

# How Language Looks: On Asger Jorn and Noël Arnaud's *La Langue verte*\*

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In November 1968, the Paris publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert brought out Asger Jorn and Noël Arnaud's *La Langue verte et la cuite*, an event accompanied by a banquet for 2,000 at a Danish restaurant in Paris, and a considerable response from the press, though the book has largely dropped from view since.<sup>1</sup> Initially titled *La Langue crue et la cuite*, the book was written in French by artist Asger Jorn, founding member of Cobra and of the Situationist International, and revised by Arnaud, member of the Surrealist "Main à plume" group in occupied Paris, founding member of the Revolutionary Surrealist group in postwar Paris (with which Jorn was also involved), and later regent in the Collège de 'Pataphysique.<sup>2</sup> Jorn, in addition to writing the text, also chose the illustrations, while Arnaud added sections of his own and reordered the material in collaboration with Jorn. It is thus the collective labor of two individuals who had first met in Paris in 1946, and who were both involved in the Revolutionary Surrealist group, a splinter group of Communist persuasion that had seceded from the main body of the Surrealist group shortly before the opening of its exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, at the Galerie Maeght. If Cobra was very much oriented against Arnaud when it was first formed in 1948, the paths of the two men crossed numerous times in subsequent years. Jorn turned to Arnaud as a trusted friend who was in sympathy with his aims, who corrected Jorn's rather casual French, and who in general was willing to lend a hand to the enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

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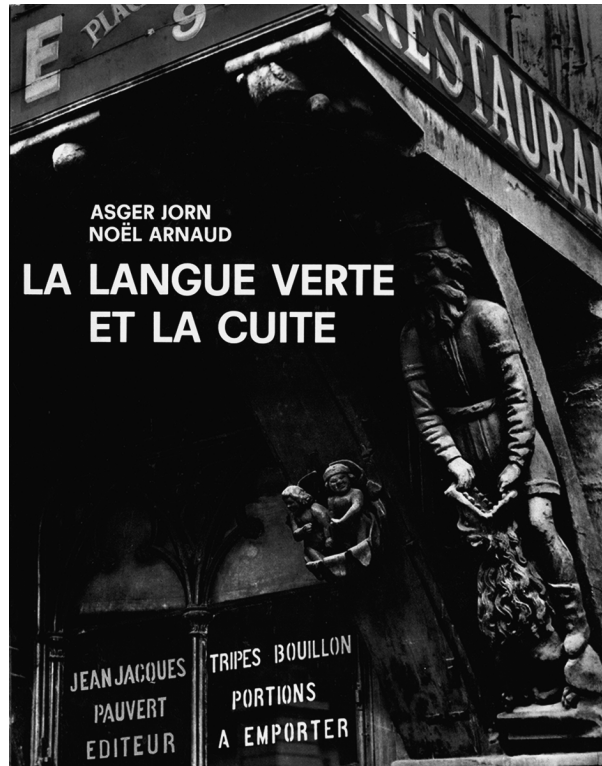
1. Noël Arnaud claims that the book was widely reviewed by the press at the time of its publication in *C'est tout ce que j'ai à dire pour l'instant: Entretiens avec Anne Clancier* (Saint-André-de-Najac: Patrick Fréchet, 2004), p. 140.

2. The various drafts and the visual materials used for the book are in the *fonds Arnaud* in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris.

3. Cobra was founded in November 1948 by six individuals who had walked out of the Conférence du Centre international de documentation sur l'art d'avant-garde organized by Arnaud,

As the original title *La Langue crue et la cuite* indicates, the book was a response to Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Le Cru et le cuit* (*The Raw and the Cooked*), which was published in 1964, as well as to structuralist theory more generally. I want to focus here on the nature of this response, as well as on the respective interests that Jorn and Arnaud brought to their project. For *La Langue verte et la cuite* is a book that includes a tremendous amount of visual imagery as well as written text, and its proportion of imagery to text (there are roughly 67 pages of text distributed across the 327 pages of the book, and 315 images) is one of the most significant features of Jorn's response. Jorn and Arnaud's dissatisfaction with structuralist theory is articulated by means of a parody that nevertheless depends on the notion of difference for the effectiveness of its critique, as well as on a series of permutations of images of tongues which constitute the iconography of the book.

*Le Cru et le cuit* is, of course, Lévi-Strauss's examination of the extrapolation of myths based on a common myth about the origin of cooking, which exemplifies in his view the transition from nature to culture. Jorn's first title, *La Langue crue et la cuite*, makes explicit the role of the tongue in both eating and speaking, and refers implicitly to the Saussurean linguistic theory underpinning structuralism, which, in distinguishing between *la langue* (language) and *la*



Cover of Asger Jorn and Noël Arnaud's  
*La Langue verte et la cuite*. 1968.

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Édouard Jaguer, and René Passeron, all former members of the Revolutionary Surrealist group in Paris, which had been dissolved in April of that year.

*parole* (speech), strips the word *langue* of any association with the body, despite the fact that *langue* denotes both “language” and “tongue.” The title can be translated as *The Raw Tongue and the Cooked One*, with the added implication that *la cuite* is also an idiom that signifies being drunk. It is Arnaud who introduced the word *verte* into the title. *La Langue verte et la cuite* does not literally mean *The Green Tongue and the Cooked One*, since *la langue verte* is an idiom for slang or popular language, but rather “Slang and Drunkenness,” two kinds of improper behavior involving the tongue. A *Dictionnaire de la langue verte* was compiled by the French journalist Alfred Delvau in the 1860s, and the term was used by later lexicographers of popular language in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *La Langue verte* is also the title of a book of poetry published in 1954 by the Belgian writer Géo Norge and reviewed two years later by Arnaud in Georges Bataille’s review *Critique*; an epigraph by Norge is used to preface one of the sections of *La Langue verte et la cuite*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, if the relation of *langue* to language is maintained in Arnaud’s revision of the title, it is to a language that is spoken on the street.

Arnaud had understood popular language to be a source for poetry and for the renewal of language since his days as a Surrealist in the 1940s. In an essay from 1945 with the significant title “Il faut que l’homme mange ses mots,” Arnaud proposed the renaissance of a popular poetry through “*a delirious utilization of the normal forms of popular expression*,” as in such phrases easily translatable into English as “to lose face,” “to learn by heart,” “to have on the tip of one’s tongue,” “to put one’s finger on something”—phrases that are both figurative and concrete.<sup>5</sup> For Arnaud, popular language is already poetic in this sense, and it and Surrealist poetry can mutually inform and enrich one another. This aspiration was conditioned by Arnaud’s Communist politics at the time, but also by the need to develop an alternative to the return to traditional poetic forms then being championed by the Communist poet and former Surrealist Louis Aragon.

