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Speech and writing according to Hegel

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Introduction to Hegel's semiology

Since real difference belongs to the extremes, this mean (*Mitte*) is but an abstract neutrality, their real possibility, the as it were theoretical element of the existence, process, and results of chemical objects. In the corporeal element water has this function of being medium; in the spiritual element, in so far as there is an analogon of such a relationship in it, we must seek this function on the side of signs in general, and more precisely (*näher*) in language. [*Science of Logic*, p729]

What must be understood here by 'mean'? By 'semiological medium'? And more precisely (*näher*) - more closely, more narrowly - by 'linguistic medium'? We shall here be interested in the difference of this narrowing, discovering on the way nothing else than a narrowing of difference: another name for the medium of the spirit.

In the *Encyclopaedia* (§ 458) Hegel regrets that in general 'signs and language are introduced as an appendix in psychology, or even in logic, without any reflection on their necessity and their enchainment in the system of the activity of the understanding'.

For the moment let us see here the indication or the incitation to recognise that the essential place of semiology is at the centre, not on the margin or as an appendix to Logic.

In determining Being as presence (presence of the present being [*étantprésent*] in the form of an object, or self-presence of the present being in the form of self-

consciousness), metaphysics could only consider the *sign* as a passage, a place of passage, a passage-way [*passerelle*] between two moments of presence, the provisional reference from one presence to the other. The passage-way can be *lifted*. The sign procedure, the process of signification, has a history; it is history comprehended: comprehended between a primordial presence and its reappropriation in a final presence, in the self-presence that would have been separated from itself only during the time of a detour, the time of the sign. The time of the sign is then the time of reference; and time itself is but the referring of presence to itself. As such signification, the sign procedure is, to be sure, the moment of presence lost; but it is a presence lost by the very time that engages it in the movement of its reappropriation.

The sign can then, in metaphysics, become an object - the object of a *theory*. That is it can be considered, regarded *on the basis* of what is given to be seen in intuition, viz. the present being. The theory of signs arises from present being, but also, and thereby, in view of the present being, in view of presence. The 'in view' designates the theoretical pre-eminence of the gaze, as well as the authority of the final aim, the *telos* of reappropriation of full presence, the ordination of the theory of signs to the light of parousia. The theory of signs, already inasmuch as it is a theory, though it be given out to be scientific or positive, is, from this *point of view*, metaphysical in essence; it is historically metaphysical inasmuch as the concept, and consequently the whole theory, of signs remains commanded by an archaeology, an eschatology and a teleology ordained to presence, or to presentation of present being.

It could be shown that this very general necessity governs metaphysics in its essence and in its totality - which is one with its history, and, I would even go so far as to say: with history as such.

We should then expect Hegelianism, which is so generally said to represent the *completion* of metaphysics, both in the sense of accomplishment and in the sense of end, to give the most systematic and powerful, the most ingathered, ingathering, assembled, assembling form to this metaphysical gesture. We should find a primary index of this in an architectonic reading that aims to locate the place Hegel assigns to the theory of signs in the system. For such an architectonic reading it would

doubtless be best to consult here the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (1817).

I Semiology and psychology

The theory of signs is inscribed in the third part of the *Encyclopaedia*, that is in the *Philosophy of Mind*, following the *Science of Logic (Lesser Logic)* and the *Philosophy of Nature*. What does this division answer to? To briefly collect its meaning it is enough that we refer to what Hegel himself says at the end of the [Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia*, § 18:](#)

As the whole science, and only the whole, can exhibit what the Idea or system of reason is, it is impossible to give in a preliminary way (*vorläufige Yorstellung*: precursorially) a general impression of a philosophy. Nor can a division (*Einstellung*: distribution) of philosophy into its parts be intelligible, except in connection with the system. A preliminary division, like the limited conception from which it comes, can only be an anticipation (something anticipated). Here, however, it is premised that the Idea turns out to be (*sich erweist*) the thought which is completely (*schlechthin*: simply) identical with itself, and not identical simply in the abstract, but also in its action of setting itself over against itself, so as to gain a being of its own, and yet a being in full possession of itself while it is in this other (*und in diesem Anderen nur bei sich selbst zu sein*). Thus philosophy is subdivided in three parts:

1. Logic, the science of the Idea in and for itself.
2. The Philosophy of Nature, the science of the Idea in its otherness.

[Nature is thus the Idea inasmuch as it has left itself and opposed itself to itself.]

3. The Philosophy of Mind, the science of the Idea come back to itself out of that otherness.

All this is, of course, a movement, and Hegel makes clear that this kind of dividing would be abusive if it decomposed and juxtaposed these three parts, substantialising their differences.

The theory of signs belongs, then, to the third part, the Philosophy of Mind, the science of that moment in which the Idea returns to itself after having so to speak lost consciousness, lost the consciousness and meaning of itself in nature. The sign would then be a moment or an essential structure of the Idea's return to self-

presence, returning to itself in Mind. Mind is the Idea's being with itself. We can then already assign to signs the absolutely general determination of being a form or a movement of the Idea's relation to itself in Mind, a mode of the absolute's being with itself.

Let us narrow our focus, and situate with more precision the theory of signs within the Philosophy of Mind. The Philosophy of Mind is itself articulated into three parts, corresponding to the three movements of the development of Mind:

1. The Mind Subjective: the self-relation, and the ideal totality of the Idea. Being with itself in inward freedom.
2. The Mind Objective: in the form of a world to be produced and to be produced no longer in the form of ideality, but of reality. Freedom now becomes existent, present necessity (*vorhandene Notwendigkeit*).
3. The Mind Absolute: the existent unity of Mind as objectivity and of

Mind as ideality and concept, which essentially and actually is in and for itself and for ever reproduces itself: Mind in its absolute truth.

