THE BIRTH OF OCCIDENTAL SEMIOTICS

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Different traditions: Semantics. Logic. Rhetoric. Hermeneutics. *The Augustinian synthesis:* Definition and description of the sign. Classification of signs 1. according to the mode of transmission, 2. according to origin and usage, 3. according to social status, 4. according to the nature of the symbolic relation, 5. according to the nature of that which is designated, sign or thing: a) letters, b) metalinguistic usage. *Some conclusions.*

The ambitious title above requires that 1 begin with a restriction. From my initially sketchy notion of what semiotics is, I shall extract two essential criteria: we are treating semiotics as a discourse whose objective is knowledge (rather than poetic beauty or pure speculation), and whose subject matter is the whole variety of sign phenomena (not only for example words). These two conditions were fulfilled for the first time, it seems to me, in the work of St. Augustine, although he did not invent semiotics. One might say, on the contrary, that he hardly invented anything; he merely combined ideas and notions from different spheres. As a result, I have had to go back to his "sources"—those found in grammatical and rhetorical theory, in logic, and so on". However, I have not attempted a complete historical survey of each of these disciplines up to the time of Augustine even if they were able to inspire new developments in semiotics at other times. The tradition prior to Augustine is thus treated here only in so far as it found its way into his work, hence the (incorrect) impression which these pages might convey that the whole of Antiquity leads to Augustine. This is obviously not the case; thus, to cite just one example, if the Epicurean philosophy of language is not treated here, it is simply because its relation to the semiotics of Augustine is not significant.

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These considerations explain the plan adopted for this essay: one part is devoted to Augustine's predecessors, regrouped under headings that correspond more to an understanding of discourse than to truly isolated traditions; the other, to the study of Augustinian semiotics per se.

DIFFERENT TRADITIONS

SEMANTICS

I trust I will be forgiven for beginning my survey with Aristotle; he will reappear elsewhere under several different headings. For the moment, I shall concentrate on his theory of language, such as it appears, in particular, in the first chapters of his treatise *On Interpretation.* The key passage is as follows:

> Sounds emitted by the voice are symbols of states of soul, and written words, the symbols of words emitted by the voice. And just as writing is not the same for all men, spoken words i are not the same either, even though the states of soul for which these expressions are the immediate signs are identical among all, as are the things for which these states are the images (16a).

In this brief paragraph, if we compare it to other parallel developments, we can distinguish several claims.

1. Aristotle talks about *symbols,* of which words are a special case. We should hold onto this term. The term "sign" is used in the second sentence as a synonym; it is important however that it does not appear in the initial definition; as we shall see in a moment, "sign" for Aristotle has another technical sense.

2. The type of symbol used immediately as an example is composed of words. These are defined as a relation of three terms: sounds, states of soul, and things. The second term serves as an intermediary between the first and the third, which do not communicate directly. Hence this term supports two relations whose natures are different, as are the terms themselves. Things are identical to themselves, always and everywhere; states of soul are too. They are independent of individuals. They are thus united by a motivated relation in which, as Aristotle says, one is the *image* of the other. On the contrary sounds are not the same in different countries. Their relation with states of mind is unmotivated: one signifies the other without being its image.

This leads us to the ancient controversy over the cognitive power of names, and correspondingly, the origin of language, natural or conventional, the most famous discussion of which is Plato's *Cratylus.* This debate emphasizes problems of knowledge or origin which we shall not consider here, and which is concerned only with words, rather than with all kinds of signs. However we should retain the distinction it makes since we can (and do) say that signs are either natural or conventional. This was already the case in Aristotle who adhered in this debate to the conventionalist hypothesis. This assertion often occurs in his work; it permits him notably to distinguish between language and the cries of animals, which are also vocal and interpretable. "We have already said," he writes, "that a name signifies this or that *by convention.* No sound is by nature a name. It becomes one, becoming a symbol. Inarticulate noises mean something—for instance, those made by beasts. But no noises of that kind are names" (ibid). Symbols then can be either "names" (conventional) or "signs" (natural). In the *Poetics,* 1456b, Aristotle provides another basis for the distinction human sounds/animal sounds: the latter cannot be combined into significant and larger units; but this suggestion seems not to have had any consequences on the thought of the Ancients, (on the other hand it is headed in the same direction as the theory of double articulation).