Jorn’s views were similarly oriented to a popular art and were based on his understanding of folk culture, such as had existed before art had become the specialized activity of professional artists. Jorn’s account of early egalitarian societies, which largely depended on Friedrich Engels’s *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), held that agrarian societies had developed cults related to fertility and the seasons, which were only later elaborated into myths and then eventually into religions; religions were a consequence of the stratification of society, which also gave rise to forms of knowledge produced by individuals who were

4. Noël Arnaud, “Norge ou l’éloge de la langue vivante,” *Critique* 107 (April 1956), pp. 319–31. A short poetic text by Norge incorporating references to poetry, music, and eating, taken from his own *La Langue verte*, prefaces the sixth section of the “Premier Service” of *La Langue verte et la cuite*, which is entitled “Fugue aux figues à la gomme chromosommaire” (p. 79).

5. Noël Arnaud, “Il faut que l’homme mange ses mots,” in *La Terre n’est pas une vallée de larmes*, ed. Marcel Mariën (Brussels: Éditions “La Boétie,” 1945), p. 49 (emphasis in the original). The list of phrases Arnaud highlights includes: “Peigner la girafe, avoir la tête farcie, parler à bâtons rompus, mâcher la besogne, faire tapisserie, branler dans la manche,” etc., in addition to those more easily translated into English.

freed from the need to labor because others labored for them.<sup>6</sup> Structuralism was for Jorn a contemporary example of the disembodied, idealist forms of knowledge that stratified societies produced.

Art, on the other hand, was for Jorn a subjective reworking of matter that transformed its materials, rather than a representation of nature, and thus was not superstructural in the Marxist sense but rather part of the base, a material practice that transformed nature. Art, which was mimetic in hunting-and-gathering societies, became nonmimetic or symbolic in agrarian ones.<sup>7</sup> This is one of his major points of disagreement with Lévi-Strauss, for whom the primary function of art was mimetic.<sup>8</sup>

Jorn saw both folk culture and contemporary experimental art as active reworkings of matter. Upon resigning from the Situationist International in 1961, he conceived the multivolume series *10,000 Years of Nordic Folk Art*, and founded the Scandinavian Institute of Comparative Vandalism with a few friends to oversee this project; he is named as director of this institute on the title page of *La Langue verte*. Each volume was to be dedicated to a particular aspect or region of Scandinavian folk culture, with a written section contributed by a scholar and a larger section of photographs to follow. Jorn was struck by the possibilities of André Malraux's various series of books on art, published from 1947 on, and even hired Gérard Franceschi, the chief photographer at the Louvre—whose photographs Malraux frequently relied on—to take the majority of the photographs for his own, even larger series. Significantly, Jorn insisted on the separation of text

6. There is an eight-page manuscript in French entitled “Science [*sic*] et Matherialisme [*sic*]” in the Jorn archives at the Museum Jorn, Silkeborg, which is dated by the museum ca. 1948–49, and which discusses what Jorn views as the inseparable relation between cults and agricultural labor in early agrarian societies. He writes: “*The materialist cults are cults of utility inseparable from work. The cult of the moon and the stars, the cult of the boat, of fish, of the lion, etc. are tied to Navigation, fishing and hunting, which—especially the latter two—are work of the night and the winter. The cult of the sun, of the rain, of watering, the cult of the Bull, of [illegible], of bread, of milk, of trees etc. are tied to agriculture, the work of the day and the summer, and there is nothing ‘supernatural’ in this. These are cults of realities essential to man. Noone can deny that the whole of terrestrial life depends on the sun, and to recognize it is poetry.*” Jorn, “Science et Matherialisme,” pp. 5–6. On p. 7, Jorn claims that the materialist cults that he describes here are identical to popular festivals, which are in turn tied to the rhythms of agricultural labor. Jorn also discusses these views in “La Roue de la fortune: Méthodologie des cultes,” trans. Matie van Domselaer and Michel Ragon, the French translation of Jorn’s text that was included in Asger Jorn, *Guldhorn og Lykkehjul* (Copenhagen: self-published, n.d. [1957]), pp. 83 and 85. Jorn discusses the development of specialized forms of knowledge by those freed from productive labor on p. 88. On the influence of Engels on Jorn’s understanding of early agrarian societies, see Graham Birtwistle, *Living Art: Asger Jorn’s Comprehensive Theory of Art between Helhesten and Cobra (1946–1949)* (Utrecht: Reflex, 1986), pp. 149–53.

7. Birtwistle, *Living Art*, pp. 115–16.

8. Lévi-Strauss makes this point in the “Ouverture” to *Le Cru et le cuit*; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology I*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 18–22. For Jorn, a mimetic art was proper to a society of hunters and gatherers, but the return to mimesis in Renaissance art and after was a regression and a mistake. In his annotated copy of *Le Cru et le cuit*, which can be found in the Museum Jorn, Silkeborg, Jorn wrote the word *idiot* beside one of Lévi-Strauss’s remarks on the essentially mimetic nature of painting (in the 1964 Plon edition, p. 28).



and image, so that images could function independently of text and be arranged according to an order intrinsic to the images themselves; in this arrangement, his own projected series most closely resembles one of the lesser known of Malraux's series, his three-volume *Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale* (1952–54), in which a short introductory text in each volume prefaces a large collection of photographs of sculpture from different periods and places, with scholarly descriptions of the works found at the back of the volumes.<sup>9</sup>

Jorn was well aware, through Malraux's books and through the Swedish art historian and architect Erik Lundberg's multivolume series *Arkitekturens Formspråk* (The Formal Language of Architecture) (1945–61), of the uses of photographic reproduction in disseminating ideas about art and architecture.<sup>10</sup> There are significant differences, however, between Malraux's use of photography and Jorn's. In both *Psychologie de l'art* (1947–49) and its single-volume revision, *Les Voix du silence* (1951), Malraux claims that black-and-white photography, through its elimination of color, texture, volume, and scale, tends to focus attention on style. When objects lose their material properties through reproduction, when they can be gathered together in the pages of a book and placed in proximity to one another, one can begin to notice similarities in the style of artworks that used to be widely separated in time and space. For Malraux the photographic detail is especially useful in this regard, since it fragments the unity of an artwork that would more likely be perceived as a gestalt or whole by a viewer standing before the original, and in isolation a detail indicates something to the viewer of the reproduction that might otherwise escape notice.<sup>11</sup> In other words, as Rosalind Krauss has pointed out, the photographs decontextualize artworks as museums do, and Malraux was certainly aware of this when he coined the term *musée imaginaire* for his series.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to Malraux, Jorn focuses on the motif or gesture rather than on

9. On the separation of plates and text, see Anneli Fuchs, "Asger Jorn and Art History," *Hafnia: Copenhagen Papers in the History of Art* 10 (1985), p. 132, and Ann-Charlotte Weimarck, "'Nordic Anarchism': Asger Jorn and the Project 10,000 Years of Nordic Folk Art," the English summary of "'Nordisk Anarkism': Asger Jorn och projektet 10 000 års nordisk folkkonst" (Århus: Kalejdoskop Förlag, 1980), p. 84.

10. Jorn reviewed the first volume of Lundberg's series in 1946, and the entire series up to the fourth volume in 1950; see Asger Jorn, "The Living Essence of the Language of Form" (1946), in *Fraternité avant tout: Asger Jorn's Writings on Art and Architecture*, ed. Ruth Baumeister, trans. Paul Larkin (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2011), pp. 84–102, and Asger Jorn, "Changement d'époque dans la recherche stylistique," in *Discours aux pingouins et autres écrits*, ed. Marie-Anne Sichère, trans. Anne-Catherine Abecassis (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 2001), pp. 100–11. Jorn comments approvingly in the latter on the layout of the books.