The first two moments are finite and transitory determinations of Mind. The theory of signs belongs to the science of one of these finite determinations, that of the Mind Subjective. If we consider that 'the finite *is not*, i.e. is not the truth, but merely a transition (*Ubergehen*) and an emergence to something higher (*Ubersichhinausgehen*)', then we can determine signs - which are part of a finite determination of Mind - to be a mode or finite determination of Mind Subjective taken as mediation or self-surpassing; the sign is a transition within transition, a transition of transition. But it is the transition of the departure from itself that is the route unto itself (*nosto*). This transition is, of course, thought in the movement of the true, under the authority of the dialectic, and is supervised (so to speak) by the concepts of *Aufhebung* and negativity. 'This finitude ... is the dialectic that makes a thing have its cessation (*Vergehen*) by and in another.'

But let us state yet more precisely the site of Hegel's semiology. The Mind Subjective itself is

1. In itself, or immediate: this is the soul or the Spirit in nature (*Naturgeist*), the object of Anthropology, which in fact studies man in nature.
2. For itself, or mediate, as identical reflection in itself and in other things. This is Mind in relation or particularization (*Besonderung*): consciousness the object treated by Phenomenology of Mind.
3. Mind determining itself in itself, as a subject for itself. This is the object treated by Psychology.

The theory of signs belongs precisely to psychology, defined as the science of Mind determining itself in itself as a subject for itself. Let us in passing notice (though this is most significant) that semiology, as a part of the science of the subject for itself, does not thereby belong to the science of consciousness, i.e. to phenomenology. I point out how profoundly traditional is this gesture or this topic inscribing semiology in a non-'natural' science of the soul, a psychology. We are thereby not only referred to all the semiological endeavours of the eighteenth century, which are all psychologies, but finally to Aristotle, the patron Hegel invokes for his Philosophy of Mind when, in the Introduction, he writes, speaking of psychology:

The books of Aristotle *On the Soul (Peri Psychis)* ... are for this reason still by far the most admirable, perhaps even the sole, work of speculative value on this topic. The main aim of a philosophy of mind can only be to reintroduce the concept into the knowledge of mind, and so rediscover the lesson of those Aristotelian books.

But Aristotle is precisely he who has inscribed his theory of the voice in a treatise *Peri Psychis* (this will be important for us later), and in his *Peri Hermeneias* has defined signs, symbols, speech and writing on the basis of the *pathemata tes psychis* - states, affections or passions of the soul. You know well that text that opens the *Peri Hermeneias*:

Spoken words (*ta en tiphoni*) are the symbols of the affections of the soul, and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the states of the soul, of which these expressions are the immediate signs (*semeia protos*: the primary signs) are the same for all [which precisely permits making a science of them], as also are those things of which these states are the images. This matter has, however, been discussed in my treatise about the soul.

When I say that it is traditional to make semiology dependent on psychology, I do not think only of Hegelianism in the past, but also of what often gives itself out as being beyond Hegelianism, and even as a Hegelianism surpassed. For this tradition, properly metaphysical and thus extending from Aristotle to Hegel, will not be interrupted by the venerable (venerated) initiator of the modern project of the general semiology that serves as the paradigm or model for so many 'modern' and 'human' 'sciences'. You know that at least twice in his *Course in General Linguistics* de Saussure makes his plan for a general semiology juridically dependent on psychology.

Everything in language is basically psychological, including its material and mechanical manifestations, such as sound changes; and since linguistics provides social psychology with such valuable data, is it not part and parcel of this discipline? (p. 6-7) *A science that studies the life of signs within society* is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek *semeion* 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts.

To determine the exact place of semiology is the task of the psychologist.

It is from our point of view noteworthy that it was the same linguist or glossematician, Hjelmslev, who, while recognising the

importance of the Saussurian heritage, cast into question, as the uncritical presuppositions of the Saussurian science, at the same time the authority recognised to psychology and the privilege accorded to the sonorous or phonic 'expressive substance'. We shall see how the psychic excellence and the phonic pre-eminence go together in Hegel also, for reasons that are essential and are historically metaphysical.

We return to Hegel: what does the inscription of semiology in speculative psychology mean for him? It means first very generally that signs are here considered according to the structure and movement of the *Aufhebung* by which mind, rising above nature, suppressing and retaining it, sublimating it in itself, is accomplished as inward freedom, and thus is presented to itself *as such*: 'Psychology', says Hegel, 'studies the faculties or general modes of mental activity qua mental - intuition, representation, remembering etc., desires etc.' As in the *De Anima* (432 ab) Hegel in several places refuses every real separation between the faculties of the soul (cf. § 445). In view of this attention to not substantially separate the psychic faculties and structures, but rather to determine their mediations, articulations, joinings, which constitute the unity of the movement, it is noteworthy that the theory of signs, essentially consisting in a theory of speech and writing, is contained in two long Remarks, much longer than the paragraphs to which they are attached, in the sub-chapter entitled 'Imagination'. Semiology is then a development in the theory of imagination, and more precisely, as we will see, in a Phantasiology or Phantastics.

What is imagination? Representation (*Vorstellung*) is intuition remembered-interiorised (*erinnerte*). It pertains to intelligence (*Intelligenz*), which consists in interiorising sensible immediacy, 'to posit itself as possessing the intuition of itself' (*in sich selbst anschauend zu setzen*) - to lift and conserve, in the twofold movement of *Aufhebung*, the subjectivity belonging to inferiority, to be exteriorised in itself and 'be in itself in its own exteriority' (*in ihrer eigenen Ausserlichkeit in sich zu sein*). *Erinnerung* is a decisive

moment or movement in this movement of representation by which intelligence is *recalled* to itself, and is in itself in its own exteriority. In it the content of intuition becomes an image - that is, is freed from immediacy and individuality so as to allow transition to objective conceptual representation. And the image that thus is *erinnert* interiorised in memory - is no longer an 'existence', that is present, there, but stored up out of consciousness (*bewusstlos aufbewahrt*), retained in an unconscious abode. Intelligence can then be conceived as this reserve, this very dark cover at the bottom of which the buried images are to be sought. It is, Hegel says, a 'nocturnal pit' (*nächtliche Schacht*) or, further, an unconscious pit (*bewusstlose Schacht*).

