
LANGUAGE AND VIOLENCE

Since the *Cratylus* of Plato, the philosophy of language has discussed the question of meaning in discourse as the affirmation or negation of being. Words signify objects in as much as they denote modes of being, objective qualities, or existential characters. Without the thesis of being, language would be merely subjective utterances without any relationship to a world and without any power to implant consciousness and human action in time. The relationship to being, thus, is crucial for the philosophy of language for the question of the relationship of symbolic meaning in language to being is the fulcrum around which gravitates the difference between sense and nonsense, not only within the confines of the logic of language and of the sign, but in the human world. Beneath that relationship to being presupposed by the signifying of the sign there is, of course, since the writings of Heidegger, another question—the question of the meaning of being. The meaning of language as a whole revolves around and depends on the ontological question, What is the meaning of being? Language and being, then, are completely intertwined: language forms the threshold for delimiting the question of being and the question of being demarcates the significance of the question of language.¹ In existential terms, the decadence of language follows on the forgerfulness of being;

meaning is only ontologically secured in speaking words at the limits of being, in being toward death.

What is important to note at this point is the nature of this involvement between the linguistic sign and being. It is circular in the sense of mutual involvement or mutual determination and it is unmediated. The ground of signifying is the direct relationship between the meaning of the linguistic sign and being. It is not the particular objective notes denoted by a particular sign, but its affirmation of being and the ability of the sign to carry that thesis as its sense or intentionality. Circular and unmediated, the thesis of being in the sign precedes every other signifying act, for it is only on the basis of the relationship to being that the sign can denote or connote specific semantic characters and relations. The power of signification arises on the basis of the thesis of being. For it is through the presence of being that the sign is, first of all, full of meaning and that, second, it can name things and articulate a world. In signifying, being is present in the sign, forming its ontological density. Neither its psychic, subjective qualities nor its empirical character are responsible for the semantic relation between the sign and its objects. To be able to signify, name, or denote presupposes a relationship that initiates the very possibility of signifying acts. At the origin of the sign, then, lies the thesis of being as the fundamental, grounding relationship between meaning and the linguistic sign through which being is present in the act of signifying.

Intimately bonding language to being, and in the case of Heidegger to the fate of being, the thesis of being also presents the fundamental image and paradigm for the concept of rationality. Reason denotes that discourse or those discourses in which the multiform relations of being stand as the basis for the judgments and relations expressed in signs. Without the initial bond between being and the sign, reason would be an impossibility, an idea without any prefiguration in the relationship between linguistic signs and the world. In that sense, the thesis of being in the sign is prerational; a condition for the possibility of reason and not a construct of rational reflection, an ontological and transcendental condition. Reflection may subsequently clarify the conditions that govern its use and the construction of specific scientific discourses, but it must not deny the implicit

affirmation of being in the signifying power of the linguistic sign. Discussions about the use of reason depend on the bond between meaning and being that makes signifying possible in the first place. The theory of rationality as it has been understood and pursued in the dominant strains of Western philosophy has not always opened up to view the prerational relationship of the linguistic sign to being on which reason is dependent, but it has certainly elaborated it in the specific discourses to which it has given birth: knowledge is an affirmation of what characterizes reality.

The question to be asked at this point is not whether the question posed in this manner is correct or not, for to deny the relationship between meaning and being would assert that meaning is not anchored in reality. The question to be asked is whether the relationship between language and being in the thesis of being is as circular, unmediated, and direct as the logic of the linguistic sign would appear to demand. In addition, the structure of the question requires that it be located with respect to the various sites or places from whose position in discourse speaking or writing occurs. The question of the thesis of being in language is more than a simple matter of language making possible reflection on its own conditions. It has its roots in the oral or written text.

Writing is a reflexive activity that installs its own point of generation within itself as a site, perspective, point of view, or person. The universal subject of reflective, transcendental knowledge neither writes nor speaks; on the contrary, it is a written or spoken subjectivity, located within a discourse as the subject of discourse. The point of view from which reflection, or the observation of experience, is carried out, therefore, is not equal to the subject of experience. Between the reflecting subject and the subject reflected on there is neither a simple identification nor a simple disparity of perspectives, but rather a textual complexity and complicity, in which the sense that the written text produces comes from the interweaving of subjectivities and their alternations, dislocations, and correspondances.