11. André Malraux, *Museum Without Walls* (1947), vol. 1 of *The Psychology of Art*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), pp. 24 and 50; André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence* (1951), trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953), pp. 21 and 44.

12. Rosalind Krauss, "The Ministry of Fate," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 1005–6. Henri Zerner and Douglas Smith also discuss this aspect of Malraux's imaginary museum: see Henri Zerner, "Malraux and the Power of Photography," in *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, ed. Geraldine A. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), p. 117; and Douglas Smith in "Without Walls: 'World Art' and Malraux's Imaginary Museum," in *Cultural Memory: Essays on European Literature and History*, ed. Eric Caldicott and Anne Fuchs (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 181.

style in his choice of images. What he adapts from Malraux is the focus on the significant detail as revealed by the photograph, but what this detail exposes is a motif that might otherwise be overlooked, rather than a style. We see this methodology at work as well in the images chosen for *La Langue verte et la cuite*, when a tongue or tongue-like motif that might otherwise pass unnoticed is highlighted in color. While Malraux tended to select masterworks from museums around the world for his books, Jorn's choices for the Nordic folk-art series are specific to Scandinavia, and are deliberately provincial; his imagery, for the most part known only to locals or to specialists, is often astonishing, but the images are intended to demonstrate the value and interest of Scandinavian popular culture as opposed to the culture of elites.<sup>13</sup>

As Anneli Fuchs and other scholars have shown, Jorn became interested in the ideas of nineteenth-century Danish art historian Julius Lange as he was thinking about how to arrange the material for his Nordic folk-art series in a way that would give at least equal weight to the images as to the text.<sup>14</sup> Lange focused on the motif or gesture in a rather Warburgian way, and in the books in the series that have been published in recent years by Borgen and Walther König according to Jorn's specifications, as well as in the organization of images in *La Langue verte et la cuite*, particular attention is paid to the way the images relate to one another on the level of their motifs; the visual play between images always takes precedence over issues of formal resemblance, the history of the development of a motif, or iconography.<sup>15</sup> The range of materials in each volume of the Nordic folk-art series is, by the nature of its subject, much narrower than in *La Langue verte*, where the corpus of imagery is multicultural; in the latter, Jorn incorporated photographs of objects and images from around the world, including a number of cartoons that he had brought back from a recent visit to Cuba. That said, the majority of the images in *La Langue verte* are of European origin, and just under one quarter come from his archive of photographs for the Nordic folk-art project.

It should be noted that this project was stillborn, as Jorn was unable to persuade funding agencies to support the project unless he relinquished control of its overall direction—and over the presentation of images in particular, which others found eccentric. Jorn produced one volume as a pilot, in order to give potential

13. Michel Melot notes the academic and conventional nature of Malraux's choices of artworks in "André Malraux, du Musée imaginaire à l'Inventaire général," in *André Malraux, D'un siècle l'autre: Actes du colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle*, ed. Jean-Claude Larrat and Jacques Lecarme (S.l.: Gallimard, 2002), pp. 256–57.

14. Fuchs, "Asger Jorn and Art History," pp. 139, 141–43, and Peter Shield, "An Artist's World-View: The Writings of Asger Jorn," *Asger Jorn* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2002), pp. 288–89.

15. Fuchs, "Asger Jorn and Art History," p. 142. Recently, the Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König has published six volumes of the series in association with the Museum Jorn (then the Silkeborg Kunstmuseum), where the archival materials are held, and Borgen reissued the 1965 pilot volume in 1995. (Borgen also published the Scandinavian-language versions of the series, which are appearing in German or English through König.) This is as many volumes as Jorn's increasingly sketchy directions for the series will allow.

investors a proper idea of what he had in mind, but rather than lose control of the project, he chose to shut it down in 1965.<sup>16</sup>

However, Jorn published a related book in 1964, *Signes gravés sur les églises de l'Eure et du Calvados*. This was the second volume of a series Jorn edited called the Alexandrian Library: a series of Situationist pamphlets made up volume one, and *La Langue verte* was volume three. *Signes* focused on graffiti carved into the stone interiors of Norman churches between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries, which it presented as an unofficial culture contributed over the centuries by worshippers, as they attended Mass or visited the churches for other purposes.<sup>17</sup> Jorn was drawn to this graffiti for several reasons. On one level, he saw a resemblance between the kinds of marks made in these Norman churches over several centuries and the graffiti found in Scandinavian churches, which implies the persistence of cultural ties between Normandy, settled by Scandinavian peoples, and the cultural heritage of his homeland. (While Jorn was not a nationalist, he saw a specificity to Scandinavian culture that he wished to make available to others.) On another level, he was drawn to this graffiti as a popular expression that is also a commentary on, and a supplement to, the official culture of the Catholic Church.

For *Signes*, Jorn solicited texts from scholars, and wrote an important one himself; these texts are interpolated with full-page photographs of the graffiti, which are nearly all figurative rather than verbal. The images punctuate the essays, which refer to them, but they are not a function of the texts; rather, they are on an equal footing. Supporting visual materials drawn from other sources are shown facing the texts, but the photographs of the Norman graffiti are always displayed as full-page spreads, uninterrupted by text other than a number that refers to a table at the back of the book indicating the site of the graffiti. The photographs also focus on details and motifs without situating them in the architectural context of the churches in which they were found. This is one of the Malrucian features of Jorn and Franceschi's approach: to emphasize a significant detail through a close-up, which is what the photographic art of technical reproduction allows.

Such an approach is also taken in the Nordic folk-art series and in *La Langue verte*. In his presentation of the series, Jorn's thinking about the relation of part to whole is closely associated with his social thinking, wherein society ought to be a structural support for the individual, rather than the individual being subordinated to the needs of society. Emphasized here is a way of thinking

16. Anneli Fuchs, "Roots and Perspectives: Asger Jorn and Traditions in Art," trans. Annette Mester, in *Asger Jorn* (Ishøj: Arken Museum of Modern Art, 2002), p. 107.

17. The graffiti has often been described as Viking, but there are quite a few images, for instance of rigged sailing ships, that bear no resemblance to Viking ships, as well as a few words in Roman script. One of the contributors to the book, Norwegian ethnographer Gutorm Gjessing, dates the graffiti to between 1110 and 1800, noting that several inscriptions are dated to the eighteenth century. Gutorm Gjessing, "Nord et Normandie," *Signes gravés sur les églises de l'Eure et du Calvados* (Copenhagen: Éditions Borgen, 1964), pp. 35 and 39.

about the relation of detail to structure, or of individual to society, that also bears on Jorn's critique of structuralism.<sup>18</sup>

Much of Jorn's own written and visual work takes the form of a commentary on the work of others. As in his *Modification* and *Défiguration* series of paintings of 1959 and 1962, respectively, and in his critique of Marx's concept of value in his own *Critique de la politique économique*, published as a Situationist pamphlet in 1960, it is an active response to that work, rather than a passive reception and absorption. In a similar way, *La Langue verte* is an active response to and commentary on structuralism, and on Lévi-Strauss's *Le Cru et le cuit* in particular. This response produces something quite different from what prompted it; the source text or image gives shape or structure to the commentary, even as their possible meanings diverge.