Let us add that, advocating the unmotivated relation between sounds and sense, Aristotle is sensitive to the problems of polysemy and synonymy which illustrate it. He talks about it on several occasions, for example in *Sophist Refutations* (165a), or in *Rhetoric III* (1405b). These discussions make evident the non-coincidence between sense and referent: "It is not exact, as Bryson claimed, that there are no obscene words, since to say one thing in place of another always signifies the same thing; there is an error there, since a word can be more precise, more similar, or more suitable for putting the thing before one's eyes" (1405b; cf. another example in *Physics,* 263b). More generally, though also in a more complex way, the term *logos* designates, in certain texts, what the word signifies, as opposed to the things themselves; cf. for example, *Metaphysics,* 1012a: "The notion, signified by the name, is the definition itself of the thing."

3. Although considered at once as a privileged example of a symbol, words are not alone in this case (it is precisely here that Aristotle's text goes beyond the framework of a strictly linguistic semantics); letters are cited as a second example. We shall not insist here on the secondary role assigned letters relative to sounds; it has become a familiar notion since the work of J. Derrida. Let us mention rather that it is difficult to imagine how the tripartite subdivision of the symbol (sounds—states of soul-things) could be applied to these special symbols that are letters.We are only

talking here about two elements, written words and spoken words.

4. One further remark on the central concept of this description: the states of soul. First, this is a psychic entity, something which is not in the word but in the mind of the users of the language. Secondly, although a psychic fact, this state of soul is not at all individual: it is identical for everyone. This entity thus derives from a social or even universal "psychology" rather than from an individual one.

One problem remains that we shall merely formulate here without being able to study it: the relation between "states of soul" and significance, such as it appears, for example, in the text of the *Poetics* where the name is defined as a "composite of signifying sounds" (1457a). It would seem (but I refrain from any categorical assertion) that one can speak of two states of language: in the *in posse,* as it is envisaged in the *Poetics,* where all psychological perspective is absent; and in action, as in the text *On Interpretation,* where sense becomes a lived sense. Be that as it may, the existence of significance limits the psychic nature of sense in general.

Such are the preliminary results of our inquiry. We can hardly speak of a semiotic conception: the symbol is clearly defined as something larger than the word, but it does not seem that Aristotle seriously considered the question of non-linguistic symbols, nor that he tried to describe the variety of linguistic symbols.

There is a second incidence of reflection on the sign in Stoic thought. We know that access to this thought is extremely difficult since we only have fragments of it derived moreover from authors who were in the main opposed to the Stoics. We shall have to be satisfied, therefore, with a few brief indications. The most important fragment is in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors, VIII,* 11-12:

> The Stoics say that three things are linked [together]: the signified, the signifier, and the object. Of these tilings, the signifier is the sound, for example "Dion"; the signified is the thing itself which is revealed and which we grasp as subsisting in dependence on our thought, but which the barbarians do not understand, even though they are capable of hearing the word pronounced; and the object is that [thing] which exists outside of us: for example, Dion in person. Two of these things are corporeal: the sound and the object; while one is incorporeal, which is the entity which is signified, the expressible [dicible] *(lekton),* which is true or false.

Let us notice once again several important points.

1. One will remark that the terms "signifier" and "signified" make their appearance here (with a meaning that Saussure, we note, will not give them), but not that of sign. This absence, as we shall soon see, is no accident. The example given is a word, or more exactly, a proper name, and nothing indicates that the existence of other kinds of symbols was envisaged.

2. Here, as in Aristotle, three categories are simultaneously given. Notice that in both texts the object, although exterior to language, is necessary for the definition. No significant difference distinguishes, in these two the first and third elements, sound and object.

3. If there is a difference it is in the *lekton,* [dicible] spoken or signified. A great deal has been written, in modern literature, about the nature of this entity. Since controversy on the matter continues, we have decided to keep the Greek term. We must remember first of all that its status as "incorporeal" sets it apart in the resolutely materialistic philosophy of the Stoics. This means that it is impossible to conceive of it as an impression in the mind, even though it be conventional: such impressions (or "states of soul") are for the Stoics, incorporeal. "Objects" on the other hand do not necessarily have to belong to the world observable through the senses. They can be psychic as well as physical. The *lekton* is not located in the mind of the speaker but in language itself. The reference to barbarians is revealing. They hear the sound and see the man, but do not understand the *lekton,* that is to say the fact that this sound evokes this object. The *lekton* is the capacity of the first element to signify to the third. In this sense, the fact of having, for instance, a proper name is highly significant, since the proper name, unlike other words, has no sense, but like other words, has a designatory capacity. The *lekton* depends on thought but does not confuse itself with it. It is not a concept; it is not even, as was once thought possible to say, a Platonic idea. It_is rather that upon which, thought operates. In the same way the inner expression of these three terms is not the same as It was in Aristotle. There are no longer two radically distinct relations (of signification and image). The *lekton* is that which allows sounds to relate to things.