The question must be asked, then, of the subject of the sign: Who is speaking and who is spoken in the question of

the thesis of being in language? It is principally the subject of observation for whom experience unfolds its dialectic and, consequently, for whom being possesses a meaning and significance across the threshold of perceptual presence; for whom desire, death, hunger, starvation, and war can be seen in terms of the conditions of presentability, or in terms of presence. From the perspective of the philosophical subject since Hegel, all experience is indexed to the subject of observation; being is the mark of what can be presented in the written text as the result of a point of view written into the text: the subject of observation to whom the narrative of the text presents the world of experience.

The introduction of the subject of writing into the discussion of the question of language and being vastly complicates any response but, at the same time, makes it possible to raise the crucial issues.² Who or what speaks in language, writes texts, and enjoys the flow of conversation or the passage of the written text? But the issue is not the discovery of the true transcendental subject, but of the threshold across which the relationship between meaning and the linguistic sign is raised. Language is itself a form of action and of discursive practices in which, alongside the power of reflection and observation, desire, passion, hatred, love, the fear of death, and joy operate to form the subjectivities of language. To write or to speak is not primarily to observe or reflect on experience but to desire, to want to commit oneself to words impelled by passion or the asceticism of death. That shifts the question of the subject of language from the observing ego whose motivation is to dominate its terrain to the multiple forms that desire assumes in speaking of its hunger for others and for the world.

Speaking and writing are actions initiated by desire, the desire to speak and the infinite metamorphoses it undergoes as it prolongs itself in speaking and writing. The subject of language in the production of conversation or the written text does not occupy a place in the spectacle that conversation and written texts are for the subject of observation. There is, therefore, a lack of identity, symmetry, and reciprocity between the subject of language and the subject of reflection, between desire and the observing ego, that imposes a barrier to the identification of the

logic of the thesis of being in the linguistic sign with the meaning produced by the multiple subjectivities of language that constitute the subject of desire.

The subject of observation assumes that there is a position within subjectivity from whose place all the systems of articulation and affectivity can be seen as syntheses of one subjectivity. And from that place or topos within subjectivity, the different semantic codes and symbolic systems of meanings that at the level of speaking or writing cannot communicate with each other or cannot translate their sense into one another's coordinates are seen in their transparent interconnections. From the side of language, symbolic systems and the possibility of their reciprocal translations, however, remain a puzzle. In speaking or writing, the clarity that observing consciousness could bring to the totality of what is signified and to the signifying acts is not present, nor are the interconnections between the different symbolic networks. Linguistic processes signify in the midst of impenetrable obscurity, in acts whose meaning does not rest on clear lines of denotation or connotation.

Psychoanalysis has resorted to the theory of different psychic systems in order to deal with this problem: the ego, the id, and the superego. The lines of communication between symbols do not follow lines of reference, but follow the pathways of affective investment that symbols possess at the moment of their inscription within the systems of the psyche. Symbolic meaning is multidimensional and overdetermined, not because the mind is not finite, but because it cannot absorb desires and passions into logical or denotative sense. What is spoken in desire resists definition and observation and exists in different registers at the same time.

It is thus the existence of multiple symbolic networks of meaning that presents an insurmountable barrier to the consolidation of the identity of the subject by means of observation. Nor is it possible to identify the subject of language with one of the places that language hollows out in its signifying practices. The subject of language violates the primary rule that governs the activity of a transcendental subject. For a constituting subjectivity must be identical to itself by uniting all its acts into one consciousness where the relationship of

act to subject is one of belonging to the self. Transcendental subjectivity must, by its own logic, be aware of the logical relationships constituting the manifold networks of sense appearing within the syntheses of subjectivity. In principle those logical relationships must be retrievable from experience by the sheer exercise of consciousness itself. The clarification of meaning and the corresponding concept of truth intrinsically depend upon that critical exercise. For a transcendental subject meaning is grounded, the relation between consciousness and its object can be seen in all its necessity and fullness, through the sheer force of self-awareness.