Jorn first addressed structuralism in an article titled "Strukturalisme og Fortielse" (Structuralism and Suppression), published in the Danish periodical *Kriterium* in September 1967. He is critical of structuralism for "excluding the human being by claiming the human being was nothing other than an invention of the natural sciences that is no longer needed. *The human being is that which the structuralists must not discuss*, if they are to structure the human sciences."<sup>19</sup> Here Jorn also quotes Lévi-Strauss from his 1965 essay "Le Triangle culinaire": "Thus we can hope to discover . . . how the cooking of a society is a language through which it unconsciously translates its structure."<sup>20</sup>

It is these concerns that orient Jorn's conception of *La Langue verte*, the third sentence of which reads: "Strictly personal, this book evidently does not exist, since by definition that which [*ce qui*] does not exist is no one [*personne*], and no one can exist at the present hour."<sup>21</sup> It is significant that the organization of Jorn and Arnaud's own book turns on the orientation to cooking taken by Lévi-Strauss rather than to a general principle of structuralist method. This relation of one book to another, in addition to being a form of commentary, is itself a nearly structuralist opposition, which depends, however, on several conceptual differences important to Jorn in particular: on a philosophical and practical materialism, through which art is a practice in, and on, the real; on the idea of an experimental knowledge or *connaissance*, achieved through an engagement with empirical matter; and on the notion of a visual thinking that is independent of language. In a brief unpublished and undated text (which is given the approximate date of 1972 by the Museum Jorn), Jorn writes:

Why did we make *La Langue verte et la cuite*? First because the tongue as a subject of visual art is fascinating and much more varied than still

18. Asger Jorn, "Description préliminaire du dispositif et du plan pour la publication de 10 000 ans d'art populaire nordique" (1965), in Jorn, *Discours aux pingouins*, p. 346.

19. Asger Jorn, "Structuralism and Suppression," trans. Niels Henriksen, in this issue. The article was originally published in *Kriterium* 2 no. 4 (September 1967), pp. 6–8.

20. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Culinary Triangle," trans. Peter Brooks, *Partisan Review* 33, no. 4 (Fall 1966), p. 595; quoted by Jorn in "Structuralism and Suppression." "Le Triangle culinaire" was first published in French in *L'Arc* 26 (1965).

21. Asger Jorn and Noël Arnaud, *La Langue verte et la cuite: Étude gastrophonique sur la marmythologie musculinaire* (S.I.: Jean-Jacques Pauvert Éditeur, 1968), p. 11. In French, *qui* can signify both "that" and "who," depending on the context, and Jorn plays on this ambiguity here.

lives, and these images have never been shown together, and then because the linguists are seriously beginning to plague us [*nous casser les pieds*]. It was time to leave this “too defensive a posture against the power of words,” with which John E. Burchard reproaches artists in his chapter on “The City as Symbol” in *Sign, Image and Symbol*.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, there is a relation in Jorn’s mind between the critique of structuralism and an emphasis on the visual image. Jorn’s materialist orientation presupposes human agency, which is threatened by structuralist theory. Indeed, an essential component of the beliefs grounding Jorn’s artistic practice is that the artist gives shape to matter and eventually to an image that is prior to language.

The differences that Jorn draws between structuralism and his own values appear in *La Langue verte* as an excess to the structure, which is related to a corporal embodiment that the authors believe to be absent from structuralism. Lévi-Strauss’s interest in cooking seems to be based primarily on his insight that it is a universal human activity that can be diagrammed and thus understood conceptually in a way similar to that other human universal, language. Lévi-Strauss’s “Le Triangle culinaire,” for instance, is largely concerned with diagramming structural oppositions between food in its raw state and in different states of cooking and decomposition, which he describes by adapting Roman Jakobson’s “vowel triangle” and “consonant triangle” (by which phonemes become significant through a structure of difference) to the “culinary triangle” of the title. Nevertheless, Lévi-Strauss opens the “Overture” to *Le Cru et le cuit* with these words:

The aim of this book is to show how empirical categories—such as the categories of the raw and the cooked, the fresh and the decayed, the moistened and the burned, etc., which can only be accurately defined by ethnographic observation and, in each instance, by adopting the standpoint of a particular culture—can nonetheless be used as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions.<sup>23</sup>

That is, Lévi-Strauss is ordering empirical data using a structuralist method, and this grounding in practices of cooking, eating, and drinking, and in Amerindian myths about the origins of these practices, itself structures the relations between *La Langue verte* and *Le Cru et le cuit*.

One of the initial themes of *La Langue verte*, adapted from *Le Cru et le cuit*, is that of the *dénicheur des langues*, the “dislodger of tongues,” which is both described as a myth in Jorn and Arnaud’s text and displayed as a motif in numer-

22. Asger Jorn, untitled and undated typescript (1972?), 4 pp., in Museum Jorn, Silkeborg. Jorn is quoting John E. Burchard’s essay “The City as Symbol” in *Sign, Image and Symbol*, ed. Gyorgy Kepes (London: Studio Vista, 1966), p. 236.

23. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le cuit* (S.I.: Plon, 1964), p. 1; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, p. 1.



ous images—in fact, 102 of the 315 images in the book are included under the rubric of *héros dénêcheurs de langues* in the “Service de table des enluminures” at the back of the volume.<sup>24</sup> (The *dénêcheurs des langues* are a variation on the *dénêcheurs* in one of the first myths described in Lévi-Strauss’s book, concerning the “bird-nesters” of the Bororo tribe in the Mato Grosso state of western Brazil, who rob nests of young macaws.<sup>25</sup>) As the authors write in *La Langue verte*, the “heroes dislodgers of tongues” are those in structuralist linguistics who separate the human being from language:

The relation between tongue [*langue*] and language [*langage*] merits examination.

The tongue is language less speech [*parole*]. To extract one’s tongue, it is therefore necessary to cut off one’s speech, which one achieves in a radical manner by cutting out the whole tongue. This carnage of the tongue is called language. The operation itself is called *langagement*.<sup>26</sup>

Here Jorn and Arnaud are playfully taking up the Saussurean distinction accepted by Lévi-Strauss between *langue* as system and *parole* as speech—as well as, secondarily, Sartre’s notion of commitment (*l’engagement*).<sup>27</sup> Their critique of the sep-



Plate from *La Langue verte et la cuite*. 1968.

24. One of the many untranslatable examples of wordplay in *La Langue verte et la cuite*, this expression condenses the *service de table* or “dinner service” and the *table des enluminures* or “table of illuminations,” *enluminure* also signifying the coloring of the tongues in the same way that a print may be printed in different colors.

25. Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, pp. 35–47. In the 1964 Plon version read by Jorn, the relevant pages are pp. 43–55. *Dénêcheurs* is the French term, “bird-nesters” its translation.

26. Jorn and Arnaud, p. 48. *Langagement* is literally “languagement,” but it sounds like the Sartrean term *l’engagement* (“commitment”).

27. Lévi-Strauss refers to Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole* in two places that would have been easily accessible to Jorn and Arnaud: in “The Structural Study of Myth,” first published in English in 1955 and included in *Structural Anthropology* (1958), trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Schoepf (S.I.: Basic Books, 1963), p. 209; and in Lévi-Strauss’s 1960 *Leçon inaugurale* for the





Plate from *La Langue verte et la cuite*. 1968.

aration of language from the human animal is made in two ways. One is through the predominance of the visual over the verbal in the book, which *shows* the tongue as an implicit critique of structuralism's privileging of language—although the text is full of exuberant wordplay, and offers up its own mythical narratives to complement and parody those that Lévi-Strauss has gathered in *Le Cru et le cuit*. The other is through an insistence, both verbal and visual, on the tongue in all of its functions—eating, drinking, vomiting, speaking, kissing, or being shown in a spirit of derision. If myths about cooking are the basis of Lévi-Strauss's study, they are for Lévi-Strauss “structured like

a language,” a point of view that Jorn and Arnaud counter with the unruly tongue of their title, which is language but also more than language—language as but one function of a Rabelaisian body.<sup>28</sup>

This raises the possibility of a Bakhtinian analysis of *La Langue verte* as a carnivalesque response to structuralist theory. Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, first published in the Soviet Union in 1965, had not yet been translated into French by the time of *La Langue verte*'s appearance, though Julia Kristeva had introduced his work to a French public in an important article published in

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Collège de France, published as “The Scope of Anthropology,” trans. Monique Layton in *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 17. Lévi-Strauss famously critiqued Sartre in the last section of *La Pensée sauvage* (1962), which is probably why Jorn and Arnaud are bringing Lévi-Strauss and Sartre together here.

28. The image of a tongue being used as a musical instrument, which comes from a book of engravings of grotesque figures entitled *Les Songes drolatiques de Pantagruel*, is the first one in the book, the epigraph reading: “Any intelligent man who builds begins wisely by starting with the kitchen.” Jorn and Arnaud, p. 5. The caption specifies that the image comes from a book, published by Richard Breton in Paris in 1565, of 120 engravings of figures purporting to have been invented by Rabelais. This is the first of nine images from this source used in *La Langue verte et la cuite*.

*Critique* in April 1967.<sup>29</sup> Arnaud was a contributor to *Critique*, and therefore may have read this text. However, Kristeva introduced Bakhtin as a member of the formalist circle (which he was not), and analyzed his work from a structuralist perspective, so it is unlikely that Bakhtin's thinking would have been available to either Jorn or Arnaud as an alternative to structuralist theory.<sup>30</sup> In any case, a knowledge of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque was not necessary in order for Jorn and Arnaud to conceive their book; the *Cahiers du Collège de Pataphysique* had published special issues on "Rabelais pataphysicien" and "Jarry pantagruéliste" in 1954, and an interest in Rabelais was shared with other pataphysicians like Raymond Queneau in the 1950s and '60s.<sup>31</sup>

Even if Jorn lacked direct knowledge of *Rabelais and His World* and his "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1975), Bakhtin's theories can be useful in understanding the orientation of *La Langue verte et la cuite*. Bakhtin insists that both the language and the viewpoint of Rabelais's fiction enter literature from a popular consciousness, rather than from elite or official culture. For Bakhtin, they are related in a fundamental way to the seasonal rhythms of agricultural labor and to the commerce of the town fair, as well as to the festivals that still punctuated everyday life in sixteenth-century France. In other words, Bakhtin's is a class analysis, through which he argues convincingly that the emphasis on the material in Rabelais, as opposed to the spiritual and ideal of the religious and aristocratic communities that made up the official culture of the time, is closely related to popular experience in towns or on estates.

In "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin argues that labor processes are oriented to harvest and birth, and throughout *Rabelais and His World* he claims that folk or popular cultures are closely related to nature, in ways that aristocratic, clerical, and, later, bourgeois conceptions of culture are not.<sup>32</sup> Bakhtin understands the human body to be open to the world, and one of the figures of this openness in Rabelais's fiction is the mouth, through which food and drink flow (and from which vomit issues in moments of excess): "But the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all

29. Julia Kristeva, "Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman," translated as "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (1967) in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University, 1982), pp. 64–91. The article was first published in *Critique* 33 (April 1967).

30. The English translation of *Rabelais and His World* was published in 1968, the French one in 1970. For a helpful discussion of Bakhtin's reception, including Kristeva's, see Karine Zbinden, *Bakhtin between East and West: Cross-Cultural Transmission* (London: Legenda, 2006).

31. The *Cahiers du Collège de Pataphysique* 13–14 (March 9, 1954) was devoted to "Rabelais pataphysicien" and to "Jarry pantagruéliste" in issue 15 (April 14, 1954). Raymond Queneau alludes to Rabelais in his novel *Les Fleurs bleues* (1965). Bakhtin mentions Jarry as an example of the modern grotesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1965), trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1984), p. 46.

32. M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1975), ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 206–07.

else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss.”<sup>33</sup>

Popular language also issues from the mouth, of course, in shouts, curses, and wordplay, which Bakhtin finds of great interest in *The Histories of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, an early instance of vernacular literature in France.<sup>34</sup> Laughter, too, comes from the mouth, and Bakhtin sees parody and the grotesque as essential features of the literature he is investigating:

Let us enlarge upon the second important trait of the people’s festive laughter: that it is also directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world. They, too, are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed. This is one of the essential differences of the people’s festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times. The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world’s comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction. The people’s ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it.<sup>35</sup>

This for Bakhtin is one of the dimensions of the popular consciousness that inform Rabelais’s fiction. Exaggeration and hyperbole are two of the qualities of parody and the grotesque, which debase the ideal and the hierarchy of official culture into the material of unofficial popular culture: “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.”<sup>36</sup> The giants Gargantua and Pantagruel exemplify these qualities in their size and their actions, despite the fact that they are also princes.

Although *La Langue verte et la cuite* is a parody of structuralist theory, as well as of the musical and scientific pretensions of *Le Cru et le cuit*, it also adopts Lévi-Strauss’s method in the organization of its images and prose. The permutations of images of the tongue—which are broadly organized in the “table service of illuminations” into *héros dénicheurs de langues*, *la langue pédale* (roughly, “foot lickers”), *tireurs* (those who show their tongues), *les langues élémentales* (the elements in question being chiefly air and fire), *la langue orientable* (in which tongues take the form of vegetal arabesques), *la langue zoomorphe* (which are mostly snakes, but on two occasions frogs), *bi-langues*, and *tri-langues*—are transformational in nature. So, for instance, the series of images of dislodgers of tongues begins with the “heroes”

33. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 317; see also p. 26.

34. Ibid., pp. 15–17 and p. 182.

35. Ibid., p. 12. The first trait of laughter according to Bakhtin is that this laughter is festive and therefore collective, rather than individual.

