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Słupsk**THE CURRENT STATE OF LANGUAGE IN CONTEMPORARY  
ART AND CINEMA: FROM WILLIAM WORDSWORTH  
AND HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL TO JEAN LUC-GODARD  
AND MIŁOSZ ODOBROVIC****AKTUALNY STAN JĘZYKA W SZTUCE I KINIE WSPÓŁCZESNYM:  
OD WILLIAMA WORDSWORTHA I HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHALA  
DO JEANA LUC-GODARDA I MIŁOSZA ODOBROVICIA****Słowa kluczowe:** język, nowoczesność, sztuka współczesna, kino, digitalizacja  
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The ability of language to fully capture the human experience or encompass nature's limitlessness has been questioned by many of the precursors to modernity. "O nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies"<sup>1</sup>, writes Herman Melville in 1851's *Moby Dick*. In Book 3 of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth similarly bemoans the limitations of language: "This genuine prowess, which I wished to touch/With hand however weak, but in the main/It lies far hidden from the reach of words"<sup>2</sup>. "Yet wherefore speak?/Why call upon a few weak words to say/What is already written in the hearts/Of all that breathe?"<sup>3</sup> he repeats in Book 5. Though the poet finds himself disillusioned by language<sup>4</sup>, particularly its inextricable ties to reason<sup>5</sup> and its power over thought<sup>6</sup>, Wordsworth, similar to Melville, ultimately pens his long poem in none other than words. This alone would suffice in framing the paradox of both the inadequacy and necessity of language. In fact, Melville

<sup>1</sup> H. Melville, *Moby Dick*, Oxford 1988, p. 280

<sup>2</sup> W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude: Book Three*: 1850.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. *Book Five*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: "Poems which at that time/Did never fail to entrance me, and are now/Dead in my eyes".

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. *Book Seven*: "Words follow words, sense seems to follow sense:/What memory and what logic! till the strain/Transcendent, superhuman as it seemed,/Grows tedious even in a young man's ear".

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. *Book Six*: "languages that want the living voice/To carry meaning to the natural heart;/To tell us what is passion, what is truth,/What reason, what simplicity and sense".

and Wordsworth stood in the forefront of the crisis of language that was slowly but surely taking shape at the time. As Richard Sheppard confirms, in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature*, “the notion of a crisis of a language is not something entirely modern”<sup>7</sup>. Thus, while Melville and Wordsworth wrote before the “progressive hardening and cerebralization”<sup>8</sup> of language, they were, in some ways, active participants in it.

Language undergoes continuous transformations, moving from a unified whole to fragmentary stages. While this fragmentation of language may have begun thousands of years ago with the Tower of Babel, it took on a new face with the age of Modernism. The rise of modernism, with its proclivity toward efficiency and productivity, steered language toward economics, where “rationality, predictability, utilitarianism have torn the potentiating centre out of language”<sup>9</sup>. Walter Benjamin, in his essay “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” claims that “all communication of the contents of the mind is language”<sup>10</sup> while also maintaining that the conditions of modernity make meaningful communication impossible. Thus, the contents of the mind can no longer be communicated meaningfully. Susan Sontag in *Against Interpretation* writes: “Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience”<sup>11</sup>. This loss of sensory experience, partly caused by language, is, in turn, harmful to language, making the latter less effective, incapable of communicating a sensory experience that is no longer there. “The existence of language”, writes Benjamin “is coextensive not only with all the areas of human mental expression in which language is always in one sense or another inherent, but with absolutely everything”<sup>12</sup>. As such, language, having become a reflection of this lack of experience, is rendered flat, losing its place in the unity of things.