In contrast to the unitary character of transcendental subjectivity, then, in the practices of language, there are many subjectivities, symbolic networks, and registers of sense. As an action and a series of actions, language incorporates sense into networks or clusters of affects, passions, and things with their perceptual qualities, intersubjective relations, and social customs. Symbolic networks, hence, arise from subterranean lines of sense that overflow the borders of universal concepts to expose the signifying and the signified to the aberrations and risks that only a contingent event can contain. Desire and passion speaking in the tropes of language install meaning in the obscurity of contingency through the overdetermined symbols of the social and of the individual unconscious. The sense spoken by desire cannot be covered by a priori, universal structures nor by the constituting activities of transcendental subjectivity. Desire is immersed in the event and enmeshed in the contingent: individual preferences, myths, social customs, in sum, all the points of intersection between individual life and culture. If there is a logic to the constitution of the subjectivities of language, it is not the logic of the a priori structures of transcendental subjectivity but the vagaries of individual history and the transformations of social and political life, now sudden, now slow, but, nonetheless, unrelenting in their challenge to the stabilization of the eternal.

The interiority and exteriority of language, thus, present to critical philosophical reflection a vastly different visage than a *cogito* whose existence is assured by the evidence of its self-awareness. The subjectivities of language are neither necessarily

identical with one another nor necessarily in positions of reciprocity or symmetry. The desires that animate discursive practices are a passage between the interior and the exterior; interiority is hollowed out in language through the invasion of exteriority into acts of speaking and writing; exteriority has its implacable visage effaced by being invested with the rhythms of affective life and the raw character of passion. Desire traverses the body as it traverses the distance from other bodies.

The identity of the subject of language is not a presupposition of the philosophy of language, but a question. The subject of language is a problem for itself, a source of questioning, and in the final analysis, a source of agony and despair. Hence the reflexivity of language is principally the reflection into subjectivity of the confrontation of desire with its exterior and the image of the exterior within desire. It is the permanent mark of the existential crises that are formative of affectivity and make it bear the scars of its individual history.

One of the essential tasks of language as a practice is the question that has formed one of the fundamental presuppositions of the philosophy of language: the identity of the subject of language. The identity of the subject of language is one of the tasks of speaking and writing along with its correlate, the identity or place of the world with all of its configurations. It cannot be presumed as an explanatory principle, however, but must be placed within brackets so that it can have the same place in the theory of language that it has in the multitude of practices of language. The identity of the subject is the nodal agony of narratives and of fragments that attempt to tell a story that has yet to be told and, in fact, can never be completely told. What is denoted in those narratives is nothing more than a void or empty place around which words circulate, but whose place can never be filled by amassing words. The inability of language to fill that void stems from the inability of the *cogito* to coincide with itself, with the rupture of the subject with itself. Reflection and its constructs, theory, cannot recapitulate subjectivity nor recover the sense of the subjectivity of language in a pacific relationship in which reflection names the being of the self. On the contrary, the rupture of the self introduces an original violence into the subjectivity of language from which the whole

drama of language originates. The subjectivity of language is not the subject of the logic of language, in which the pacific relationship of word to object reigns. The subjectivity of language is the subjectivity of desire in which to speak is at the same time to be in conflict with oneself, to experience the lack of identity as want and demand, and to be dependent on an exteriority that can never be assimilated.

The turmoil and violence of desire in language is what presents the unsurmountable obstacle to reflection in its efforts to recover the subjectivity of language in a priori and universal structures or in the logic of the sign. Desire as a conscious intentionality is intrinsically dependent on exteriority and on the image of the exterior that shapes its fantasies. Desire does not name being; desire attempts to incorporate being into its own life by possession and by the images of its objects, which become part of its own interiority and hence part of its own internal anguish. Coincidence with self in perfect symmetry of identity is an internal impossibility for desire. It is the expression of wants and of demands over which its language moves, but over which it has no control. Each thing that it speaks, the signs in which it moves, are surrounded by unspoken and unspeakable depths. Desire cannot understand itself, certainly not along the model of the self-understanding of the *cogito*. The self-understanding of desire can only take place in the midst of its own violence, in its internal turmoil, and in its dependence on exteriority. Desire can be brought to confess its intentions by being placed on the rack; it speaks only under duress, under the pressure of narratives in which the subject of language and its world are in crisis. For the desire of language, the tranquility of the name, and the peace that governs logical relationships are lies. Desire deludes itself when it takes contentment as the sign of reciprocity between itself and what it desires, or between its passion and the object in which it loses itself.