36. Ibid., pp. 19–20. He also writes: “Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style.” Ibid., p. 303.

“dislodging” the tongues of dragons; it then shifts to images of heroes forcing open an animal’s jaws (a traditional sign of strength and courage), which are followed by human hands being grasped in the mouths of beasts—a literal inversion of the hero’s domination in the earlier images. This series of transformations is in keeping with Lévi-Strauss’s account of how myths spread in Amerindian societies through a logic of difference.



Plate from *La Langue verte et la cuite*. 1968.

The text is organized according to a different logic of development than that found in the “table service of illuminations.” The table of contents is set up as a menu, with each dish an example of wordplay whose name often incorporates both musical and gastronomic references (for instance, “Pizzicato al pommo d’oro” and “Elégie au fromage blanc”). The texts that have been given the names of individual dishes are modular, and they develop over the course of the book as a series of *dismythes* and *marmythes*.<sup>37</sup>

The musical references in the book’s organization refer of course to Lévi-Strauss’s own use of musical terms to structure the four volumes of his *Mythologiques* series, whose first volume was *Le Cru et le cuit*. Lévi-Strauss uses similar titles in the organization of his chapters (e.g., “Fugue des cinq sens,” “Cantate de la sarigue” [opossum]—which later shows up as “Cantate des seringues” [syringes] in Jorn and Arnaud’s book). Lévi-Strauss adopts a musical structure because he believes myth and music to be organized in similar ways, but he keeps the structure of his book and the contents of the myths he discusses separate; in the organization of their book, Jorn and Arnaud integrate the content of those myths as two forms of pleasure.<sup>38</sup> The difference is subtle but of great importance, for Jorn and Arnaud’s synthesis acts as a critique of the separation they see informing Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist method. Within the texts, Jorn mimetically adopts the same academic rhetorical devices that Lévi-Strauss frequently relies on (“Mais il y a plus” [But there is more], “La démonstration peut être poussée encore plus loin” [The proof can be

37. The marmythes continue the parody of *The Raw and the Cooked*: *marmite* is the French word for “cooking pot.”

38. Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le cuit*, pp. 34–35; *The Raw and the Cooked*, p. 26.

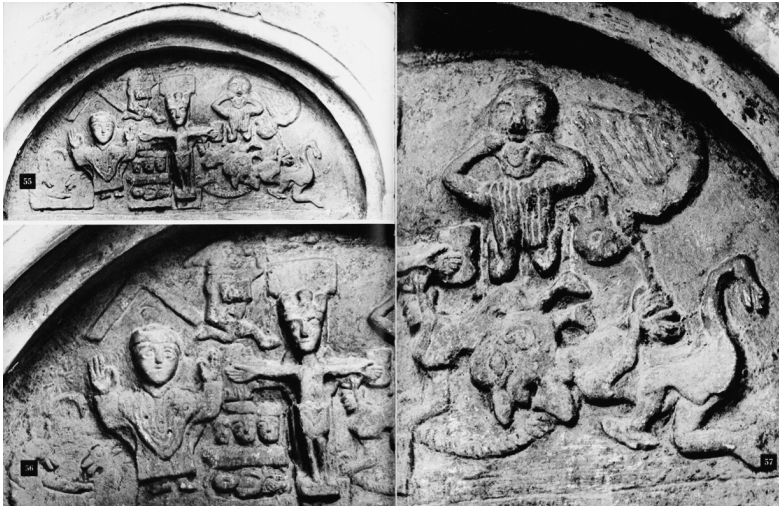


Plate from 12th-Century Stone  
Sculptures of Scania. 1965.

pushed even further], etc.), which he noted in his copy of *Le Cru et le cuit*, and which serve to tie the parody more closely to its model.<sup>39</sup>

Jorn and Arnaud's emphasis on the embodied tongue, a response to a disembodied structuralist discourse that has eliminated the human being from its reasoning, takes the form of a Joycean excess of language and of images that bear witness to orality. For Bakhtin the mouth has symbolic value as an opening to the world, especially in those cultures and for those classes involved in agricultural labor that are most dependent on nature, and Jorn seems to share Bakhtin's viewpoint.<sup>40</sup> If the variety of these nonverbal images of the mouth and tongue initially fascinated Jorn—he may first have noticed the motif when collecting photographs for the Nordic folk-art series (as, for instance, in a remarkable image of a figure showing his tongue at a crucifixion, found in both *La Langue verte* and *12th-Century Stone Sculptures of Scania* (*Skånes Stensulptur under 1100-tallet*), Jorn's 1965 pilot volume for the Nordic folk-art series)—he offers them as a response to the structuralist reduction of *la langue* (the tongue) to language. This is so even if the organization of the images in the book is sometimes based on shifts in sounds and meaning in language—for example, from *la langue forgée* (the forged tongue) of one image to *la langue fourchue* (the forked tongue) of several later images, and to the *bi-langue* of yet others, which sometimes takes on the properties of the plant

39. Jorn underlined all of these figures of speech in his copy of *Le Cru et le cuit*, and used them liberally in his own text.

40. Significantly, Lévi-Strauss also discusses laughter and eating as openings to the world, in *Le Cru et le cuit*, pp. 133–34; *The Raw and the Cooked*, pp. 125–26.



motifs in decorative arabesques. Extending the visual logic at work here, in some images the leafy tongues suggest intoxication, as in the image captioned, “Bilinguiste viniculaire éméché” (tipsy vinicular bilinguist).

Intoxication has a positive value for Jorn and Arnaud, and Jorn in fact describes it as “natural aesthetics” in his 1952 book *Luck and Chance*.

*Bacchus, Dionysius, Liber* and our Nordic *Frø* all personify this ancient principle of intoxication or natural aesthetics which is, indeed, *the divine origin*



*Plates from La  
Langue verte et  
la cuite. 1968.*

*of the concept of freedom itself.* But it is very significant to point out that these are above all symbols of fertility, work, love and liberation, showing that *true freedom to consist of liberation into life, not of freeing oneself from life*, as is normally maintained in the modern presupposition of unproductive independence, where freedom means passivity.<sup>41</sup>

Jorn's painting *Dead Drunk Danes*, 1960, its title an allusion to Shakespeare's line “your Dane dead drunk” from *Othello*, is another instance of this, though it is also in keeping with the Rabelaisian theme of banqueting that runs through *La Langue verte et la cuite*.<sup>42</sup> The title of the painting appears to be a response to a remark made by U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower at an address to fellow Republicans on July 27, 1960:

Only in the last few weeks, I have been reading quite an article on the experiment of almost complete paternalism in a friendly European country. This country has a tremendous record for socialistic opera-

41. Asger Jorn, *Luck and Chance: Dagger and Guitar* (1952, revised 1963), in *The Natural Order and Other Texts*, trans. Peter Shield (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 273. This last remark would seem to refer to the passivity and atomization of the consumer in consumer society, a point of view shared with Jorn's once and future comrades in the Situationist International.