As Benjamin suggests, the function of language is not to communicate things themselves but the “linguistic being of things”; therefore, “all language communicates itself”<sup>13</sup>. In modern times, language communicating itself has taken on a new meaning. Humanity has too eagerly moved toward a world that is interpreted through intellect rather than feeling. References to existing thought, quotes taken from previous thinkers, established symbols and formulaic expressions have replaced original thoughts, while much of an individual’s natural experience is, in fact, mute, immediate, indescribable. “A babe, by intercourse of touch/ I held mute dialogues with my Mother’s heart”<sup>14</sup> writes Wordsworth. Indeed, what the poet implies is that language is unnecessary where the experience is pure and where the immediate sensory experience suffices. Thus, it seems that language may only be used effectively in lesser contexts and is, by default, an impure form of communication. In Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *The Letter of Lord Chandos*, former writer Lord Chandos laments language’s lack of profundity and seeks to communicate “in a medium more immediate, more liquid, more glowing than words”<sup>15</sup>. Lord Chandos is experiencing a moment in which he cannot

<sup>7</sup> M. Bradbury & J. McFarlane, *Modernism: A guide to European Literature 1890–1930*, Sussex 1978, p. 323.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>10</sup> W. Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, New York 2007, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*, New York 1966, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> W. Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, New York 2007, p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>14</sup> W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude: Book Two*, p. 1850.

<sup>15</sup> H. Von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter*. New York 2005, p. 134.

adequately express himself because his mental state and language are at odds with one another. As language is unable to contain or reflect the entire scope of a state, feeling, or condition, Lord Chandos' lament is unsurprising. As Benjamin writes: "It is a metaphysical truth that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language"<sup>16</sup>. He adds that "lament, however, is the most undifferentiated, impotent expression of language"<sup>17</sup>. In response to Lord Chandos' lament, Benjamin would suggest an acceptance of the impurity of language. There must be ways, he seems to imply, to circumvent the problems and paradoxes of language, ways which do not result in lamentation. Lord Chandos describes a future "with a language that is no language and that, until this language is found, the only possibility is silence"<sup>18</sup>, somewhat echoing Ludwig Wittgenstein's words: "what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence"<sup>19</sup>. The significant difference between the two is that Lord Chandos laments the inadequacy of language while Wittgenstein readily accepts it. Wittgenstein seems to suggest that silence is neither a punishment nor an unwanted result of the insufficiency of language but a part of it. What is happening currently is that things that should perhaps "pass over in silence", are "discussed" in silent emoticons.

To communicate using language means to relinquish that which one is describing and to create a new world, one which, as Baudelaire confirms with his poem "Correspondences", can only be effectively created through an original, individual use of language, a higher language which, as Benjamin suggests, is "a translation of all lower ones"<sup>20</sup>. According to Benjamin, this higher language not only includes the language of nature and natural states but also elevates them. In his famous poem, Baudelaire achieves this elevation of language by joining nature and the world of man until "All scents and sounds and colors meet as one"<sup>21</sup>. Lord Chandos, on the other hand, cannot translate a similar experience into language: "The ideas streaming into my mind suddenly took on such iridescent colouring, so flowed over into one another, that I reeled off the sentence as best I could"<sup>22</sup>. Baudelaire's "poetic beauty is the hardest to create", however, writes Wallace Fowlie, because "it starts from hard complex notions and proceeds to reach a total simplicity of form and rhetoric"<sup>23</sup>. Yet, this same process of translating the complex into the simple is to blame for the flatness of modern language or expression as it is at the very core of the misguided use of non-dimensional emotive symbols and efficiency-based language. This kind of simplicity is far from Baudelaire's in that it reflects and represents flat content, rather than simplified or elevated complex meaning.

Similar to Baudelaire, Jean Luc-Godard's film *Goodbye to Language* reveals a language that plays with other sensory faculties and symbols. As in many of his films, here he focuses on the significant sound-image relationship, often using sounds as equivalent of images or vice versa<sup>24</sup>. In *Goodbye to Language*, Godard attempts to achieve a unity of all languages.

<sup>16</sup> W. Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, New York 2007, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> M. Bradbury & J. McFarlane, *Modernism: A guide to European Literature 1890–1930*, Sussex 1978, p. 323.

<sup>19</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London and New York 2002, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>21</sup> C. Baudelaire, "Correspondences" 1857.

<sup>22</sup> H. Von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter*, p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> C. Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil and Other Works/Les Fleurs Du Mal Et Oeuvres Choisies*, New York 1992, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> The blog Cinema Asparagus discusses in more detail Godard's work with sound an image in his films.