Pleasure is not the resolution of the dialectic of desire. It is caught up in the same symbolic determinations as desire. Desire follows the imago of its object; pleasure is determined along the same lines of the symbolic. The simple fact is that pleasure is not produced by some properties of the object, but is produced by

the relation of desire with itself in which interiority and exteriority are at play. Pleasure is produced in the reflexivity of sensibility, where desire feels itself feeling, feels the sensible contours of things and bodies in the noncoincidence of sensibility with itself. Pleasure plays over that surface created by symbolic lines of reference. The noncoincidence of self provides a surface for the play of the imagination in which images, symbolic networks, and the palpability of things coalesce. However, Aristotle was correct when he failed to recognize this relation as the paradigm of happiness or the sign of the realization of rationality in desire.³ Pleasure is just as much the sign of the ambivalence of desire in the midst of its cares as is the lack that signifies the tension of desire and its drive to search for objects of satisfaction in the expenditure of energy. It is the discharge of tension or of energy without being the sign of the resolution of internal conflicts or of the mark of reality in the imaginative life of desire. Pleasure is not the index of being in desire nor the sign that desire has surpassed itself, obliterated its lack, to become identical with itself, to realize the goal of its sense in the reality of the world of things.

The subject of desire in language asks questions that are not answerable by pleasure. The overdetermination of desire through symbolic networks, imagination, and exteriority overflow the sense of completion effected in pleasure. Pleasure effects a discharge—to use Freud's metaphor—and thus a return to stasis only in a very limited sense.⁴ Aristotle's concept of catharsis seems to share Freud's perspective to the extent that emotion in the viewing of tragic drama is purified of the violence it is and the play represents. But for Aristotle, catharsis involves a violence that is awakened again and again because it arises from the nature of social relationships and of society.⁵ The return to stasis in pleasure is interrupted by the mediation of the other and by exteriority. Pleasure, itself, is a form of violence, for it arises on the subjection of the other and on the basis of the domination of exteriority. Pleasure is not a hermetic experience, in which the subject of desire is isolated from the effects of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is inscribed into the systems of subjectivity, since it is first and foremost a

confrontation with the other and with exteriority. The shape that confrontation takes is an interruption in the return of the subject to itself, an interruption that repeats the rupture of subjectivity with itself.

The subjectivity of desire is open to the interruption of the other and of exteriority because of its rupture with itself. Husserl in the *Cartesian Meditations* indicated the crux of this problem when he said that subjectivity is intersubjectivity.⁶ However, contrary to Husserl's position, intersubjectivity is not a variation on transcendental subjectivity. The subject of desire and of language is nonidentical with itself because it is open to desiring and being desired, speaking and being spoken to, seeing and being seen, and, finally, because subjectivity is a history forced to take certain routes over others by the violent intervention of others. Subjectivity is other to itself and through the dialectic of affectivity a confrontation of self with self. Desire is inscribed with the relation to the other and to exteriority from its inception, for it follows and is dependent on perception and language. To desire is to exteriorize subjectivity, to create a subjectivity that presents a surface to the exterior on which others and things can write. The interiority of desire is, thus, constantly a mediated interiority, one in which others and exteriority have a place from which they can speak in the imagos, images, and symbols of desire. The subjectivity of desire is inhabited by the traces of exteriority and not only their representations in words and images.

The nonidentity of the subject of language rests structurally on the introduction of violence into the relation of subjectivity to itself and to its world. Desire occurs within a violent confrontation with others and things. The desire to speak is rupture and interruption in which words confront things across the violence of affectivity and confront others across desires ambivalent in origin and in their destiny: overtures that are constantly threatened by hostility. To language belong all the general structures of desire and all the conditions that govern the possibilities of action in the world of others. To act or to speak is always to intervene, to destabilize, to restore agreement, if not harmony, only to introduce new orientations into situations that are always on the edge of disintegration. Words escape the

logic of being because they incorporate the contingency of encounters and confrontations. Their logic is a logic of symbolic networks in which the lines of force are not those of representations but of the affective forces and consequences of individual and collective history. Language only represents the world across the threshold of desire and, hence, does not represent at all, but encounters others and things.

