Wittgenstein's Synthesis of Image and Language (Translation)

Aware of the superiority of semantics over syntax, Ludwig Wittgenstein always adhered to a use of language that did not alienate thought. Given that language is the principle medium of thought (at least for the time being), the speaker, as verbal representative of the thinker, must be extremely vigilant in his choice of modes of expressing what he has conceived. The study of word games is one of the methods developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein to demonstrate the problem of semantic ambiguity. This permitted him to approach the fundamentals by means of a set of unambiguous formulas—loaded with meaning—which constituted a structured, isomorphic diagram of a mental image. The reader, if of a sufficiently abstract mind, takes hold globally of the reasoning behind the demonstration without losing himself in the maze of faulty interpretations that can permeate poorly thought out writing.

As noted by Thomas Riepe (Wittgenstein's thinking), Wittgenstein did not choose to strengthen his weakest point (syntax errors) but rather to develop his strongest point—the power of his semantics across an original and innovative syntax. This represents a crucial decision in the creation of his work, and we think, moreover, that this choice is generic, since creativity is best expended on that which one does best.

Let us now address the issue raised by Machteld Vos de Wael (Image-thinking) within the framework of problems specific to language and image in Wittgenstein's work. This is to say clearly that no obvious dichotomy between these two aspects of his thought exist, for his work shows, in a clear fashion, that his thought is built upon a combination of these two things.

It is true that language can appear to be, on first approaching it, a one dimensional form of thought, whereas image is multidimensional. However, even if this proposition were true, it would not imply a hierarchical superiority of thought that favored image. In fact, in the extreme case of mathematics, it is completely appropriate to approach problems from both these points of view—language : combinatorics :: image : geometry. According to the nature of the problem, one of these methods is more efficient than the other.

The truth of the initial proposition of the preceding paragraph is due to the following implicit hypothesis: the supremacy of space of synchronic vision. But how not to see that language hides within it more numerous temporal dimensions of image, and is therefore richer on the diachronic plane? A phenomenon known to test creators is that verbal tests require crystal intelligence to be solved, whereas others require fluid intelligence.

When one considers image and language in cognitive space-time, their role is dual. It is therefore of note that this idea is already contained within language itself. Indeed, at least in French and Greek, to explain the meaning of a word we can use equally well the written or spoken word.

It is true that each of us has not only his own mental activity, but also a character that undoubtedly influences the choice of solving strategies. Nonetheless, we are stronger yet (brainpower) when we are able—via a

conscious process of synthesis—to exploit in full all of the tools of thought at our disposal.