4. The final remark of Sextus, according to which the *lekton* can be true or false, prompts us to give it the dimension of a proposition. The example cited however, which is an isolated word, has a different meaning. Here, other fragments, from Sextus or Diogenes Laertius will allow us to understand more clearly.

First, the *lekton* can be either complete (a proposition) or incomplete (a word). Here is the text from Diogenes: "The Stoics distinguish between complete and incomplete *lekta.* The incomplete are those whose expression is incomplete, for example "writes". We ask: Who? The complete *lekta* are those that have a complete sense: " 'Socrates writes' " *(Life,* VII, 63). This distinction had already been made by Aristotle, and leads to the grammatical theory of parts of speech which does not concern us here.

Secondly, propositions are not necessarily true or false: truth or falsity is a property only of assertions, and there are, moreover, imperatives, interrogatives, oaths, imprecations, hypotheses, vocatives, etc. (ibid.,65). And here again we find a commonplace of the era. We can no more talk about an explicit theory of semiotics here than in Aristotle. What is at stake for the time being is the linguistic sign, and it alone.

LOGIC

It is somewhat arbitrary to set up different headings such as "semantics" or "logic" when the Ancients did not do so. But in this way we can see more clearly the autonomy of texts which, from a later standpoint, treat related problems. We shall review the same authors as before.

In Aristotle the theory of the sign in logic is presented in the *Prior Analytics* and *Rhetoric.* Here is the definition: "The tiling of which the existence or the production entails the existence or the production of another thing, either prior or posterior to it, is a sign of the production or the existence of the other thing" (Pr.An. 70a). The example that illustrates this notion, and which is destined to have a long career, is: the fact that this woman has milk is a sign that she has given birth.

One must first situate this notion of the sign in its context. For Aristotle, the sign is a truncated syllogism, one whose conclusion is missing. One of the premises (the other can equally be absent as we shall see) serves as the sign: the designated is the (absent) conclusion. And here we must insert a first correction: for Aristotle, the syllogism illustrated by the above example does not differ in any way from the common syllogism (of the type "If all men are mortal. . . "). Today we know that it does not work that way. The traditional syllogism describes the relation of the predicates within the proposition (or that of predicates appearing in related propositions), while the example cited is based on propositional not predicative logic. The relations between predicates are no longer pertinent; only inter-propositional relations count. This is what ancient logic hid under the word, intended to describe cases such as this as "hypothetical syllogism."

It is essential to go from one proposition ("this woman has milk") to another ("this woman has given birth"), and not from one predicate to another ("mortals" to "men"), for we pass at the same time from substance to event, and this greatly facilitates one taking into consideration non-linguistic symbolism. We have seen elsewhere that Aristotle's definition spoke about things and not propositions (the opposite is found in other texts). We are not surprised, consequently, to ascertain that Aristotle now envisages explicitly non-linguistic signs, or more precisely, visual signs (70b); the example envisaged is: large limbs can be the sign of courage in lions. Aristotle's perspective here is more epistemological than semiotic. He wonders whether it is possible to acquire knowledge from such signs. From this point of view, he will distinguish the necessary sign *(tekmerion)* from the sign that is only probable. We shall not concern ourselves with this direction of thought.

Another classification envisages the content of predicates in each proposition. "Among signs, one defines the relation of the individual to the universal, the other of the universal to the particular" *(Rhetoric, I,* 1357b). The example of the woman who has given birth illustrates the latter case. An example of the first type is: "A sign that the wise are just, is that Socrates was wise and just." Here again, we see the damaging results of the confusion between the logic of predicates and the logic of propositions. If Socrates (learned, just) is the individual vis-a-vis the universal, so too, the proposition that this woman had milk and that she had given birth are two facts on the same logical level. They are two "particulars" in relation to the general law "if a woman has milk, she has given birth."