The practices of discourse are encounters of violence. In speaking the logic of things, negation and affirmation are, as Freud noted, the denial or incorporation of the encounter with things into the life of desire.⁷ The being of the copula, the grammatical mark of being, "to be," is the other side of the expulsion of objects from the hidden life of desire. Negation or denial in the affective life of perceptual and linguistic subjectivity has an import for the subject beyond the simple negation of qualities in predication. It issues from a confrontation in which the object is expelled from imaginative and symbolic life of desire, a violent expulsion in which the object is met with rejection and revulsion. But incorporation into the lines of force of desire is no less violent because it entails the destruction of the object. Desire affirms in an identification that can only be violent because it is impossible and rests on an attempt to erase the boundaries between the interior and the exterior. If, as Freud maintained, the origin of desire is the loss of the primary object of desire and, with that loss, desire is launched on the search for the lost object, then the encounter with exteriority imposes on desire its own impossibility.⁸ The structure of desire is not the result of a completely interior dialectic but the response to an external imposition: the violence of the exterior has inscribed upon the history of desire its own fate, its nullity and futility. What language narrates when it speaks of the history of subjectivity is a history of disruption and betrayal, in which the truth of desire is wrenched from violence by violence.

The self-consciousness of language, then, cannot be the placid coincidence of self with self, but the result of successive distortions, violence done to violence, with the intent to retrieve in symbolic form the original situation. The truth of language and its desire becomes more than merely allusive; it becomes evasive. The truth of statements and the idea of

rationality are the objects, not of the clarity of self-consciousness but of the strategems of interpretation. Meaning cannot be reached through the adequation of reflection or intention with its object, but indirectly through the confrontation of each word with its history and with the conflict of events in which it arose. The linguistic sign has, first and foremost, a history. It has a collective history that bears the marks of social conflict, but also a subjective history at the level of the utterance issuing from the confrontation of the desire to speak with others and with the exterior world. The relationship of sign to sign, the interpretation of sign by sign, rests on that symbolic history of confrontations.

In its history, language is, through confrontation with the other and exteriority, caught up in a temporal dispersal. Meaning in the linguistic sign is bound to time and to the passage of time. The image of language as a system, a network of semantic and grammatical paradigms, is the residue of a history in which meaning is first of all the creation of ruptures and interruptions. The linguistic sign is the conquest of dispersal in time through mimesis and repetition. It installs itself in the denial of the originality of the dispersal and passage of time with respect to the existence of truth. As a response to the interruption of the other and exteriority in subjectivity, the sign tries to hold time captive in conflictual encounters of intersubjectivity. The repetition of the encounter with the other is, consequently, the basis for the ideality of the sign, for the possibility of its repetition in time, and for the possibility of its transmitting a sense across the passage of time through marks and traces. The word is a trace of the passage, not of time, but of the other in time. It has all the signs of a display before the other; its tropes, redundancies and seductions play on a relationship that must be saved from chaos.

Without language, intersubjectivity would succumb to the violence that perpetually threatens it; that threatens it from within and threatens language itself. From within, language is threatened by the absence of a logic of meaning governing the identity of self. From without, it is threatened by the sheer exteriority of the encounter with the other and the world of things. Exteriority is an imposition and a torsion; it sets the stage for the dialectic of language: wresting meaning from meaning

through violence, rupture, and interruption, and against the guile and stratagems of the lie.

Language is the captive of the rules of interpretation, because it must discern the counterviolence of the truth in the midst of the confusion of the violence of the encounters with exteriority. The suspicion of the lie cannot be exorcised from the encounter with the other; it is the coequal counterpossibility to truth and its expression. Aside from the fact that truth may, a priori, be more primary than the lie, every specific utterance faces the situation in which the truth is that which is discerned in the face of the counterpossibility of the lie, because the truth cannot, for the most part, in politics and daily life, be assured outside of the resources of language itself. The logic of being and the logic of science appeal to the rules of objectivity where falsehood is a mistake in the sequence of truths. But discourse has no such appeal. It appeals to itself, that is, to the stratagems of interpretation, that moving from word to word, utterance to utterance, seek confirmation through words spoken by another.