For instance, in the film, words like “Language” or “God” and the exclamatory phrases “ah!” or “oh!” are juxtaposed with one another, dueling for a position neither one can fully claim, while an alarming sound blares in the background, audio seeking its place in the unity of expression. At once, through an effective sensory and rational assault, the potential demise of faith, language and feeling becomes clear for the film viewer. As such, the effect is much greater than the sum of its parts. Lord Chandos describes the opposite condition. Language has become hollow and fragmentary, and is not capable of expressing unity: “For me everything disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts: no longer would anything let itself be encompassed by one idea”<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, precisely those words that should reveal the most representative potency are especially repulsive for Lord Chandos: “I experienced an inexplicable distaste for so much as uttering the words spirit, soul, or body”<sup>26</sup>. Words float around him like whirlpools, resulting in a vertigo that leads him into a void. Again, Baudelaire is a prime example of someone who surpasses this hurdle: “Baudelaire never describes in his poetry”, writes Fowlie, “he transforms his visions into sentiments. And yet he is not sentimental”<sup>27</sup>. Overcoming Lord Chandos’ paralysis, both Godard and Baudelaire achieve a similar transformation of language, from something potentially hollow into an elevated form of expression. Unless one overcomes this initial paralysis, however, the transformation from language to sentiments leaves a void, which is precisely where the ruin of language takes place.

What is especially novel about Godard’s film *Goodbye to Language* is that, in it, he attempts to achieve a return to language through the acceptance of its fragmentary condition. His film is made of fragments of language, music, and images which are repeated and reiterated yet never placed in logical order. Godard reintroduces poetic language to the contemporary arena, suggesting that there is an effectiveness to language when it is not used in its most rational form. Language is more meaningful when the meaning conveyed is not immediate or literal and, perhaps most importantly, when it does not stand on its own, but is unified to other forms of communication, much as the senses unify to absorb meaning. He films objects, a dog, nature, along with people in order to show a unity that needs no further explanation. The symbols of each object, human and animal are imbued with meaning because they are juxtaposed with one another. It is precisely their contrast that unifies them and creates a greater whole. As Lord Chandos writes: “A pitcher, a harrow abandoned in a field, a dog in the sun, a neglected cemetery, a cripple, a peasant’s hut – all these can become the vessel of my revelation”<sup>28</sup>. There is power in these simple, fragmentary images, immediate in their effect, which can lead to a unified sensory experience. These are images that “words are too poor”<sup>29</sup> to describe since language would flatten them or “bring them to their knees”<sup>30</sup>, as Chandos suggests, rather than add to their dimensionality and revelatory power. Yet, it is also by listing them that Lord Chandos imbues them with the meaning they command.

Through the dominating presence of a dog, Roxy, whose name is the only memorable one in the film, Godard ensures that the ‘mute’ creatures, which remind Lord Chandos of life and meaning, have the same effect in the film. “The water spoke to Roxy and it

<sup>25</sup> H. Von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter*, New York 2005, p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> C. Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil and Other Works/Les Fleurs Du Mal Et Oeuvres Choisies*, New York 1992, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> H. Von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter*, New York 2005, p. 136.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

tries to communicate to us. The fog stops us from seeing further”<sup>31</sup>, a male voice narrates, confirming the necessity of the mute creatures as mediators in the communication between humans and nature. Godard suggests that the language of cinema and television is partly to blame for transforming people into two-dimensional, flat characters. “I hate characters,” says the female character while sitting next to a television screen showing an old romantic film. “To live or to tell” answers her lover. The characters’ language does not communicate in that one does not clearly reply to the other. Language is used to make revelatory declarations which are otherwise neither heard nor understood by the other. While this non-conversation reflects the current state of communication, it simultaneously attempts to redeem it. The characters do not answer one another but meaning is transferred to the viewer. “If face to face could invent language” says the man. The woman replies: “Soon we will all need an interpreter to understand words that are coming out of our own mouths”. In both utterances, the distance between the words spoken and the individual who speaks them is vast; experience and its verbal translation do not match. They both refer to the fact that language no longer communicates, that is does not heighten people’s understanding of one another. Face to face could potentially invent language if the individual were to understand himself, his own language, and, as a result, his own content. “I will barely say a word,” the man says, “I am looking for poverty in language”, a distant echo of Lord Chandos in his lament. Similar to Lord Chandos’ somewhat futile declarations, the individual prefers a return to silence but can no more do so without using words than he can create a new way of communicating.