As far as language is concerned, signs are implied propositions, but not every implied proposition, Aristotle warns us, is evoked by a "sign." There are, in fact, implicit propositions which come either from the collective memory, or the logic of the lexicon; in other words, synthetic propositions and "analytical propositions ("for example, when one says that X is a man, one has also said that X is an animal, that he is animated, that he is a biped and is capable of reason and knowledge" *Topics,* 112a). In order for there to be a sign, there must be something more than this implicit sense, but Aristotle does not say what this is.

At no moment is the theory of the logical sign joined to that of the linguistic symbol (nor, as we shall see later, to that of the rhetorical trope). The technical terms themselves are different, here sign, there symbol.

We find the same idea in the Stoics. Here is one of the passages from Sextus Empiricus:

> The Stoics, wanting to define the notion of sign, say that it is a proposition which is the antecedent in the major premise and which reveals the consequent. (...) They call antecedent the first proposition in a major premise that begins with the true and ends with the true. It serves to reveal the consequent because the proposition "a woman has milk" seems to be indicative of "she has conceived" in this major premise: if a woman has milk she has conceived *(Outlines, II,* XI).

Here we find many elements of the Aristotelian analysis, including his key example. The theory of the sign is related to the theory of demonstration, and once again what interests these authors is the nature of the knowledge one derives from it. The only difference—but it is important—is that the Stoics, who practised propositional logic and not the logic of classification, are aware of the logical properties of this kind of reasoning. The consequences of the preferential attention paid to the proposition are surprising. As we already remarked in Aristotle's case, it is because of the proposition that one begins to pay such sustained attention to what we would call non-linguistic signs. The logic of Aristotle's classification "suits a philosophy of substance and essence" (Blanchet); while propositional logic seizes facts in the act of becoming events. Now, it so happens that it is precisely events (and not substances) that one can treat as signs. The change in the object of knowledge, (classifications to propositions) therefore brings about a widening of the level of matter under contemplation (the non-linguistic is added to the linguistic).

The absence of connection between this theory and the preceding one (that of language) is still more flagrant here because of the closeness of the terms used. We have noted that in their theory of semantics the Stoics did not talk about the sign but only about the signifier and the signified. Nevertheless the relationship is striking, and the skeptic Sextus was quick to point it out. It is in his criticism, which explains the necessity of relating the diverse theories of the sign, that lies a significant new step towards the constitution of semiotics. Sextus pretends to believe that the "sign" in question is one and the same in both cases. However in comparing the pair signifier—signified with that of antecedent—consequent, he observes several differences, and this induces him to formulate the following objections:

1. The signifier and the signified are simultaneous, while the antecedent and the consequent are successive. How can one call the two relations by the same name?

> The antecedent cannot serve to reveal the consequent, since the latter is, relative to the sign, the thing signified, and is therefore apprehended along with it. (...) If the sign is not apprehended before the thing signified, it cannot reveal what is apprehended along with it and not after it.. . *(Outlines, II, XI,* 117-118).

2. The signifier is "corporeal" while the antecedent, being a proposition, is "incorporeal."

> Signifiers are distinct from signifieds. Sounds signify but the *lekta* are signified, including in propositions. And since propositions are signifieds and not signifiers, the sign can not be a proposition *(Against the Professors,* 264).

3. The passing from the antecedent to the consequent is a logical operation. However anyone can interpret the facts that he observes, even animals.

> For if the sign is an (act of) reasoning, and the antecedent in a valid major premise, those who have no idea of reasoning and who have never studied logical technicalities ought to be totally incapable of interpreting signs. But this is not the case; for often illiterate sailors and farmers unskilled in logical theorems interpret signs excellently: the former those of the sea, foretelling squalls and calms, storms and fair weather; the latter those of the farm, predicting good and bad harvests, droughts and rain. Yet why speak of men, when certain of the Stoics have attributed even to irrational animals an understanding of signs? For, in fact, the dog, when he follows a beast by its tracks, is interpreting signs; but he does not draw this form of judgment: "if there is a track, there is a beast." In the same way, at the prod of a spur or the crack of a whip, the horse leaps forward and begins to run; but he does not form a logical argument from the premise, such as "if someone has cracked the whip I must run." Thus, the sign is not a reasoning in which the antecedent would be the true major premise *(ibid.,* 269-271).