We shall now follow in the Hegelian text the route that goes from this pit of night, silent as death but also reverberant as all the powers of voice it holds in reserve - the route that from this pit of night which is also a pit of voice and truth leads us to a certain pyramid brought back from Egyptian deserts which will soon rise on the sober and abstract fabric of the Hegelian text to fix there the stature and status of the sign. That the route here is circular and that the pit is a pyramid is the enigma about which we must ask if it is to be brought up like a truth from the bottom of the pit or deciphered as an inscription on the front of the monument.

The intelligence that is in possession of this reservoir (*Vorrat*), this pit, can then draw from it and bring to light, produce, 'exteriorise its possession (*Eigentum*) without having any further need of exterior intuition for it to exist'. 'This synthesis of the internal image with the recollected existence is *representation* proper: by this synthesis the internal now has the qualification of being able to be presented (to be held) before intelligence and have its existence, its *Dasein*, in it' (§ [454](#)).

This movement is the movement of the *reproductive imagination* (*reproduktive Einbildungskraft*). The 'source' of images is here 'the inferiority belonging to the ego, which is now the power over them'.

Having thus this reserve of images at its disposal, intelligence, operating by subsumption, is reproduced in itself, recalled, interiorised (*erinnert*), and is thereby produced as fancy, symbolizing, allegorizing or poetising (*dichtende*) imagination. But if there is here only question of the re-productive imagination, this is because all these formations, these *Gebilde*, remain syntheses working over intuitive, receptive data, passively received from the exterior, met with, found (*gefunden*), given (*gegeben*) in intuition. This imagination, this *Einbildungskraft*, then does not produce, does not form, does not imagine its own *Gebilde*.

But - seemingly paradoxically - inasmuch as this imaginative re-production is not a production, inasmuch as it receives the content of what it forms, inasmuch as it does not produce *sponte sua* an existence or a thing, it still remains shut up within itself. The self-identity of intelligence has been recovered, but in subjective unilaterality. The seeming paradox is then due to the fact that intelligence remains subjective, internal, because it has to passively receive a *gefunden*, a given met with an intuition. It is still an affection.

This moment will be lifted in productive imagination, productive fancy, where the intuition of self, the immediate relation with oneself, such as it was given in re-productive imagination, becomes an *existent*, is exteriorised, is produced in the world as an existent or a thing. This thing is the *sign*. And this movement is the movement of productive fancy, the sign-making fancy (*Zeichen machende Phantasie*). Imagination forms signs in, as always, proceeding outside of itself.

I shall translate [§ 457](#), which brings us from reproduction without signs to the production of signs:

In fancy intelligence is accomplished (*vollendet*) in view of intuition of itself (*zur Selbstanschauung*) inasmuch as the content gathered in itself has an imaged existence (*Existenz*). But this formation of the intuition of itself is subjective; it still lacks the

moment of being. But in this unity of internal content and matter (*Stoffes*), intelligence has therein *implicitly* returned both to identical self-relation and to immediacy. As reason, its first start was to appropriate to itself (*anzueignen*) the immediate datum in itself, i.e. to universalise it; and now its action as reason is from the present point directed towards giving the character of an existent (*als seiendes zu bestimmen*) to what in it has been perfected to concrete auto-intuition. In other words, it aims at making itself *be* (*Sein*) and be a thing (*Sache*). Acting on this view, it is selfexteriorizing (*ist sie sich äussernd*), intuition-producing (*Anschauung produzierend*): the imagination which creates signs (*Zeichen machende Phantasie*).

Let us first notice that the production most creative of signs is here determined as a simple exteriorisation, that is fundamentally as *expression*, setting without of what is within, with all that can command the classic nature of this concept. Let us notice, second, that this sign-producing imagination nevertheless does nothing less than *produce intuitions* - an affirmation that may appear abusive or unintelligible, since here it is a creating of what is given to be seen. Imagination here has a site or a status analogous to Kant's transcendental imagination, which also, as an 'art hidden in the depths of the soul', is an intermediary schema between the sensibility and the understanding, and comprises their respective and contradictory predicates, receptive passivity and productive spontaneity. Finally let us notice that the transcendental imagination is also the movement of temporalisation which Heidegger has so admirably repeated in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*; this will later be important for us. We shall soon see what time *signifies*, how it signifies, that is how it constitutes the process of signification.

The concept of sign, both production and intuition, will then be marked by the scandal of this contradiction; all the oppositions of concepts will be gathered, summed up, sunken in it - and in such a way that all contradictions will seem to be resolved into it. But at the same time what is thereby betokened in the name sign already appears irreducible to all the formal oppositions between concepts, since it welcomes them simultaneously, admitting in itself both the

interior and the exterior, the spontaneous and the receptive, the intelligible and the sensible, the same and the other etc. The sign is thus also the sign of the following question - it signifies the following question: is this contradiction dialecticity itself, or is the dialectic the resolution of the sign in the horizon of the non-sign? We see that the question of the sign quickly merges with the question what is dialectics? or better with the question: can the question of the sign or the question of dialectics be put in the form 'What . . . ?'? I cover over again this distant and underlying horizon to return to the turn of our text.

Immediately upon naming the sign-making fancy, Hegel states that fantastic unity of opposites that are constituted in semio-poetics. This fantastic emission of signs, this semio-poetics, is a *Mittelpunkt*, that is both a central point towards which all the rays of opposites converge, a mid-point, the milieu in the sense of the element, the medium, and the mean point, the point of transition of opposites into one another. 'Productive imagination is the *Mittelpunkt* in which the universal and being, one's own (*eigen*) and what is picked up (*Gefundensein*), the internal and external, are completely welded into one (*volkommen in eins geschaffen sind*).'

