

SIGN AND SYMBOL

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European history shows really amazing virtues today. The epoch of fratricidal wars which we could call Iliadic is followed now by another one, that of wandering in space, even beyond planets, which we could call the Odyssean period. Is Europe finally ready to return home? Or is the colonisation of other planets the precise moment of losing such a chance? Contemporary philosophy offers completely strange proof: the consternation with which one of its leading figures, *recte* Heidegger commented on man's first steps on the Moon.

Did this great philosopher hold the prejudice of a simple, otherwise completely respectable peasant? What does the eulogy written by him to the village in the Black Forest mean in fact? A banal attempt of anachronism? And what is anachronism itself? Far from expressing a resistance *vis-à-vis* the flow of time, *aná-Khrónos* might presuppose, on the contrary, a double negation, that is, its infinitely superior assertion. The same as *aná-mnésis* is not the lack of memory but remembering again, it is not forgetting but the forgetting of forgetting.

But why all this rounding? Why is the forgetting of forgetting not simply the same as remembering? Does Heidegger's eulogy refer to the beginning of European civilisation as a rural society or, more precisely, the way in which the Beginning makes its presence felt in the European peasant's settlement? Returning home is not a usual road but a return of the road in itself, a conversion the extreme limits of which disappear. The often mentioned *regressus ad uterum* does not belong to onto-geny but onto-logy. It is a genuine initiatory task similar to Odisseus' return.

But what is forgotten through books? What sacrifice must we offer to Hermes to find out the way to this "something"? More than a *commentary* of forgetting is expected of the exegetist. He has to surpass exactly his state of exegetist so that *remembering* again should not refer to the text but, in an *anachronic* way, that which preceded it as *pure presence*.

It is already commonplace to assert that a book is a sum of signs. Semioticians strive so hard for the strictness of the *pure* sign that discussions about contextuality became superfluous. To be *pure* means, on the contrary, to be outside any context. They consider that the abstract nature of sign comes exactly from its *abstraction*. Exegesis itself is transformed, thus, in a certain mode of moving round the sign *in itself*.

This perspective has more consequences for the exegetist of the book. Here are some of them:

1. the sign has an existence *in itself*
2. its *nature* cannot affect the *essence* of the exegetic act
3. the *syntax* of signs must not tell anything about the *semantics* of the text
4. the *book* is, in extreme cases, a *sign* of signs
5. *exegesis* looks *on* the book
6. the book is an *exterior* object for the exegetist
7. any *symbol* is an *impure* sign, not yet completely detached from its context
8. the *meaning* is attributed to signs “*from outside*”
9. *hermeneutics* is a theory of *meaning*
10. *attributing* a meaning is *interpretation* itself

These presuppositions, which themselves became commonplace prove to be completely *false* with more attentive analysis. Moreover, if the sign could exist in itself, then every attempt to recover forgetting would be fatally thwarted. The fact that the sign is a mark, or more precisely, the mark of forgetting, would be forgotten.

Is the “abstract” language different from usual language? Let us consider the initial moment of writing and find in it the possibility of any beginning, instead of historical beginning.

To write means to remember. Remembering does not refer to the object *in itself* but the *world* in which it might appear. The *blank* does not affect the object but its *possibility* or a gate opening towards the *world* in which it exists. The act of remembering *re*-produces reality whereas writing consequently *re*-produces the memory. It is only natural that the first writings are completely *figurative*.

Had Egyptians known the cinema, they would not have dealt with writing. For what else are their old writings than some simple drawn strips? Their *pictography* was not different from *painting* itself and we must say that it happens even today that archeologists cannot tell for sure if a “mark” belongs to the field of *writing* or, on the contrary, to that of *ornaments*.

The pictorial origin of the alphabet shows that the beginning of writing is linked to the functionality of the symbol and not that of the sign. It does not only reveal the genetic *link* between symbol and sign on the more general basis of the intermediary role of *ornamentics*. First of all it reveals the fact that *the sign itself belongs to pictoriality*.

The sign cannot “come out” of the pictogram; it can only simplify it. This is not an evasion of pictorial “material” but a sublimation of it. The difference between hieroglyphic and alphabetic writing does not reproduce that between painting and geometry. We could say that alphabetic writing represents an abstract *painting* and not an abstraction as such. A written sentence hides the fact that it represents an *image* of reality just as hieroglyphic writing tried to do it effectively.