It must be admitted that if often the criticisms of Sextus are purely quibblings about form, in this case they are substantive. The assimilation of two species of signs really creates problems. Let us imagine that Sextus sought not the inconsistency within Stoic doctrine but the connection between the two theories. His objections then become so many constructive criticisms, which may be reformulated thus:

1. Simultaneity and successivity are the consequence of a more fundamental difference: that is, in the case of the linguistic sign (word or proposition) the signifier directly evokes its signified; in that of the logical sign, the antecedent, as a linguistic segment, has its own sense, which will be upheld. It is only as a secondary consideration that it evokes something else as well, namely the consequent. The difference is that between direct and indirect signs, or, in a terminology opposed to that of Aristotle, between signs and symbols.

2. Direct signs are composed of heterogenous elements: sounds, incorporeal *lekton,* object. Indirect symbols are composed of entities whose nature is similar: one *lekton* for instance evokes another.

3. These indirect symbols can be linguistic as well as non-linguistic. In the first case, they take the form of two propositions. In the second, of two events. In this latter form, they are accessible not only to logicians but also to the uninitiated and even to animals. The substance of the symbol does not prejudge its structure. On the other hand, one should not confuse a capacity (the inference) with the possibility of talking about it (the logician's discourse).

If we reconsider the classification of the *lekta* in terms of completes and incompletes, we see that it is possible to reconstitute a chart with one empty box:

	WORD	PROPOSITION
direct indirect	incomplete lekton ?	complete lekton sign

This absence is all the more strange (but perhaps this fault is due simply to the fragmentary state of the Stoic writing which has come down to us) since the Stoics were the founders of a hermeneutic tradition that is based on the indirect sense of *words*—on *allegory.* This however takes us into the framework of another discipline.

Before leaving the Stoic theory of logic we should mention another problem. Sextus reports that they divide signs into two classes: commemorative and revealing. This subdivision results from a previous categorisation of things, according to which things are either evident or obscure, and in this latter case, obscure once and for all, either by chance

or by nature. The first two classes that result from this, things which are evident or things which are obscure for ever, do not make the sign intervene. It is the latter two that do this, thus providing the basis of two species of signs:

> Those which are obscure for a moment and those which are uncertain by nature are graspable by signs, not by the same signs, but the first by commemorative signs (or by recall), the second by revealing signs (or indicative). We call a commemorative sign a sign which—having been manifestly observed at the same time as the thing signified, as soon as it falls upon our senses, no matter how obscure the thing—pushes us to remember what has been observed along with it, even if it does not fall manifestly upon our senses, as it is the case with smoke and fire. The revealing sign, according to what they say, is the one which has not been manifestly observed at the same time as the thing, but which of its own nature and constitution indicates whatever it is a sign of, as the movements of the body are the sign of the soul *{Outlines, II, X,* 99-101).

Other examples for this kind of sign: commemorative—the scar for the wound, puncture of the heart for death; revealing—sweating for the pores of the skin.

This distinction does not appear to call into questions the properly semiotic structure of signs and only poses an epistemological problem. However, in his criticism of the distinction, Sextus brings the debate back to more familiar grounds. For he does not believe in the exisxence of revealing signs. He modifies therefore, first the relation between these two classes, by elevating the one—commemorative signs—to the rank of genre, and relegating the other—revealing signs—to that of kind, in whose existence however he does not believe *{Against the Professors,* 143). From that point, his discussion casts doubt upon two other oppositions: polysemic and monosemic signs, natural and conventional signs. The debate can be summarized thus: Sextus contests the existence of revealing signs by asserting that these do not allow for certain knowledge to be extracted, since a thing can symbolize, potentially, an infinite number of other things. It is therefore not a sign. To which the Stoics retort: but commemorative signs (whose existence Sextus acknowledges) can equally well be polysemic and evoke several things at once. Sextus admits this fact, but shows that he stands on a different footing: commemorative signs can only be polysemic by force of a convention. Now revealing signs are natural by their own definition (they exist as things before being interpreted). Commem-

orative signs are either natural (thus, smoke for a fire), in which case they are monosemic, or they are conventional and as such they can be either monosemic (such as words) or polysemic (such as the lighted torch which on one occasion can announce the arrival of friends, on another the arrival of enemies). Here in any event is the text from Sextus:

> In answer to those who draw conclusions from the commemorative sign and quote the case of the torch or that of the sounds of the bell (which can be announcing the opening of the meat market or the necessity of watering the roads), we must declare that it is not paradoxical for such signs to be capable of announcing several things at the same time. For these signs are established by lawgivers, and it is in our power to make them reveal one thing or several. But since the revealing sign is above all supposed to suggest the signified thing, it must necessarily only indicate one single thing. {*Against the Professors,* 200-201).