But (and this is my last point here before broaching this semiology for itself) Hegel, who at first sight seems to place no limits on the extension of the theory of signs, none the less immediately reduces its import and reinscribes it in the movement and structure of a dialectic that encompasses it. The moment of the sign is as it were *provisory*, a provisory deposit. This limit is the limit of abstract *formality*. The semiotic moment is a formal moment. And for this reason it remains exterior, inferior, and prior to the moment of content and truth. Taken for itself the sign is only *in view of* truth. Only truth can give it content:

The formations of fancy are on all hands recognised as such combinations of the mind's own and inward with the matter of intuition; what further and more definite aspects they have is a

matter for other departments. For the present this internal studio (*innere Werkstdtte*) of intelligence is only to be looked at in these abstract aspects. Imagination, when regarded as the agency of this unification, is reason (*Vernunft*), but only a *formal* reason, because the matter or theme it embodies is to imagination qua imagination a matter of indifference; whilst reason qua reason also determines the content in view of *truth* (*zur Wahrheit*).
(§457)

We must, then, emphasise the progress represented by this semiology which, despite the formal limit assigned to the sign, ceases to make of the sign a reject or an empirical accident, but on the contrary a moment, however abstract, of the development of rationality in view of truth. Yet, having stressed this, we must then ask why truth (the presence of being, here in the form of self-presence) is announced in the absence of signs. Why is the metaphysical concept of truth (and there is no other) bound up with a concept of signs, and yet can determine the sign only as a *lack* of full truth? And why - if we consider Hegelianism to be the ultimate assembling of metaphysics and the historically most systematic opening up of the question of signs - why does metaphysics necessarily determine the sign as a progression in view of truth - where 'in view' means: thought in its destination from the truth towards which it is orientated; but also means: remaining in the view of truth (as we say to express distance and divergence in the process of navigation); and, finally, 'in view' means being the means of manifestation with regard to truth (fancy (*phantasia*) having the same root as phenomenon (*phao, phainesthai*), the brilliance of the appearing that provides for seeing). We ask why the phantastics of signs is so related to the phenomenon as the presentation of the truth of beings; why sign and truth are so related.

But this 'Why' can no longer be understood as a 'What does that signify?' and still less as a 'What does that mean to say?' For the question thus understood would still be commanded by what is in question, signification and meaning [*vouloir-dire*]. Our ultimate question, our ultimate why, is then not to be resolved into a 'What

does signification signify?' or 'What does meaning mean?' We must question at the point and in the form where signification no longer signifies, and where meaning no longer means to say anything - not that they would be absurd in the sense of their system and within it, that is within metaphysics, but because the question will have taken us beyond the closure of this system, to the outer limits of metaphysics - if such an operation is still possible in our language. Then 'Why' [*Pourquoi*] here no longer indicates a question about the in-view-of-what? [*pour quoi*], about the *telos* or the *eschaton* of the movement of signification; nor does it indicate a question about an origin: 'Why?' taken as 'because of what?' 'Starting with what?' etc. 'Why' is then the still metaphysical name for a question about the metaphysical system that links the sign to the concept and to truth. But this question can break through and penetrate only in freeing itself from even this Why-form, undetermined as it may seem. In any case, whatever be not the response but the trajectory, the plot of such a break-through, we know already - and this is a knowing (scientific, historical, metaphysical knowing: here the distinction between these regions is not pertinent) we know already that the concept of sign, whatever be the problematic renewal to which modernity subjects it, whatever be the positive, fecund and necessary scientific progress of semiology or linguistics (and we know that today it is considerable), we know that the concept of sign, wherever it is at work, and especially where it determines the field and object of a science - the concept of sign detains all this positivity, all this science, all these acquisitions in the metaphysical closure. This does not prevent this closure from being solicited by certain movements of this scientific and intra-metaphysical labour. But in this labour everything that still requires the sign 'sign' is, in this aspect and in this measure, metaphysical in essence.

II Hegel's semiology

The sign, then, is in Hegel's definition the unity of an 'independent representation' and an 'intuition'. But Hegel must immediately

introduce a sort of divergence, of difference, which will divide intuition, opening forth the space of signification and the play of the sign. For in the signifying unity, in the identity of representation and intuition, something exceptional takes place: this intuition is not a simple intuition, like all others. As in all intuition, a being is given, a thing is presented, given to be immediately received in its presence. For example, says Hegel, the colour of a cockade-is there, present, immediate, given to intuition. But inasmuch as it is united to representation (*Vorstellung*) this presence represents, that is represents something other than itself. It is put in place of something else (*etwas anderes vorstellend*), a representational representative of something else (here *Vorstellung* has all the meanings of 'representative'). What represents? Of what is the signifier thus presented to intuition a signifier? How does Hegel determine the represented or the signified? It is clearly an ideality contrasted with the real corporeality of the signifier. Hegel calls this represented of the *Vorstellung*, this signified of the sign, the *Bedeutung* (generally translated by 'signification'; I, however, prefer to translate it by 'meaning-content' [*content de vouloirdire*]). It will be seen that this translation is also fitting here for a soul (*Seele*). A soul deposited in what? In a body, of course; in the body of the signifier. The sign, unity of the signifying body and the signified ideality, is then defined as an incarnation. The opposition of soul and body, intelligible and sensible, is then, with all the concepts this opposition implicates, what continues and will continue to determine the difference between the signified and the signifier, the signifying intention, an animating intention, and the inert body of the signifier. This will be true in de Saussure: it will be true in Husserl, for whom the body of the sign is animated by the intention of significations as a body (*Körper*) becoming own-body (*Leib*) animated by *Geist*. And Husserl will say that the living word is a *leibliche Geistigkeit*.

In Hegel, however, the body of the signifier is not only an own-body [*corps propre*]: it does not only become 'own' in being animated by the signifying intention. Or rather it becomes own and animated

only while simultaneously being constituted as a *tomb*. The *sōma/sema* association is also at work in the Hegelian text, and this is not surprising.

What does it mean to say that the body of the sign is a tomb? The body as a tomb is at the same time the body's life as a sign of death, the body as other than the soul, the animated *psychi*, the living breath. But the tomb is also what shelters, holds in reserve, treasures up life, enables life to withstand duration, marks the soul and shelters it from death. The tomb is thus what *warns* the soul of possible death and warns of the death of the soul, averts death. This twofold warning function constitutes the status of the funerary monument. The body of the sign is that monument in which the soul will be shut up, guarded, maintained, held in maintenance, present. The soul is and keeps itself alive in this monument, but it has need of the monument only because it is somehow dying, it at least risks death, is exposed to death in its vital relation with its own body. Death must indeed be at work - and who better than Hegel has been able to describe the work of death? - for something like a monument to come to retain and protect the life of the soul.