Language has no logic to conquer the threat of the lie and to exorcise violence from the dialectic of intersubjectivity. Nor can it have recourse to a logic of being in which the relationship between the name and the being of things would be a priori to particular utterances and hence surety of the ultimate truth of language in the primordially of its relationship with being. Language is, in the most radical fashion, cast adrift in the wreckage of events that occurs in the passage of time and in the contingency of its encounters with the other and with exteriority. The sense that language expresses bears within itself the scars of that violence and can only be retrieved across its own history. The desire to speak is radically committed to time in order to formulate signs that signify. It commits language to seek out those means in which sense cannot be saved from the ravages of time, but in which sense can turn time against itself in mimesis and repetition. Language as a system of signs is the other side of language turning the violence of time against itself by repeating the marks of sense in sound and by imitating the signs articulated by others in the patterns of social customs and mythic narratives.

In spite of the dialectic of violence written into the structure of language and because of it, that there is a world of sense within language, across it and through it, is due to the force of desire and its rationalization. Freud was correct to point to the sheer quantity of energy in desire and its related drives as an explanation of the different pathways taken by desire and the investment of objects with symbolic value and sense.⁹ From one side the energy or quantity of desire binds it to the body; it is anaclitic. From the other side, desire follows, in its search for its objects, the routes of symbolic sense, the affective networks forming language. Desire exists at the intersection of two surfaces on which meaning is written: the body and the symbol. The difference between the two, energy and symbolic networks of sense, surfaces in the comparison of individuals and cultures. The similarities and dissimilarities between individuals and cultures focus not only on myths, ideologies, customs, and material culture but also on the significance of instinct, drive, and desire itself in its many forms. Cultures involve the evaluation of values, the time spent in the pursuit of different values, and the pleasure derived from those pursuits. Behind symbolic networks there is the brute fact of the amount of psychic energy expended in thinking within them and poured out in exploring symbolic objects in the relations between individuals.

At the level of the investment of energy in symbolic sense, images, and things, desire mediates the reciprocity of life (*bios*) and culture. Eros only appears in dependent forms, never as an unspecified force seeking the union of individuals. Through the mediation of symbols, sexuality (*eros*) emerges in particular configurations in which language, the anatomy of the body, and instinct envelop objects and actions. The fragility and contingency of those configurations is an expression of the roots of desire in the biological forces alive in the body. At times they explode to overcome desire, to mark it with new contours, or to drive it to self-destruction. There is no guarantee that desire as it emerges and finds expression in symbolic networks of sense can contain its base or control the symbolic configurations that bind the energy of drives and instincts to the world of sense.

Tragedy is an intimate part of the destiny of desire. At the origin of desire is the navel of the dream, that point in analysis

where the origins of desire are lost in its point of contact with the body. At that point of contact the word and gestures of the body interact to create the context of desire in which words translate into gestures and gestures into words. At the level of the body, desire is incipient action; it moves toward the surface of expression: either gestures, words, or both. And at the surface the fate of desire revolves around the possibilities of signifying. The rupture of subjectivity introduces a mark of difference into the structure of desire: through gestures and words desire can be different than it is; it can signify its objects along different symbolic networks to indicate breaks with itself and thus possess a history. Within the subject and within the world of symbolic sense, desire reveals its nature and investments through its history. The bond between desire and the body, thus, also indicates a difference between them.

In the context of desire, language is just as much a gesture or action of the body as it is the realization of ideal sense and the field of formal relations. The desire that animates language is itself a desire of the body; it cannot be separated from its drives and instincts. And the world of signifying sense builds its networks by incorporating the overdetermination of symbols through the drives and instincts of the body into the connotations of ideal sense. Poetic texts arise only on the basis of that possibility. They continually evince a "primitive" character that belies their sophistication. Beneath the surface of words and gestures, there are chains of signification in which meaning spirals downward to disappear in the navel of the dream. In the navel of symbolic sense, meaning folds in on itself to disappear in its silent interiority. The body possesses a depth that defies the reach of reflection and of the criterion that self-consciousness sets for itself in self-identity.

Through its dependence on the body, subjectivity and the sign finally suffer the ultimate act of violence: death. The disappearance of the lines of meaning into the depths of the body is the death of conscious sense and consequently the death of the pretention of consciousness to be itself. But more radically, the death of the body is the death of sense in its finality. The violence of death erases desire and with it the power of signification. And it condemns language and its texts to the hope of

retrieval and redemption through the desire of others and acts of interpretation. The captive of interpretation, individual desire cannot pose as a counterword to interpretation. It finally dissolves into the texts in which, in being written or committed to memory, the traces of desire still move.