Silencing language through its use is the main characteristic of Milosz Odobrovic’s art. His type of art, called buff, is described as “an unconscious kind of street-art evolved in the culture of graffiti removal”<sup>32</sup>. Graffiti, once a revolutionary form of communication that reached the unsatisfied masses, is currently being peacefully silenced, though not entirely erased. The language is not eliminated but simply relegated to a secondary position, hidden underneath layers of paint, rendering the message illegible but never entirely absent. Echoing Sontag’s argument in her essay “Against Interpretation” as well as Godard’s use of language in his film, content is not of primary significance in Odobrovic. Rather, the act of removing something which once communicated clear content and transforming it into a fragmented, multi-layered message reveals both language’s and art’s lack of necessity and reluctance to make sense. “Signs must become confused where things are entangled. The enslavement of language in prattle is joined by the enslavement of things in folly almost as its inevitable consequence”<sup>33</sup>, writes Benjamin. It is by releasing language from its functional role, and functional meaning, that Godard and Odobrovic set it free. On the contrary, because Lord Chandos has not submitted to a coherent existence that has adjusted itself to language rather than vice versa, he claims that he has lost “completely the ability to think or to speak of anything coherently”<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, the coherence he lacks is a language which cannot adequately depict the incoherence of the human experience.

In 1767, Denis Diderot was convinced that language, though poor, could always be saved by the individual because, as Ludwig Wittgenstein also succinctly confirms, “the subject

<sup>31</sup> J.L. Godard, *Goodbye to Language*, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Milosz Odobrovic Official Website: <http://miloszodobrovic.com/about/> [dostęp 30.06.2017].

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 72.

<sup>34</sup> H. Von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter*, New York 2005, p. 133.

does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world”<sup>35</sup>. In this, the individual’s power is implied. Life conspires to make everyone sound and think similarly; yet, Benjamin writes, “the language of feelings, the language of nature, the individual dialect are enunciated at the same time as the impoverished common language [...] Never, since the world has been the world, have two lovers said ‘I love you’ identically”<sup>36</sup>. Certainly, there is much an individual can do to enrich the impoverished common language. Indeed, as evidenced by Melville and Wordsworth, an “impoverished common language” is not a new problem. However, the current problem is not the statement of a phrase such as “I love you” but in understanding its full meaning. The phrase “I love you”, rendered meaningless from its infinite iterations on media and daily life, is slowly being replaced with the symbol of a heart, a flat icon for a profound feeling, an efficiency of language required by digital modernity. In turn, these standard symbols are reshaping the individual’s subjective experience, creating an order of things which does not exist, which should be created by the individual. Wittgenstein confirms that “whatever we see could be other than it is. Whatever we can describe at all could be other than it is. There is no a priori order of things”<sup>37</sup>. Current language, however, reflects a non-subjective experiencing of life and reveals that people assume that there *is* an a priori order of things, rather than realizing the order of things is constantly shaped and created.

If Ludwig Wittgenstein’s famous adage, “The limits of my *language* mean the limits of my world”<sup>38</sup>, is taken into account, the more hopeful interpretation of this new onslaught of symbols could be that they reveal the individual’s world as expanding with the boundaries of language stretching to accommodate new, more dimensional, forms of communication. Indeed, the world of symbols, as a supplement to language, could potentially evoke more than language alone. However, no such expansion is occurring. On the contrary, it seems that symbols used on their own, in the form of icons, GIF’s, memes, and likes are superseding language, which entails a kind of regress, rather than progress. Yet, it is not language that has lost its power to convey. Rather, it is that language translates a mental entity which, in the present time, reveals an absence of metaphor, symbolism, or imagination. As such, language cannot convey meaning that is not there. The limits of current language reveal a limited world. Unlike prehistoric hieroglyphics, which conveyed complexity in simple form, modern symbols convey simplicity in simple form. In other words, Wittgenstein’s adage would point to a presently reductive human interpretation of a world which, as the progress of language throughout the years has testified, was once complex and is no longer. Indeed, standardized emoticons ensure that Diderot’s individual, the savior, is gradually eliminated. He contributes to the impoverished common language rather than attempting to save it. “There is no such thing as a content of language;” writes Benjamin, “as communication, language communicates a mental entity – something communicable per se”<sup>39</sup>. Language without the individual is an empty vessel, filled with the language of the masses, impoverished because of it.