This pictorial-representative nature of writing becomes evident if we realise that the *references* of what we read are not letters *in themselves* but *images* called forth by them. Reading does not evoke signs *in themselves* but signs and images simultaneously, symbols, that is. We do not concentrate on the fact of reading when we read but on the things it *represents*. We do not pay attention to the process of reading but the development of *action* or, more precisely, of the *images*. This is why we often use the expression “the *film* of an action.”

Let us dot the *i* now and ask ourselves what is the difference between “reading” and “viewing”. Is the book an *exterior* image of reality? Are the letters some simple additions to objects? What is the difference between a *concrete* landscape and its *description in words*?

An object might become the image of another object only if they have something in common. In mathematical terms, there must be an *izomorphism* between the real landscape and its literal image. But the *izomorphism* itself does not refer to the material elements of these two entities but to their *common* intimate structure. If in the visual field there is an oak on the left, then the same should be told about the word “oak” in the *text*. However, neither the “object” “oak”, nor “the object” “left in general” have an effective reality. We always see with our sensible eyes *as well as* our mind’s eye *certain* left directions and *certain* oaks.

However, without these formal entities no link can be formed between the landscape and the text. *Nevertheless, this does not mean that we attribute our landscape a form “from outside”*. If we would not have the notion of spatial disposition as well as the nature of objects exposed, no landscape would exist for us, because the landscape does not exist outside these *articulations*. Moreover, we could say that the *higher* the level of articulation of the elements of the *unity* of the landscape, the more inspired a painter or poet is.

These facts have certain consequences.

First of all, we must state that the landscape never represents a simple “reproducible” *object*. Otherwise, its unity would consist of the unity of articulation of a world. The same holds good for the text itself. The book cannot be considered an artificial object, a reproduction of its natural original; it is also a world. The only difference between these two worlds is that one of them uses natural elements while the other uses artificial ones. We reproduce natural material by artificial material, by a phonetic or chromatic one in our case. The difference between pencil and brush means a difference in technique and symbolic language.

Consequently, the landscape is in fact also an image, a real image. Therefore we compare a real image with an artificial one, or a real image with an imaginary one. *In both cases we deal with images*, more precisely, *articulated* images. The naturalness of a landscape does not mean that we construct ourselves its image “from the outside”. The landscape is natural because its image does not represent anything at a given moment. It ceases to be the image of *something*, without losing its image-like nature by this. However, all this is relative because a

patch of grey colour in our *natural* field of sight can appear through a *field glass* as the image of a distant corner of a forest which goes back in fact to the *image of an image*. The same happens if we use the *microscope*. The irreducible in our experience does not appear as a unique object but as a unique structure. The indestructibility of reality does not consist in the invariableness of certain objects in themselves but in the constancy of certain relations in themselves.

It follows that the distant forest or the microscopic being are also like images. Moreover, they must preserve the same relations to the whole as the so-called "derived" *images*. *Izomorphisms* of all ranges, be they natural or artificial, must function in a *univocal* manner. The image of an image does not presuppose, therefore, an exterior relation between two objects but *the observation of the same structure of articulation of elements in two different "material" registers*. Only if the two images have the same structure can we say that they reproduce each other. The relation of representation does not only function from the natural towards the artificial but also vice versa, projecting the projection in the field of the natural, because izomorphism must be *bi-univocal*.

What does all this mean for the world of European books? Here are some of the possible consequences:

1. The book is not a sign of signs but a symbol of symbols. It is not an object but a world. In other words, its world is a *worldly* image. The role of a book is not that of enriching the world with another object. The book is not part of the world but a *re-production* of it.

2. However, the world itself is also an *image* for us, namely, a natural one. The izomorphism between the world of the book and the real world must be bi-univocal. This allows the *reciprocal conversion* of the determinations in question, therefore it is not only the book which can be seen as a world but the world can also be considered a book.