This criticism by Sextus is not only interesting in that it attests to the idea that the perfect sign must only have one sense, and Sextus' preference for conventional signs, but as well, as we have seen, the natural-conventional opposition was applied up to this point to the origin of words, and that it was necessary to opt for one *or* the other solution (or a compromise between the two). Sextus himself applies it to signs in general (words are only one special case), and, as well, he conceives of the simultaneous existence of one *and* the other kind of sign, natural and conventional. The difference is of capital importance. In this way his vision is properly semiotic. Was it just coincidence that this vision required a certain eclectism in order to develop (that of Sextus in this case)?

RHETORIC

We have seen that if the "sign", in the Aristotelian sense, was treated by him within a rhetorical framework, his analysis properly belongs to logic. For now, we shall study not the "sign" but indirect meanings, or *tropes.*

Once again, we must start with Aristotle, for it is with him that the opposition, literal—transposed, originates, which will interest us first of all. But in its beginnings, the opposition was not what it became later. Not only is there an absence of all semiotic perspective in the description given by Aristotle, but the opposition does not have the preponderant role that we are accustomed to seeing it have. The transposition, or metaphor (a term that for Aristotle designates tropes altogether), is not a symbolic structure that would possess, among other things, a linguistic manifestation, but a

kind of word: a kind where the signified is other than the usual signified. It appears at the heart of a list of lexical classifications, which, at first glance anyway, comprises eight terms. It is a complimentary species of the neologism, or innovation in the signifier. To be sure, the existing definitions are slightly more ambiguous. One reads in the *Poetics:* "Metaphor [transposition] is the bringing forward of a displaced name " (1457b); and a parallel passage from *Topics,* but one in which the term metaphor [transposition] does not appear: "Those who call things by displaced names (calling, for example, the plane tree, *man),* thus transgressing current usage" (109a). In discussing how tropes operate *Rhetoric* talks about "that which one does not name, even while naming" (1405a). It is clear that Aristotle is hesitating between two definitions of metaphor, or else he defines it by this very duplicity. It is either the non-literal sense of a word (a carrying-over, a transgression of current usage) or the non-literal expression used to evoke a sense (a displaced name, a naming that avoids proper naming). Wliatever the case, metaphor remains a purely linguistic category. Even more, it is a sub-class of words,Choosing metaphor rather than a non-metaphorical term stems froriT the same tendancy that makes us choose this synonym rather than that one. One always seeks what is appropriate and proper. Here is a passage which illustrates this idea.

> If we wish to magnify our object, we must borrow the metaphor from what is more elevated in the same genus; if to depreciate it, from what is of less value; I want to say, for example, since the opposites are of the same genus, that to affirm in one case that he who begs prays, and in another that he who prays begs (these two actions being one and the other kinds of asking), is to do what we have just said *(Rhetoric,* III, 1405a).

Transposition is one stylistic means among others (even if it is Aristotle's preference) and not a way of being of meaning that one would need to articulate with direct signification. In turn, what is literal is not the direct but the appropriate. One can understand that under these conditions, it is not possible to find an opening toward a typology of signs in the theory of transposition.

Things do not stop there. Beginning with Aristotle's disciples, Theophrastes for example, figures of rhetoric will play an increasingly more important role. We know that this movement will not end until the death of rhetoric which will reach it when it is transformed into a "figuratic." Even the multiplication of terms is significant. Along with "transposition", always used in its generic sense, *trope* and *allegory,* irony and figure appear. Their definitions are not far removed from Aristotle's. For example, pseudo-

Heraclites writes: "The figure of style that says one thing but signifies another, different from the thing said, is called by its proper name 'allegory'." And Tryphone: "The trope is a way of talking diverted from literal meaning." The trope and its synonyms are defined here as the appearance of a second sense—not as the substitution of one signifier for another. But it is the position and the overall function of tropes which slowly change; they tend more and more to become one of two possible poles of signification (the other being direct expression); the opposition is for example much stronger in Cicero than in Aristotle.