The sign as a monument of life and death, a tomb preserving intact the life of the soul or the embalmed own body entrusted to it, the monument preserving the hegemony of the soul and withstanding the wear of centuries, the monument signifying like a text of stones covered with inscriptions is the pyramid.

And the fact that Hegel uses the word 'pyramid' to designate the sign, that he uses this sign, this symbol, or this allegory to signify the sign, that the sign's signifier here is the pyramid, this fact will be important for us. Not only because of the meanings denoted I have just recalled, but also for the meanings connoted, which we could decipher over and beyond Hegel's express intention. In particular, to designate the sign in general there is the reference to a silent writing

and to Egyptian hieroglyphics, in which Hegel will later see a kind of resistance to the movement of dialectics and history.

But let us first read the few lines in which suddenly Egypt is inscribed and plants its pyramid in Hegel's text:

In this unity (initiated by Intelligence) of an independent representation with an intuition, the matter of the latter is, in the first instance, something accepted, immediate, or given (*ein Aufgenommenes*: given in affection or sensibility) (for example, the colour of the cockade etc.). But in this fusion of the two elements, the intuition does not count positively or as representing itself, but as representative of something else. [Thus, for once, we have a sort of intuition of absence.] It is an image, which has received in itself (*in sich empfangen hat*: received, welcomed, conceived in the sense a woman conceives by receiving) as its soul (*als Seele*) and signification (*seine Bedeutung*) a representation independent of Intelligence. *Diese Anschauung ist das Zeichen*: This intuition is the Sign. (§ 458)

Let us now move to the remark that follows, one of those two remarks that contain the whole theory of signs (although Hegel later criticizes those who reduce semiology to the place and importance of an appendix). 'The sign is some immediate intuition, representing a totally different import from what naturally belongs to it (*die einen ganz anderen Inhalt vorstellt, als den sie für sich hat*). Notice here that *vorstellen* - generally translated by 'represent', but in the sense of 'positing before', placing in view, object-representation - here has also the sense of representational detour, recourse to a representative, put in the place of the other, delegate for the other and reference to the other. An intuition is here delegated, commissioned, to represent something else, a 'totally different content'. 'The sign is some immediate intuition, representing a totally different import from what naturally belongs to it; it is the pyramid into which a foreign soul (*eine fremde Seele*) has been conveyed (*ist versetzt*: transposed, transplanted, transferred; *im Leihhause versetzen*: to pawn) and where it is conserved (*aufbewahrt*: kept, entrusted, guarded, deposited, consigned).' In this allusion to the pyramid as the signification of signification and the representation of representation

we can see some essential points involved. First, what we can call, without the least abuse or anachronism, the *arbitrary nature of the sign*. That is the absence of any *natural* relation of resemblance, participation or analogy between the signified and the signifier - here between the representation and the intuition, or rather between the represented and the representative in representation. This absence of any relation of resemblance is indicated in Hegel's text in two words:

1. The soul consigned in the pyramid is *foreign (fremde)*. If the soul is *versetzt* - transposed, transferred, transplanted - in the signifying monument, it is then of a different order from the stone of the signifier, from the intuitive given. And this heterogeneity is first the irreducibility of the soul and the body, the intelligible and the sensible, the *Vorstellung* (*the concept or ideality signified*) and the sensible body of the signifier.

2. This is why Hegel says that in the sign the immediate intuition (that of the signifying body given) represents a totally different import (*einen ganz anderen Inhalt*) from the import it has for itself.

Thus there is a relation of absolute alterity between the signifying body, given to intuition and the ideal representation signified by this body. Hegel says expressly that this is precisely what distinguishes the sign from the symbol. The difference between the sign and the symbol is that there is no natural bond between the signifier and the signified, while between the symbolising and the symbolised there is mimetic or analogical participation. 'The *sign* is different from the *symbol*; for in the symbol the original characters (*eigene Bestimmtheit*) (in essence and conception) of the visible object are more or less identical with the content which it bears as symbol; whereas in the sign, strictly so-called, the natural attributes of the intuition, and the connotation of which it is the sign, have nothing to do with one another (*geht einander niches an*).' This theory of the arbitrary nature of the sign and this distinction between the sign and the symbol are explicated at length and clearly in the Introduction to

the first section of the *Aesthetics* ('On symbol in general'), to which I here permit myself to refer you.

If there still remained any doubt that the whole conceptual system that dominates the so-called linguistic revolution used as declared model by so many champions of the human sciences - I mean the conceptual system dominating Saussurian linguistics - belonged to metaphysics, it would be enough to compare the oppositions of concepts within which the principal level of Saussurian linguistics - the arbitrariness of signs - is brought forth with the oppositions of concepts that dominate Hegel's semiology. I will then merely read a passage taken from the second paragraph of the first chapter of the first part of the *Course in General Linguistics*, a paragraph entitled: 'Principle one: the arbitrary nature of the sign':

Signs that are wholly arbitrary realise better than the others the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the master-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system. [We will soon find the same move in Hegel, the moment he accords pre-eminence to signs of spoken language and speech.]

The word *symbol* has been used to designate the linguistic sign, or more specifically, what is here called the signifier. Principle I in particular weighs against the use of this term. One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a tank. (p. 68)

This difference required between the signified and the signifier is entirely congruent with the move by which semiology is inscribed in psychology. We recall that psychology in the Hegelian sense is the science of mind determining itself in itself, as subject for itself, at the moment that, as Hegel says in the opening of the *Psychology of the Encyclopaedia*, 'Mind henceforth has only to realize the concept of its freedom.' But the production of arbitrary signs manifests the freedom

of mind. Consequently freedom is more manifest in the production of the sign than in the production of the symbol; it is signified better by arbitrary signs than by more or less natural symbols. Mind is closer to itself and to its freedom in the arbitrary sign, whereas it is more outside of itself in the naturalness of the symbol. Hegel writes: 'In signifying intelligence therefore manifests a will (*Willkür*: choice, free will) and a mastery (*Herrschaft*) in the use of intuitions which are not manifest in symbolising' (§ 458).