An analysis of both Godard and Odobrovic reveals that in order to neither lose the individual nor language, one must observe that fine balance between relinquishing the dominance of language while still conserving it. This is perhaps what most characterizes both Godard

<sup>35</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London and New York 2002, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> D. Diderot, *Diderot on Art, Volume II: The Salon of 1767*, Connecticut 1995, p. 117.

<sup>37</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London and New York 2002, p. 69.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 68.

<sup>39</sup> W. Benjamin, *Reflections: essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, New York 2007, p. 73.

and Odoibrovic, as their use of layers reveals a certain loyalty to language while confirming that language is, indeed, insufficient. In Godard's case, the layers are more complex: references, sounds, music, the overlapping of words and images, narratives blending with one another while the film is also characterized by abrupt sequences and dramatic silences. Language is at once powerful and powerless when confronted with this onslaught of sensory experience. The battle between these diverse elements is perhaps what makes the film warrant an immediate response, one that is devoid of interpretation but that has received the stimuli offered from the film in their entirety. In Odoibrovic, the layers are both literal and metaphorical, as well. The layers, in addition, are composed of different people, resulting in a complete work which also joins multiple "voices". "The buffer", or the person who covers the graffiti, explains Odoibrovic "is mostly unaware of the creative side of the process he is in charge of, while choosing color, tool and application method. The form and the size of a work are usually chosen unconsciously. My works depict the resistance of two opposite phenomena (graffiti and buff), one artist and another, one opinion versus dissent, two life views"<sup>40</sup>. Here, Odoibrovic also refers to the battle between language and non-language, content and lack of it. Of Godard's film *Vivre sa vie*, Sontag writes that "there is no longer a single unified point of view", a result of Godard's masterful technique of overlapping narrators and references, texts, and quotations, which, Sontag writes, are "primarily words; but they may also be wordless sounds, or even wordless images"<sup>41</sup>. As such, both Godard and Odoibrovic achieve a similar kind of novel unity, of a "language-non-language", one made out of the fragments that remain of language. In both cases, the language does not clarify its function. It is simply there. Yet Odoibrovic's work at times includes multiple languages which are not there to be understood; rather, they are there to emphasize that the message is not conveyed through language alone.

Lord Chandos concludes his letter: "The language in which I might be able not only to write but to think is neither Latin nor English, neither Italian nor Spanish, but a language none of whose words is known to me, a language in which inanimate things speak to me and wherein I may one day have to justify myself before an unknown judge"<sup>42</sup>. Godard and Odoibrovic test this approach, ignoring the judges, i.e. Sontag's interpreters. This approach is perhaps an example of Diderot's individual's attempt to save the impoverished language. However, while in the art world language has become layered and un-interpretable in the traditional sense, in the real and virtual worlds, language fulfills its functional role and content continues to be paramount. It seems, then, that this "irrational" approach to language in art is borne out of the necessity of countering the too-reasonable use of language in the real and virtual worlds, where symbols and acronyms are beginning to dominate, forms of communications these which transmit no other meaning than their primary, functional one. This struggle between language in art and language in life at this point in time reflects the cyclical nature of language throughout time, as well. In *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino attributes the undoing of language to the cyclical nature of communication, as Marco Polo and Kublai Khan shift from simplistic gestures to descriptive language and vice versa, failures of one leading to the reintroduction of the other. "Words began to replace objects" in Marco's tales but later "words failed him, and little by little, he went back to relying on

<sup>40</sup> Milosz Odoibrovic Official Website: <http://miloszoibrovic.com/about/> [dostęp 30.062017].

<sup>41</sup> S. Sontag, *Godard's Vivre Sa Vie*, 1964, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> H. Von Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter*, New York 2005, p. 141.

gestures, grimaces, glances”<sup>43</sup>, the pleasure of which also in time diminished, eventually resulting in silence.