Language in its systematic relations, in the diacritical nature of the linguistic sign, is already that death of subjectivity. Or it is that death of subjectivity anticipated as the very condition of the power of signifying through symbolic networks and through texts. Language is possible because death is written on every possibility. Without death, language, the desire to speak passing through time, would not signify because it would have no hold on difference and negativity, on nonidentity, that is, on the very conditions of subjectivity and the power of signifying. The word is the anticipation of death as the incorporation of its imminence, as the actuality of its irradicable threat and menace. Language can signify because it is hounded by its counterpart, the absolute lack of significance in the body's regeneration of desire.

Sense is thus a part of nonsense; nonsense is, through death, written on the possibilities of sense. There is no escape. Only if language is to be the desire to signify can there be any escape. For to escape would be to retreat to a place before subjectivity and before the inception of desire. On the contrary, to speak and to write is to commit oneself to assume the necessity of death, without choosing it as the rule of desire.

Death, therefore, is essential to the nature of language and to the nature of desire. As a category, it is to be found in that of nonidentity, which is basic to the constitution of subjectivity and its world. And, as a category, it pervades the possibility of things, their differences, their negativity and temporality. Things are not monads, the world is not a monad, because they can die, must die in order to be. To experience something outside time would be to not have to die, and for an object to appear within the horizon of human experience would be for it to have no hold on eternity; its boundaries signal the possibility of its limitations finally absorbing its claim on existence.

The desire that speaks in language emerges into the world of sense as the fruit and consequence of violence. The word, in

naming things, initiates a space between subjectivity and things in which signs take on a life of their own, not governed by the logic of objective being but following out the passage of desire through symbols and symbolic networks of sense. The hold of language on being is tenuous for its original condition is one of nonreciprocity. The violence in the desire to speak is initiated with the interruption of silence and continues through the non-equivalence of semantic codes and the objective qualities of things. It is only by doing violence to ordinary language that reflection can install into language metalanguages in which words can be turned against themselves to signify beyond their original semantic content. The transcendence of knowledge—to signify beyond the lexicon of ordinary language—presupposes that desire in language can use violence against itself. If that were not the case, then, science and knowledge would be synonymous with the lexicon of ordinary language, that is, magic. Knowledge and science are possible because texts, passages, and the written word situate words in new contexts, override their traditional senses, to construct new texts and to unfold new possibilities for signification.

Knowledge is, thus, a direct intervention into the structure of language. It takes language into a different relationship with the world or creates a new world in which both language and the world are put to the test of critical reflection. Reflection is, therefore, a challenge to subjectivity and its world. It operates within a violent separation between subjectivity and life-world, between semantics and science, between word and thing, and finally between sign and sense. The hold of the sign upon sense is not one of being; the linguistic sign signifies, but not by virtue of a logic of being imbedded in its operations. Signs are, as Saussure said, diacritical; they have a relationship to sense because of a social pact; they are part of the history of a social group. The sense of signs lies not, then, in their mere use, but in their practice. They are caught up in the violent confrontations between political groups and vying political interests. And, in turn, they interrupt the mutual distrust between self and other.

The relationship between sign and sense is, consequently, one formed across a history of confrontations and interruptions, in which violence initiates the signifying bond. Discourse

in its concrete forms and practices is more, then, than the solution to a problem, more than the assumption of a nonambiguous relationship to the world on the basis of the logic of being. Across the violence of desire and intersubjectivity, discourse responds to the question of the world, things, action, events, wants, and needs, by forming semantic codes in words and by reassembling its resources in texts. In those activities, the desire to speak surmounts and overcomes the violence that threatens the bond between sign and sense. The world of sense is built out of the responses of language to its lack of being and the world's nonsense.