The semiotic instance, which was a moment ago defined as the rational - though abstract - instance, is now defined as the manifestation of freedom. We then understand better that we must reserve a major place for semiology in the architectonics of a logic or a psychology. And that is indeed what Hegel wishes to do; but he in fact does so incidentally, in the middle of the Remark added as a long appendix to the short paragraph defining the sign. The pyramid itself arose in the space and in the detour of this excursus.

In logic and psychology, signs and language are usually foisted in somewhere as an appendix (*Anhang*: supplement, codicil), without any trouble being taken to display their necessity and systematic place (*Zusammenhang*: enchainment, solidarity) in the economy of intelligence. The right place for the sign is that just given ... This sign-creating activity may be distinctively named 'productive' memory' (*produktive Gedächtnis*) (the primarily abstract 'Mnemosyne'); and since 'memory' (*Gedächtnis*), which in ordinary life is often used as interchangeable and synonymous with 'remembrance' (recollection) (*Erinnerung*), and even with 'conception' and 'imagination', has always to do with signs only. (Remark, § 458)

Here we see that inasmuch as the production of signs is concerned memory and imagination are the same, the same interiorisation of mind relating itself to itself in its freedom and in the intuition of itself, but bringing this intuition of itself to exterior existence. This calls for three remarks:

1. This explains that the theory of signs that appears in the *Encyclopaedia* in the

chapter on the imagination is immediately followed by the chapter on memory, and that in the *Propaedeutics* the same semiological discussion is inscribed under the title 'Memory'. I would have liked to read here certain passages of the *Propaedeutics*, but not having time, I refer you to the most important paragraphs: §§ 155-62.

2. In his fine essay on Proust G. Deleuze has shown very well that the *Remembrance of Things Past* was less an exercise of memory than a semiotic activity or experience. You see that Hegel does not distinguish between the two, and that there is here another occasion to underline an affinity between Proust and Hegel.
3. The memory that is productive of signs is also thought itself. And in a Remark that serves as the transition from the chapter devoted to memory in the *Encyclopaedia*, and the chapter devoted to thought, Hegel recalls that 'the German language has etymologically assigned memory (*Gedächtnis*), of which it has become a foregone conclusion to speak contemptuously, the high position (*Stellung*) of direct kindred with thought (*Gedanke*).

III Speech and writing

There being no question of exposing and still less of exhausting the content of this semiology, I would like now to try to see its governing intention, what it signifies, what it means to say. In announcing this I have already begun to establish myself within this metaphysical semiology, which not only means to say, but first and essentially represents

itself to be a theory of *Bedeuten* as meaning [*vouloir-dire*: lit., to want to say], and is from the first subject to the *telos* of speech and of this voluntarism, this will for absolute parousia in which Heidegger has discerned the destination of metaphysics. As later in de Saussure, language is here the paradigm for the sign, and linguistics is the model for semiology, of which, however, it is but a part.

How is that visible, and what are its implications? I shall state at once the substance of the thesis in question: it is the privilege of the linguistic - that is phonic - system, over every other semiotic system. A privilege, then, of speech over writing, and of phonetic writing over every other system of notation or every other form of inscription, in particular over hieroglyphic or ideographic writing, but also over formal mathematical writing, algebra, pasigraphics, and other projects of universal writing of the Leibnizian type, which, as Leibniz said, 'have in principle no need to refer to the voice' or to the word (*vox*).

Thus stated the thesis is well known; what interests me here is not to recall it, but, in re-forming it, in reconstituting its schema, to show what, in the excellence recognised to the voice, is essentially coordinated with the whole Hegelian system in its archaeology, its eschatology, its teleology, the will to parousia and in all the fundamental concepts of dialectics, and in particular negativity and *Aufhebung*. That is if one accepts, and in the measure that one accepts considering Hegelianism as the completion of Western metaphysics, the pre-eminence of the *phoni* is one with the essence of metaphysics. And thus whatever in certain modern sciences - for example in a certain work of glossematics carried out by Hjelmlev, but this is but one example - scientifically questions this privilege of the *vox*, both as voice

and as word, in some measure transgresses the metaphysical closure itself.

Let us return to Hegel's text ([§ 459](#)):

The intuition - in its natural phase a something given (*Gegebenes*) and given in space (*ein Räumliches*) acquires, when employed as a sign, the peculiar characteristic of existing only as superseded and sublimated (*aufgehobene - relevée* - lifted, in the sense that one would be at the same time elevated and relieved of one's functions, replaced, in a promotion by that which succeeds and relieves.)

In this sense the sign is the *Aufhebung* of the sensible and spatial intuition. In the sign the sensible-spatial intuition is sublated (*relevée*). Hegel thus says:

The intuition - in its natural phase a something given and given in space - acquires, when employed as a sign, the peculiar characteristic of existing only as superseded and sublimated. Such is the negativity of intelligence.

Intelligence is then the movement that produces the sign by negating the sensible-spatial constituent of intuition, and in doing so sublates (*relève*) the intuition. But, as Hegel shows elsewhere the *Aufhebung* of space is time, which thus is space, is the truth of the space it negates by relieving or elevating it [*en en prenant la relève ou en le relevant*]. Here, then, the truth or teleological essence of the sign as sublation [*relève*] of the sensible-spatial intuition will be the sign as time, the sign in the element of temporalisation. And this is indeed what Hegel goes on to say here: 'Such is the negativity of intelligence; and thus the truer phase of the intuition used as a sign is existence in *time* (*Dasein* the being-there in intuition - *in der Zeit*: a formula that we must think of at the same time as the one that says that time is the *Dasein* of the concept). Why is *Dasein* in time the truest form of intuition such as it is sublated [*relevée*] in the sign? Because time is the

sublation [*relève*] of space: the sensible-spatial given must be sublated [*relevée*] in its truth, that is the intuitive given - the signifier - must be effaced, must vanish before the ideality signified, while conserving itself and conserving it; and it is only in time, *as* time itself, that this sublation [*relève*] can be produced. But what is the signifying substance, what glossematicians call the expressive substance, most proper to be thus produced as time itself? It is sound, sound lifted from its naturalness and bound to the mind's relation with itself, to the *psychi* as subject for itself and auto-affecting itself - the animated sound, the phonic sound, the voice, the *Ton*.