42. Iago: “Why, he drinks you with facility your Dane dead drunk. He sweats not to overthrow your Almain. He gives your Hollander a vomit ere the next pottle can be filled.” This very Rabelaisian speech, from Act 2, Scene 3 of *Othello*, vaunts the superiority of Englishmen where drinking is concerned.



tion, following a socialistic philosophy, and the record shows that their rate of suicide has gone up almost unbelievably and I think they were almost the lowest nation in the world for that. Now, they have more than twice our rate. Drunkenness has gone up. Lack of ambition is discernible on all sides. Therefore, with that kind of example, let's always remember Lincoln's admonition. Let's do in the federal government only those things that people themselves cannot do at all, or cannot so well do in their individual capacities.<sup>43</sup>



These remarks were widely reported in the Scandinavian press. Eisenhower did not name the country he was referring to, but Jorn's title—with its reference to drunken Danes—reads as a playfully intertextual response to it.

While there is a necessarily close relation between word and image in *La Langue verte*—given that language is a property of the tongue—much of the book is focused on the visual relationships between images, independent of text, which they do not illustrate. For Jorn images are not dependent on words, and have had a long history of use independent of language; one reason for his interest in the graffiti found in Norman and Scandinavian churches is that they are figurative rather than verbal, possibly because the worshippers who carved them into wood and stone were not literate.<sup>44</sup> In 1965 Jorn titled a painting *Im Anfang war das Bild* (In the Beginning Was the Image), inverting in an obvious way the intent of the first words of the Gospel of John to indicate the precedence of image over language. As Jorn's biographer Troels Andersen notes:

Traditional iconography compares motifs that “illustrate” known sto-

43. Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Remarks at the Republican National Committee Breakfast, Chicago, Illinois.” This address was given at the Morrison Hotel in Chicago on July 27, 1960. It can be found online at *The American Presidency Project*, [presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=11891](http://presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=11891) (accessed April 15, 2012). I am grateful to Howard L. Pankratz, archivist at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene, Kansas, for indicating this source to me.

44. There are a few photographs of inscriptions in *Signes gravés*, but the vast majority of the graffiti in the book is exclusively figurative in nature.

ries such as classical myths, Biblical tales or accounts of historical events. Jorn's approach was different. He rejected the accepted notion among scholars that an image illustrates a pre-existing, verbally formulated content, whether transmitted orally or in writing. Instead he proposed the hypothesis that a pictorial representation may generate a verbally expressed myth.<sup>45</sup>

Jorn was for this reason extremely interested in the cultural tradition of the *husdrapa*, in which Nordic bards constructed poetic improvisations based on images. Images are thus prior to their interpretation in words, rather than second-order phenomena.<sup>46</sup>

As a critique of structuralism's privileging of language over other forms of expression and other aspects of human behavior, *La Langue verte* attempts to readjust the balance between word and image by insisting on the inseparability of the two meanings of *langue*. Jorn and Arnaud link them graphically through the identical coloring of titles and of tongues on each page where titles are found, connecting rather than separating the two. Thus the tongue is sometimes literally green, though at other times it is pink, blue, yellow, or orange. This is the *image* of language (*langue*)—how it shows itself, how it looks.

I noted earlier that Arnaud was a regent (and later satrap) in the College of 'Pataphysics. Invented by Alfred Jarry in the 1890s (and institutionalized by the College in 1948), pataphysics, "the science of exceptions" or "the science of imaginary solutions," is noted for its ironic adoption of scientific procedures. While Jorn was ambivalent about pataphysics and, despite the claims of many scholars, was never a member of the College, there is nonetheless a pataphysical quality to *La Langue verte et la cuite*.<sup>47</sup> In the manuscript version of a text prepared for the *Magazine littéraire*, which was published in a shortened version in February 1969, Arnaud noted:

A methodology has been made of a method (that of Lévi-Strauss). . . . Then, as always happens with ideas that become dogmatic, what we call in our book a methodotautology has come to be made of the methodology; in other words, the endless repetition of the same idea of

45. Troels Andersen, "Thidrek," in *Asger Jorn* (Ishøj: Arken Museum of Modern Art, 2002), p. 139.

46. On the *husdrapa*, see Weimarck, p. 87.

47. Jorn was honored with the title of *commandeur exquis* of the Order of the Grande Gidouille by the College in 1961, after his resignation from the Situationist International, but this was an honor bestowed on members and nonmembers alike, and Jorn neither subscribed to the College's publications nor occupied any position in its hierarchy. E-mail correspondence with Thieri Foulc, regent of the Collège de 'Pataphysique, February 16, 2009. An article by Jorn that was rather critical of pataphysics, "La Pataphysique, une religion en formation," was published in *Internationale situationniste* 6 (August 1961), pp. 29–32, after his resignation, together with an editorial note clarifying the Situationists' position on pataphysics; the date of this publication, following the announcement of Jorn's award in the *Dossiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique* 15 (which appeared in late June 1961), is perhaps a sign of a strategic move against the College by the Situationist group that was designed to embarrass Jorn.

method in regards to no matter what. Pataphysically speaking, it does not displease us in the least that a simple scientific hypothesis has been set up as a Table of the Law. Science, and culture in general, are above all administration. Culture is administered as one administers the Holy Sacrament and as one administers a potion, and, of course, as one administers the State. Culture is the police of the spirit. A naive person can find it astonishing that Lautréamont, Rimbaud and even Dada have become the topic of theses at the Sorbonne. To us it's not. The Sorbonne congratulates itself on having good digestion. And indeed, it swallows everything, in hoping that everything it hands back will be something unrecognizable. Structuralism is undeniably neater. It's the dietetic, hygienic Sorbonne. Lévi-Strauss's culinary obsession is, in this regard, quite symptomatic. And it's this, in the end, that makes him extremely sympathetic.<sup>48</sup>

Lévi-Strauss's culinary obsession makes him sympathetic to Arnaud, and this despite the universal application of his method. It is not in fact the universality of this application that is the problem for Arnaud, but its truth claims, for pataphysics is the science of exceptions, where any law is only applicable to a single instance; consequently, there are no universal laws or truths, and structuralism, with its claim to the scientific status of a *savoir* or theoretical knowledge, is just as imaginary a solution as any other. This is the challenge pataphysics makes to science, even while scientific procedures are scrupulously followed in the research published in the College's own periodicals over the sixty-plus years of its existence. At the same time, the concept of pataphysics, as established by Jarry, is founded on the notion of equivalence, of nothing's being, in itself, more or less true than anything else, and this brings it close to the differential logic of structuralist method, for which it is the differences between myths that are significant, rather than the veracity or content of specific myths.<sup>49</sup> It is this aspect of equivalence, I think, that informs the organization of the photographs in *La Langue verte et la cuite*.

