The true world we abolished; which world was left? the apparent one perhaps? But no! *along with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one!*" (Heidegger 1991:207 (quoting *Twilight of the Idols*)). Heidegger: "But as long as the 'above and below' define the former structure of Platonism, Platonism in its essence perdures." (201).

6 Compare the spatial image that Nietzsche draws, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, of willing "from" and "towards" on the basis of a plurality of sensations that are united in something called the "will":

Let us say that in all willing there is firstly a plurality of sensations, namely, the sensation of the condition "*away from which* we go," the sensation of the condition "*towards which* we go," the sensation of this "*from*" and "*towards*" itself, and then besides, an accompanying muscular sensation, which, even without our putting in motion "arms and legs," commences its action by force of habit, directly we "will" anything. Therefore, just as sensations (and indeed many kinds of sensations) are to be recognized as ingredients of the will, so, in the second place, thinking is also to be recognized; in every act of will there is a ruling thought; -- and let us not imagine it possible to sever this thought from the "willing," as if the will would then remain over!

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Modern Library, 1954), 369-616, at 399-400.

7 Carlin Romano, "Have We Reason to Believe?" in *The Nation*, August 23/30, 1999, 25-29, at 27. The thesis is expounded in many of the essays collected in Andrew Ortony's book *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

8 Kant writes:

A maxim is a subjective principle of action and must be distinguished from an *objective principle*; namely, practical law. The former contains the practical rule set by reason according to the conditions of the subject (often its ignorance or its inclinations); hence it is the principle on which the subject *acts*; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being and is the principle on which the being *ought to act*; that is, an imperative.

Friedrich 1993: 186 n.9.

9 *Ibid.*, at 187-88. ("Now we see at once that a system of nature, whose law would be to destroy life by the very feeling designed to compel the maintenance of life, would contradict itself, and therefore could not exist as a system of nature; hence the maxim cannot possibly be a general law of nature and consequently it would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty [i.e., the categorical imperative].")

10 Derrida, who is generally wont to deconstruct the idea that words are connected to actions in a determinate way, has been heard to decry the "whole axiomatic of responsibility, of conscience, of intentionality, of property that governs today's dominant juridical discourse," not just because they are "theoretically weak and crude," but also because they are somehow responsible for "effects" that Derrida says are "massive and concrete enough that I don't have to give examples." Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," trans. Mary Quantance, *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1990), 921-1045, at 965. Derrida did not add to his accusation against legal texts that sometimes laws and their canons of interpretation are actually applied in ways that contradict or subvert the "massive and concrete" *other* ways in which they are applied.

11 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,



1984), 83e (remark written in 1949) I say that Wittgenstein *almost* made this remark into a rule of etiquette because of his unstinting and life-long disapproval of philosophical thought that he counted as nonsense by his criteria. See Louis Wolcher, "A Meditation on Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics*," *Law and Critique* 9 (1998), 3-35.

12 I mean to distinguish my picture of language from Benjamin's in this essential respect, however similar they may appear to be in other ways. Benjamin's idea of an authentic language of names (as opposed to the language of representation that currently exists as its fallen state) involves a divine audience who is not the addressee of man's naming, but who nonetheless is there to witness it. Benjamin 1969: 318. ("The other conception of language, in contrast [to the conception that holds language to be a means of communication], knows no means, no object, and no addressee of communication. It means: *in naming the mental being of man communicates itself to God.*")

13 Heraclitus's picture of perpetual becoming on the basis of the Same is most famously displayed in his river fragments: number 12 ("As they step into the same rivers, different and <still> different waters flow upon them."), and number 49a ("We step and do not step into the same rivers; we are and are not."). (Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. T.M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 17, 35) It was Plato who removed the unity of Being from the flux of becoming in Heraclitus's doctrine, thereby delivering us a caricature of the original picture. Plato accomplishes the caricature by putting the following words in the mouth of Socrates: "Heraclitus is supposed to say that all things are in motion and nothing at rest; he compares them to the stream of a river, and says that you cannot go into the same water twice." (*Cratylus* 402a, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 439). Plato omitted to reproduce the richness of Heraclitus's reference to the sameness of the river into which we do *and* do not step--namely the image of the river as being *one* river in which the different and still different waters are flowing.

14 See, for example, the collection of his essays on language from the 1950s contained in Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1982).

15 In his *Portrait of Paul Eluard*, for example, Dali depicts his subject attached to a strand of hair that seems to be holding the subject aloft. Dali said of this portrait: "The idea was to paint a monumental portrait of a great poet supported by a strand of hair." Robert Descharnes, *The World of Salvador Dali* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), 152-53.

16 Compare this passage from *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, trans. James Green (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 163: "Once a monk drew the master's portrait and showed it to the master. The master said, 'If I look like that, beat me to death. If I don't look like that, burn it.'" Joshu (778-897 A.D.) was one of the great Ch'an masters of ancient China.

17 Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 260-61. Whether or not it was this particular incident that changed Wittgenstein's mind about language, we do know that he wrote the following dedication in the preface to *Philosophical Investigations*: "I am indebted to that [criticism] which a teacher of this university, Mr. P. Sraffa, for many years unceasingly practiced on my thoughts. I am indebted to *this* stimulus for the most consequential ideas of this book." (vi)

18 Huineng's predecessor Shenxiu had written: "The body is the Bodhi tree,/The mind is like a clear mirror./At all times we must strive to polish it,/And must not let the dust collect." To which Huineng replied: "Bodhi originally has no tree/The mirror also has no stand./Buddha nature is always clear and pure;/where is there room for dust?" (29)

19 Yangshan asked a monk, "Where are you from?" The monk said, "From Yu province." Yangshan said, "Do you think of that place?" The monk said, "I always think of it." Yangshan said, "The thinker is the mind and the thought-of is the environment. Therein are mountains, rivers, and the land mass, buildings, towers, halls and chambers, people, animals, and so forth; reverse your thought to think of the thinking mind--are there so many things there?" The monk said, "When I get here, I don't see any existence at all." Yangshan said, "This is right for the stage of faith, but not yet right for the stage of person." The monk said, "Don't you have any other particular way of guidance?" Yangshan said, "To say that I have anything particular or not would not be accurate. Based on your insight, you only get one mystery--you can take the seat and wear the robe. After this, see on your own.

20 See chapter nine of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 104-11, one of the most influential ancient works in the Mahayana Buddhist canon. There, in response to the question "Sirs, how does the bodhisattva go about entering the gate of nondualism?," thirty-one aspirants gave their answers, but the text records that Vimalakirti himself "remained silent and did not speak a word." His silence was not left to be interpreted as merely the absence of sound, however, for the text goes on to say "Excellent, excellent! Not a word, not a syllable--this truly is to enter the gate of non-dualism!" (111). In short, this kind of silence is as noisy in its own way as the noisiest speech. This comes through rather clearly in a twelfth century Chinese interpretation of the sutra: "Although Vimalakirti outwardly seems dumb, his speechless eloquence is pure and genuine within--that is to say, the stone conceals the jewel." (Joshu 1998: 203)

21 *Book of Serenity*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 87 ("Just affirm totally when affirming, but don't settle down in affirmation; deny totally when denying, but don't settle down in denial. Passing through all the five ranks, how could you die under a phrase?")