Hegel immediately and rigorously draws out the consequence:

thus the truer phase of intuition used as a sign is an existence in *time* (but its existence vanishes in the moment of being [*indem es ist*: inasmuch as it is]), and if we consider the rest of its external psychic determination, its institution (*Gesetzsein*: being-positing) by intelligence, but an institution growing out of its (anthropological) own naturalness. This institution of the natural is the vocal note (*Ton*: *phoni*) where the inward idea manifests itself in adequate exteriorization (*erfüllte Ausserung*).

Here two remarks are called for:

- 1.** The voice is what unites the anthropological naturalness of the (natural) sound with the psychic-semiotic ideality, what consequently joins the Philosophy of Mind to the Philosophy of Nature, and within the Philosophy of Mind joins anthropology to psychology between which, I recall, phenomenology, the science of consciousness, is inscribed.
- 2.** The essentially phonic relation between the sensible and the intelligible, the real and the ideal etc., is also determined as a relation of expressivity between the inside and the

outside. The language in sound, speech, which brings outside the inside, does not abandon it outside, as does a written sign; it conserves the inside within while putting it outside; it is then *par excellence* what gives existence, *Dasein*, to internal representation; it makes the concept or the signified exist. This means, in Hegelian language, that it is the essence of time as existence of the concept. But at the same time (so to speak) language, inasmuch as it interiorises and temporalises *Dasein* as it was in the given of sensible-spatial intuition, elevates existence itself, sublates [*relève*] it in its truth, at its highest level. It makes the sensible existence pass to representational or intellectual existence, to the existence of the concept. And this transition is precisely the moment of articulation that transforms the sound into voice and noise into language - a theme that would also merit a whole comparison with de Saussure. Hegel writes:

The vocal note (or the tone: *der Ton*) which receives further articulation to express specific ideas - speech (*die Rede*) and its system, language (*die Sprache*) - gives to sensations, intuitions, representations, a second and higher existence than they naturally possess, invests them with the right of existence in the realm of representation (*Überhaupt eine Existenz, die im Reiche des Vorstellens gilt*).

Metaphysics: metaphysics of language. In this passage Hegel is interested only in 'the proper determination of language as a product of intelligence', that is language as 'manifestation of representations in an external element'. Hegel, then, does not undertake the study of language itself. He has defined the order of general semiology and its place in psychology. He has, then, defined the place of linguistics within semiology, although semiology is the teleological model of linguistics. But he contents himself with this systematics or architectonics. He does not fill out the field whose limits and topography he delineates. There are, none

the less, indications of the lineaments of such a linguistics. For example, he admits that linguistics must be distinguished into a formal (grammatical) element and a material (lexicological) element.

Lexicology - the science of the material of language - refers us to a discipline already treated before psychology, anthropology and, within anthropology, psycho-physiology. Why? Hegel explains in a fascinating paragraph concerning what he calls *physical ideality* (§ 401), which I cannot comment on, though I take it to be fundamental. Ideality in general is, in Hegelian terms, 'the negation of the real, which is none the less at the same time conserved, virtually retained (*virtualiter erhalten*), even if it does not exist'. But ideality as an element of language since the sign is the sublation [*relève*] of the sensible intuition of the real - has its own *sense organs*, its own elements of sensibility. Two senses share physical ideality between them: the sense for light and the sense for sound. These two elements have a privilege to which Hegel devotes numerous and splendid analyses in the *Encyclopaedia* and in the *Aesthetics*.

In so far as *sound* is concerned, it is noteworthy that linguistics refers us from psychology to anthropology (psycho-physiology), and that this latter refers us to physics. It is the reverse route of the teleology and movement according to which the Idea is reappropriated to itself as mind by rising from and sublating the nature [*en (se) relevant (de) la nature*] in which it was lost while being betokened therein. But at the beginning of the Physics light is posited as the first but abstract manifestation, an undifferentiated identity of qualified prime matter. It is through the light that nature refers to itself, manifests itself to itself. As is said in the *Aesthetics*, 'light is the first ideality, the first auto-affirmation of nature. In light nature for the first time becomes subjective.'

Consequently sight is a theoretical sense, the first theoretical sense, as its name indicates. And it is also the first ideal sense. It lets the things be and does not consume them. There would be much to be said here about this Hegelian theme of consumption. Signs, Hegel reflects, are not consumed. And this is to be related to the fact that the signifying matter is for Hegel always sound or light. We should have to ask if there is no other, and even whether audible or visible signs are not in some way eaten or consumed.

In any case, if sight is ideal, hearing, Hegel notes, is even more so; it as it were sublates [*relève*] sight. Hegel explains why in the *Aesthetics*, in the chapter devoted to music: because despite the ideality of light and sight, the objects perceived by sight (and, for example, plastic art works) persist in their sensible and exterior existence, resist *Aufhebung*, do not allow themselves to be absolutely sublated by temporal inferiority; they brake the dialectic. And what is true of plastic works will, we have no doubt, also be true of writing. But it will not be true of the audible and of speech. With regard to hearing Hegel says in the *Aesthetics* that like sight it is a part not of the practical senses but the theoretical senses, and it is even more ideal than sight. For, since the calm, disinterested contemplation of works of art, far from seeking to suppress objects, lets them subsist as they are and where they are, what is conceived by sight is not the ideal in itself, but on the contrary perseveres in its sensible experience. But the ear, on the contrary, without practically (*praktisch*) turning to objects, perceives the result of the interior trembling (*innern Erzitterns*) of the body by which not the calm material figure, but a first ideality coming from the soul is manifested and revealed. As, on the other hand, the negativity in which the vibrant matter (*schwingende Materiao*) enters constitutes a sublation (*Aufheben*) of the spatial state, which sublation

[*relève*] is in its turn sublated by the reaction of the body, the exteriorisation of this double negation, the sound (*Ton*) is an exteriorisation which is in its upsurge annihilated again by its own being-there, and vanishes by itself. By this double negation of exteriority inherent in the principle of sound, sound corresponds to the internal subjectivity in that sonority (*Klingen*), which of itself already is more ideal than real corporeality, renounces even this ideal existence and thus becomes a mode of expression of pure inferiority.