3. We can find the same articulated structure in the book of nature as well as in man's book. Reading implies first of all the examination of the morphology and syntax of *natural images*, then the examination of the morphology and syntax of *artificial signs*. The grammar of reading is always the same. There is not only a grammar of the text but also one of the reality. These two coincide in the case of a correct representation.

4. The reproduction in words of the book of nature is equivalent with a *re-creation*. The word of the author and that of the demiurgos must have something in common so that the *reproduction* should take place. This is again a question of "material". God "speaks" by the images of nature. His way of "speaking" is *simultaneously* nature's *way of being*. Man must confine himself to an *artificial* material.

5. But if the same structure manifests itself in act both in the book of nature and in man's book, where is the structure itself? Where is the reader when he reads the book of nature or his own book? Would he be in nature's book, he

would not read any more, would he be in his own book, he would not know any more what he is reading about.

6. Just like the author in the moment of writing, the reader does not belong to the natural world nor to the artificial one. Reading or the relation between the two worlds becomes possible only if the reader is in a position in which the perspective of the object-subject relation is itself *possible*. In the process of reading, man is not a worldly "object" but a *limit* of the world.

7. Consequently, in order to read a book properly you must place yourself in its *possibility*. Whereas to really write a *live* book you must accomplish the *possibility of life*. A book is understood only if its unity as an articulated world results from the possibility of being of this world.

8. Reading goes on in two different temporal modes. The succession of images in their articulation takes place in one of them, the other implies their subordination to the whole which makes them possible. These two times are *simultaneous*. As readers we live the past, present and future simultaneously, as a *simultaneity of the unity of the book* in reading its distinct parts.

9. A book can be read only if we realise its *possibility* from the very beginning. In this case, in every moment of reading we will be in the very possibility of this time. We are *simultaneously in time and out of time*.

10. The reader is somehow "between" two worlds: the natural and the artificial one. The relation of representation functions only if the two worlds form a single one; so that the real world, the imaginary one as well as their mediator, the reader forms an articulated whole. It follows from what has been said before that if the reader participates in this world as an object he enriches the *natural* world with another *natural* object. After all, a painting is also an object which we could have. However, no relation of representation is possible in this way, because the painting or book is no more the image of something but a "something" linked to "something else". The image can only exist if the reader and painter "come out" both from the real world and the imaginary one, entering the very *possibility* of these.

Of course, every book is a testimony. It is born from the wish of the witness to avoid loneliness. What can we say then about the communion between author and reader?

If the relation of representation presupposes that there is a *unique* grammar of signs, be them natural or conventional, and if, in the process of writing and reading the author and reader must accomplish the same unique grammar as the very *limit* of their concrete worlds, the author and reader represent at a given moment, in their very worldly possibility of being *one and the same* person.

And, again, if the unity of articulation of the book represents its possibility of being a world, and if reading it is *impossible* outside this structural unity, then the unity of the personality of the author is *identical* with that of the reader *in the moment of reading*. The unity of the author's person is identical with

the unity of *writing itself*. The author does not tell a story; he tells *himself*. His identity with the reader presupposes, therefore, in the same perspective of his *biunivocality* two things: first, that while he is writing, the author also “reads” himself; secondly, that while he is reading, the reader also “writes” himself.

We are our own authors and readers *simultaneously*. An ideal exegetist of Aristotle should develop all the thoughts which occur in the mind of the great philosopher. The illusion of the existence of some *different* people consists, apart from the material aspects which are otherwise completely accidental, of the fact that we do not always completely identify the worldly unity characteristic of a certain author. But is there an adequate criterion for circumscribing in a *real* way an authentic world? Can the postulate of the existence of some finite, so-called “isolated” worlds - which are expressions of some individual persons called “independent” - be validated?

If the world is unique and indivisible, then in the extreme all personalities should merge in a single, indivisible one. Can a book really be finished? Do we not commit suicide when we end it, either in reading or writing it? What does the emptiness we feel at that moment mean? I think that it is the call of our humanity to express itself, the call of the world itself to tell itself. A book could be begun and finished if it contained the *whole* history of the world and mankind, in *all* its possibilities.

Only when all the important books of Europe will be within the same unique and great book of mankind could we say that Europe has found itself. It is important therefore to add page adequate to the present to the Book of history, instead of writing the books of our time.