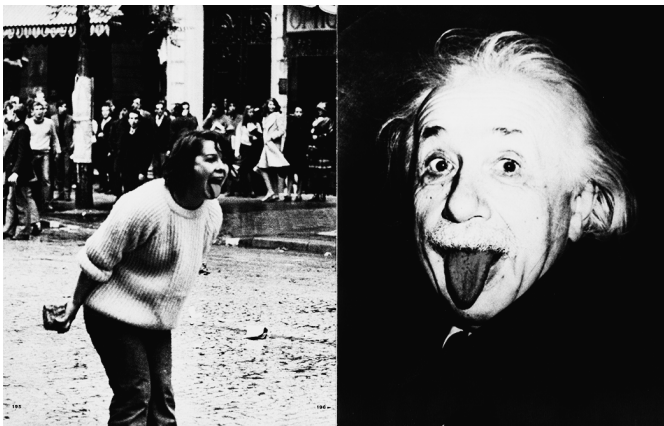
In the interview that was the basis for Pierre Hahn's article in the *Magazine littéraire*, Arnaud notes that "Lévi-Strauss affirms that 'there can be nothing arbitrary in works of the mind,'" and goes on to say: "For, as you have understood, we are passionately though imperturbably for the arbitrary in works of the mind,

48. Noël Arnaud, manuscript of an interview with Pierre Hahn, January 17, 1969, in Asger Jorn and Noël Arnaud, *La Langue verte et la cuite: Manuscrits, photographies et documents originaux* (Toulouse: Librairie Champavert, 2002), pp. 64–65. (Note: This is the catalogue for the sale of the manuscripts for *La Langue verte et la cuite*, which are now in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris.) The interview was used as the basis for Pierre Hahn, "Argot, structuralisme et gastronomie," *Magazine littéraire* 26 (February 1969), p. 24.

49. Arnaud writes about the pataphysical notion of equivalence in "Mythe du mythe et science des sciences," *Le Monde*, November 29, 1967.

for caprice, for delirium and for the absolute sovereignty of the imaginary.”<sup>50</sup> This pataphysical preference for the arbitrary—for the exception rather than the rule—is what Arnaud brings to the book, in addition to his erudition, his excellent French, and his gastronomic interests. As a founding member of Oulipo, or the “Ouvroir de littérature potentielle,” Arnaud was also interested in structures, but ones consciously devised as rules for literary games, rather than the unconscious structures investigated by structuralists. He notes, in a later interview with Warren F. Motte, Jr., that Oulipo and structuralism share quite a lot, but that there is this significant difference.<sup>51</sup>

In keeping with the pataphysical attitude towards science, it is a matter of



*Left: Two plates from La Langue verte et la cuite. 1968.*

*Photographs by Manuel Bidermanas/akg-image and Arthur Sasse/AFP/Getty Images.*

*Right: Jorn. Pas de puissance d'imagination sans images puissantes. 1968.*

course that *La Langue verte* includes Arthur Sasse's now-famous UPI photograph of Albert Einstein showing his tongue on his seventy-second birthday, next to a photograph from the weekly magazine *L'Express* of a young woman on the streets of Paris in May 1968, captioned, “La Langue universitaire pavée de bonnes intentions” (“The university tongue paved with good intentions”—*pavée* is the verb here, but a *pavé* is also a cobblestone, which she holds in her hand).<sup>52</sup> This is the only reference to the recent events that had shaken French society so thoroughly—indeed, the only reference to current events generally—in a book that appeared five months after the May revolt.<sup>53</sup> While its publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert was closely involved in the events, Jorn, according to his former girlfriend

50. Arnaud, interview with Hahn, p. 65.

51. Warren F. Motte, Jr., “Twenty Questions for Noël Arnaud,” *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature* 10 no. 2 (Spring 1986), p. 293.

52. The photograph, taken by the photojournalist Manuel Bidermanas, was first published as part of a suite of six photographs of police repression and student resistance in *L'Express*, May 13–19, 1968.

53. With one other exception: there is a drawing by Roland Topor of the head of a gagged man, whose forehead opens to stick out a tongue, which evidently connotes the mind's ability to resist even where speech is prohibited. The drawing, which was published in *Action* 9 (June 13, 1968), p. 2, is reproduced in small dimensions on p. 156 of *La Langue verte*. (*Action* was a newspaper

Jacqueline de Jong, remained far away from them in the suburbs.<sup>54</sup> He nevertheless produced a series of four posters in solidarity with the May–June events, which were as he says “conscientiously misspelled.”<sup>55</sup> These posters take the form



of a commentary on the May–June events, as well as on the posters produced by the *Ateliers populaires* in the occupied art and design schools in Paris and elsewhere, which featured simple graphics and slogans oriented to the demands of workers and students in the occupied factories and universities and in the streets.

Jorn's own posters are also a combination of word and image, though their slogans, such as “Pas de puissance d'imagination sans images puissantes” (No power of the imagination without powerful images), which refers to the 1968 slogan “L'Imagination au pouvoir” (All power to the imagination), differ from those of the *Ateliers populaires*, as do their images. Jorn was one of a number of artists who made posters in solidarity with the May events but who declined to take part in the anonymous production of the *Ateliers populaires* for reasons both

aesthetic and political. There is no question that, in the economy of *La Langue verte et la cuite*, the image of the woman showing her tongue is a positive one, precisely as

published by the *Comités d'action* organizing resistance to the regime, and featured many cartoons by different hands, including regular contributions by Topor.) However, the drawing's reference to the May–June events is not explicit, whereas the subject of Bidermanas's photograph would have been instantly recognizable at the time of publication.

54. “Interview with Jacqueline de Jong by Graham Birtwistle,” in Luciano Caprile, *Asger Jorn*, vol. 2 (Milano: Skira, 1996), pp. 524–25.

55. Asger Jorn, untitled and undated manuscript, Museum Jorn, Silkeborg.





Page from *La Langue verte et la cuite*. 1968. © Pierre Alechinsky/SODRAC 2012.

a gesture of derision aimed at power, part of a long-standing popular tradition that Jorn and Arnaud are highlighting here. There is a whole section of *La Langue verte* devoted to *tireurs de langue*, which is an instance of corporal humor aimed at authority, and the book's final image is a drawing the former Cobra artist Pierre Alechinsky made for the cover of *Les Tireurs de langue*, the book on which he collaborated with the Israeli writer Amos Kenan.<sup>56</sup>

It is important to emphasize that Jorn and Arnaud's book is a response to structuralism from the viewpoint of artists; it therefore differs from the intellectual critiques made by Claude Lefort, Henri Lefebvre, and others in the 1950s and '60s. One of the key aspects of Jorn and Arnaud's response is an expansive humor—derisive, parodic,

but also generous. It is not, in other words, a humor that treats either its object of parody or its audience as an idiot; it is, rather, an inclusive humor, a carnivalesque attitude as described by Bakhtin. In their critique of the separation that informs structuralism's logic of difference, Jorn and Arnaud focus on a materialist knowledge gained through the senses (a *connaissance* rather than a *savoir*), placing an emphasis on the unruly human animal rather than on a system. They focus on synthesis rather than on distinction, bringing images together in often astonishing ways that are both in keeping with Lévi-Strauss's notion of transformational structures and different from it. They enact their own logic of difference in differentiating themselves from a differential logic, which is and is not parodic in nature.

56. Published in 1962 by Fratelli Pozzo—the same printers that produced *La Langue verte et la cuite* for Pauvert.