Dobrovic’s art represents a cycle of language, of stating and erasing, of meaning conveyed with words to meaning conveyed beyond words. His work never completely erases language, nor does it let it dominate. The work communicates through its layers, as it recalls a time of heavier, literal content, and while it possesses it, it also does away with it. Godard, as well, attempts to convey a certain cycle by dividing his film into chapters entitled “Nature” and “Metaphor”. While the film begins with nature, continues to metaphor, returns to nature, and finally concludes in metaphor, the viewer has the distinct feeling that this struggle between the two will never come to a conclusion. Indeed, the film itself represents only the current time, the current phase. Sontag writes about Godard that he “is the first director fully to grasp the fact that, in order to deal seriously with ideas, one must create a new film language for expressing them – if the ideas are to have any suppleness and complexity”<sup>44</sup>. Indeed, language is a complex topic as it remains eternally timely. “For last year’s words belong to last year’s language. And next year’s words await another voice. And to make an end is to make a beginning”<sup>45</sup>, writes T.S. Eliot. Indeed, the language of the time is fragmented, layered, entangled, has lost its unity and autonomy. It may be time to say goodbye to language as it enters the phase of digital language, an amalgam of numbers, symbols and brevity that often results in silence. Yet, this may also be only a phase in the long, cyclical history of humanity and language. Godard is certainly not bidding farewell to language, though he claims it, and neither is Odobrovic, though he erases it. On the contrary, they are individuals who are contributing to its much-needed enrichment, layering, unification.

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<sup>43</sup> I. Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, New York: Boston 1972, p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> S. Sontag, *Godard's Vivre Sa Vie*, 1964: 6.

<sup>45</sup> T.S. Eliot (1943), *Four Quartets: Little Gidding*. From: <http://www.davidgorman.com/4Quartets/1-norton.htm>



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## Streszczenie

Zdolność języka do pełnego uchwycenia ludzkiego doświadczenia lub objęcia nieograniczonej natury została zakwestionowana przed 1900 rokiem. W „Liście lorda Chandosa” Hugo von Hofmannsthal pisał Lord Chandos dręczy się brakiem głębi języka, starając się myśleć „w bardziej bezpośredni sposób, bardziej płynny, jaśniejszy niż słowa”. Od tego czasu era cyfrowa przyniosła takie uproszczenie języka – z akronimami, emotikonami, rozmowami online i zwiększoną zależnością od obrazów – które bez całkowitego zrzeczenia się języka, nieumyślnie przenosi ludzkość w kierunku pewnego rodzaju cichego istnienia. Czy jest to znak apokalipsy języka, akceptacja jego nieadekwatności, czy tylko faza transformacyjna?

## Summary

The ability of language to fully capture the human experience or encompass nature's limitlessness has been questioned since before the 1900's. "O nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies" writes Herman Melville in 1851's *Moby Dick*. In Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *The Letter of Lord Chandos*, the former writer Lord Chandos agonizes over language's lack of profundity, seeking to think "in a medium more immediate, more liquid, more glowing than words." Lord Chandos indeed describes a future "with a language that is no language and that, until this language is found, the only possibility is silence" (Richard Sheppard, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature*), echoing Ludwig Wittgenstein's words: "what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence".<sup>46</sup> Since then, the digital age has brought on such a simplification of language – with acronyms, emoticons, chatting, and an increased reliance on images – that without entirely relinquishing language, is unintentionally moving humanity towards a kind of silent existence. Is this a sign of the apocalypse of language, an acceptance of its inadequacy or merely a transformational phase? In *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino attributes the undoing of language to the cyclical nature of communication, as Marco Polo and Kublai Khan shift from simplistic gestures to descriptive language and vice versa, failures of one leading to the reintroduction of the other. As contemporary art and cinema illustrate (specifically Jean Luc-Godard's recent film *Goodbye to Language* as well as the works of modern artists like Milosz Odobrovic, among others) we find ourselves confronting the failures of language but not yet equipped to fathom a world without it.

<sup>46</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London and New York 2002, p. 3.

## **Biogram**

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