This decisive concept of vibration, of trembling (*Erzittern*) as a physical transition from space to time, as sublation of the visible in the audible, the real in the ideal, this teleological concept of *sound* as a movement of idealisation and of *Aufhebung* of natural exteriority, is also explicated in the *Encyclopaedia* in the Physics (§ 300). We must then come back to it if we wish to account for the *material* part of language, that is lexicology.

As for [grammar](#), or the *formal* element, it refers us to articulation in categories, and therefore to the understanding, which Hegel will treat of only later in the *Encyclopaedia* (§ 465). Grammar depends on logic and the 'logical instinct' [remark on Humboldt].

From this sublating, spiritual and ideal excellence of the *phoni* it ensues that every language in space, every spacing, for example writing, is *inferior and exterior*. Thus in the linguistic part of semiology Hegel can make the move he advises against in general semiology: he can make of the question of writing an accessory question treated as an appendix, an excursus, a supplement. This move, we know, was made by Plato and Rousseau; it will also be made by de Saussure. And it occurs here; after having explicitly said that

vocal language (*Tonsprache*) is the primordial (*ursprüngliche*) language, [Hegel writes](#):

We may also comment, but only in passing (*nur im Vorbeigehen*), upon the written language (*Schriftsprache*) - a further development (supplementary: *weitere Fortbildung*) in the particular sphere of language which borrows the help of an externally practical activity (a supplement, a memory aid, *hupomnisis* etc.). It is from the province of immediate spatial intuition to which written language proceeds that it takes and produces (*hervorbringt*) the signs.

It is not possible for me here to develop all the implications of such a move. I shall content myself simply with entitling in a very schematic and very programmatic manner the paths one should perhaps have to enter.

1. The teleological hierarchy of writings. At the summit of this hierarchy, phonetic writing of the alphabetical type. 'Alphabetic writing is in and for itself the most intelligent', [says Hegel](#). Inasmuch as it respects, conveys and transcribes the voice as idealisation and movement of mind relating itself to its own inferiority, phonetic writing is the most historical element of culture, most open to infinite development. 'Learning to write an alphabetic writing must be considered a means of infinite culture (*unendliche Bildungsmittel*).' History as history of mind, the development of the concept as logos, the onto-theological deployment of parousia, is not hindered, limited, interrupted by alphabetical writing, which, on the contrary, inasmuch as it better effaces its own spacing, is the highest, the most sublating mediation. This teleological appreciation of alphabetical writing is systematic, and it structurally commands the two following consequences:

a. Over and beyond the *fact* of alphabetical writing what is here aimed at is a teleological ideal of this writing. In effect,

as everyone knows, and as Hegel recognises with a lucidity very rare in this domain, there is no purely phonetic writing; the alphabetical system we use is not and cannot be completely phonetic. A writing can never be penetrated and sublated completely by the voice. And the non-phonetic functions, the so to speak - silences, of alphabetic writing are not factual accidents or by-products one might hope to eliminate (punctuation, numbers, spacing). Hegel recognises this in passing in a parenthesis he quickly closes, and in which we read, concerning hieroglyphic writing: '(and hieroglyphics are used even where there is alphabetic writing, as in our signs for the numbers, the planets, the chemical elements etc.)'.

b. The linguistics implicated by this appreciation is a linguistics of the *word* and the name, the word and the name being its simple and irreducible elements, bearing, in the *vox*, the unity of sound and meaning. But we know that the word no longer has today the linguistic dignity it had always had. It is a unity empirically excised between greater or lesser unities (cf. Martinet). To see that the word and the name are irreducible for Hegel, and that this has the most important consequences, it is enough to read these lines (Remark in § [459](#)):

Alphabetical writing is in and for itself the most intelligent; in it the *word* - the mode, peculiar to the intellect, of exteriorizing its representations most worthily (*eigentamlichste wiirdigste*) - is brought to consciousness and made an object of reflection ... Thus alphabetical writing retains at the same time the advantage (*Vorteil*) of vocal language, that the representations have names strictly so called: the name is the simple sign for the exact representation, i.e. the simple *plain* (*einfache*) representation, not decomposed in its features and compounded out of them.

This brings me to the second point:

2. The critique of every philosophical or scientific project of non-phonetic writing. The most eminent example is, of course, the Leibnizian project of universal characteristics. One of the essential arguments of the Hegelian critique is precisely that the word and the name would be dislocated, no longer constituting the irreducible and dialectical unity of language. Speaking of the hieroglyphic or Chinese writing, [Hegel notes](#) (as he does in other texts, notably in the *Logic*): 'this feature of hieroglyphic - the analytic designation of representations - which misled Leibniz to regard it as preferable to alphabetic writing is rather in antagonism with the fundamental desideratum of language - the name'.

In assigning limits to universal, that is mute writing, writing not bound to the voice and to natural languages, in assigning limits to the function of the mathematical symbolism and calculus, considered as the work of the formal understanding, Hegel wishes to show that such a reduction of speech would interrupt the movement of *Aufhebung*, which is the movement of idealisation, of the history of mind and the reappropriation of logos in the presence to itself and infinite parousia. What is most written, most spaced, least vocal and internal in writing is what resists dialectics and history. We then cannot question the Hegelian concept of writing without questioning the whole history of metaphysics. For it is not a question of returning to Leibniz, concerning whom I have endeavoured elsewhere to show that his project remained metaphysical, and is fundamentally accessory to the system on the basis of which Hegel addresses his objections to him.

The writing from which metaphysics is to be questioned in its closure is then not writing such as metaphysics had itself determined it, that is such as our history and our culture enable us to think it, in the most familiar evidence of what is

obvious. This writing in which the outside of metaphysics is announced could have, among other names, that of difference.