Heidegger's conception of language focuses on the word as the naming of Being and commits language to the violence of the history of being in which sending of being determines the relationship of human existence—*Dasein*—to language. But the question that must be posed to that epistemo-ontological view of language is that the bond between language and meaning, or the sign and meaning, arises not in the repetition of the name or of names but in the assembling of the resources of language into texts in which desire acknowledges the action of death but does not surrender to it. The spoken or written text arises at the point where desire impels language to turn the violence of desire against itself in the process of expression and articulation and to postpone the advent of death by taking up the relationship to death. Every text is a question put, not to life as a puzzle but to the necessity of limits and of the finality of nothingness. Every text is a challenge to the evaporation of meaning through the passage of time and the dispersal of space. Turning the evanescence of time and the embodiment of space to its own purposes, the practice of discourse creates sequences of signs and symbolic networks that relate past, present, and future together. In that sense, the linguistic text is a work of memory, an understanding that remembers by working through the signifying capacities given it in the recognition of sound patterns and letters.

In the practices of discourse, sense is operative through the operations of memory: in the operations of primary memory—the retention through the passage, from future through the present to the past, of the time of perceptual and linguistic sense—and in secondary memory—the active remembering of

sense. But the recovery of meaning is possible across the passage of time because sense is retained through time and in its very passage. The ideality of meaning, which Husserl located in the noema and Saussure in the acoustic image and in associative paradigms, arises by capturing the passage of time. Sense is recognizable across past, present, and future because, in the experience of ideality, those three horizons of time are bound together in the present. The symbol, the letter, and the acoustic image are other names for the awakening of consciousness, for they embody the awareness of temporal horizons and of sense across those horizons. The passage of time is inscribed in them; they carry as ideal the traces of its passage. The symbol, the letter, and the acoustic image are thus barriers against forgetfulness; they are the productions of memory, of the existence of traces of sense in subjectivity that subjectivity depends on in order to rise to consciousness and to live in time instead of being submerged in the flow of time without remembrance.

Translated into the activities of material life, the temporal character of the symbol, therefore, is bound up with the nature of the tool and the series of inscriptions that surround the emergence of material skills, calendars, maps, and spatial orientation. The question of language is part of a neolithic epistemology that recapitulates at the level of theory the conditions on which cultural and social consciousness arose and on which cognitive conditions it still depends. In that sense, language remains a primitive acquisition of consciousness—at the origin of other acquisitions and at the origin of consciousness itself. It is primitive in the sense that the symbol/letter/image is a material barrier against submergence in the amnesia of time. Sense arises in the temporal spread of a material inscription: the binding of meaning to an extension into the past, present, and future.

The awakening of consciousness in the appearance of meaning in temporal characters ties subjectivity irrevocably to materiality in order to signify or act within the world or to be self-consciousness, to use the temporal extension of the symbol/letter/image to turn back on itself in the very flow of time. And thus desire is bound to materiality. Or one could say that consciousness is bound to materiality, because desire is desire

only through the acquisition of a conscious temporal dimension through the effects of material symbols. Desire exists through its postponement of the object, through its prolongation of sense, and through its thirst for the future. Desire anticipates its own consumation through the hold of symbols on the future, the possibility of signifying the future and incorporating it in imagos and images.

The desire that speaks in language is, because of its configuration around the symbol/letter/image, a permanent struggle against the force of time. Language is historical, not only because it bears the effects of historical change in its structures but because it, like the other activities of material life, must fight against the fact that time by its sheer existence obliterates the constructions of culture and civilization and forces men to work against time. The symbol is captured as a counterstrategm to the amnesia of time. And it is a counterviolence to the violence of time, which leaves nothing in its wake or at best traces of what it has passed over in silence.

The most primitive violence is the obliteration of sense by time itself. Time through death erodes landscapes and flesh; it attacks the instincts from which, in the depths of the body, desire renews itself. The ravages that time produces in the world of men, at the level of individual lives and material culture, is, of course, muted by the constructions of civilization and culture. Language, itself, seems to live in an eternal moment above the sweep of history. But those perceptions are false. The monuments of civilization crumble into dust before the forces of nature, and languages die due to demographic and political changes. No construction of sense is, because of its dependence on the materiality of the symbol, insured survival against the threat of oblivion.

Language, then, represents a struggle for the survival of sense in symbolic form. And, consequently, language is a struggle for the survival of the social and political world as formed on the basis of civilization and material life. The counterviolence that symbols erect against the amnesia of time use the violence of existence against itself. Its ideality rests on language as an activity forming and formed by the social and political world. Discourse and its practices, from theory to everyday gos-