Let us rapidly examine the last link in the rhetorical chain of the ancient world, by looking at the man who made a synthesis of the tradition—Quintilian. We should not find here, any more than in Aristotle, a semiotic examination of tropes. Thanks to the comprehensiveness of his treatise, Quintilian ends up by accepting into his treatment several suggestions abounding in this sense. His lack of rigor however prevents him from formulating the problems explicitly. While indirect expression was classified by Aristotle among numerous other lexical means, Quintilian tends to present it as one of two possible modes of language: "We prefer to make things be understood rather than to say them openly." *(On the Education of the Orator, VIII, AP,* 24). But his attempt to theorize the opposition between "say" and "make understandable", which relies oh "the categories of literal and transposed comes to naught. In the end, tropes are literal as well: "Exact metaphors are also called literal" (VIII,2,10).

The presence of onomatopoeia in tropes constitutes a curious fact. It is difficult to understand this property if one restricts oneself to the definition of trope by change in sense (or by the choice of an improper signifier, for we find both conceptions in Quintilian). The only possible explanation resides precisely in a semiotic conception of trope, namely, that it is a motivated sign. This is the only trait common to metaphor and onomatopoeia. But this idea is not formulated by Quintilian. We have to wait until the 18th century before this idea is set forth by Lessing.

Quintilian devotes pages to allegory, but this quantitative importance has no theoretical counterpart. Allegory is defined, as it was in Cicero, as a series of metaphors, as a strung-out metaphor. This sometimes creates problems that one comes across in the definition of example. Example, unlike metaphor, maintains the sense of the initial assertion which contains it, and yet Quintilian connects it to allegory. But this problem (subdivisions at the heart of indirect signs) goes unnoticed, in the same way as the dividing line between tropes and figures of thought remains blurred.

The domain of rhetoric itself does not contain theories of semiotics. However, it does prepare them and does so because of the attention paid to the phenomena of indirect sense. Thanks to rhetoric, the literal-transposed opposition becomes familiar to the ancient world (even if there are uncertainties about its content).

HERMENEUTICS

The hermeneutic tradition is particularly difficult to grasp, abundant and multifaceted as it is. The very acknowledgment of its object seems to have been acquired from earliest Antiquity, if only in the form of an opposition between two regimes of language, direct and indirect, clear and obscure, *logos* and *muthos,* and, consequently between two modes of reception—comprehension for the one, interpretation for the other. In describing the word of the oracle at Delphi, the famous fragment of Heraclites testifies to this: "The master, whose oracle is at Delphi, says nothing, hides nothing, but signifies." The teaching of Pythagorus is evoked in similar terms: "When he conversed with his friends, he exorted them, either by developing his thought, or by using symbols" (Porphyry). This opposition is maintained in later writings, with no attempt at justification however. Here is an example from Dionysius of Halicarnassus: "Certain men dare to claim that the figured form is not permitted in discourse. According to them, one should speak or not speak, but always simply, and by renouncing hereafter the use of speaking by implication" *(Art of Rhetoric,* IX).

Within this extremely general conceptual framework numerous exegetical practices come to be inscribed which we might divide into two parts, both of which greatly differ from each other: the *commentary* on texts (especially those on Homer and the Bible) and *divination,* in all its most varied forms (mantic).

One might be surprised to see divination appear among hermeneutic practises. However, we are dealing here with the discovery of a meaning for objects that did not have one, or of a secondary sense, for the others. First of all let us establish, as a primary step towards a semiotic conception, the variety of substances that become the starting point of an interpretation: from water to fire, from the flight of birds to the entrails of animals, everything seems capable of becoming sign and thus giving rise to interpretation. One can assert moreover that this type of interpretation is related to that which indirect modes of language constrain us, that is to say, allegory. Two authors can testify here to an extremely heterogeneous tradition.

First of all, Plutarch, when he seeks to characterize the language of oracles, inevitably brings it closer to indirect expression, thus:

> Concerning the clarity of oracles, an evolution parallel to other changes in accepted opinion took place. Formerly the strange and peculiar style of oracles, ambiguous and periphrastic, was grounds for the crowd to believe in its divine character, and to be filled with admiration and religious respect. But later they wanted to understand each thing clearly and easily without exaggeration or recourse to fictions, and they accused the poetiy which surrounded the oracles of opposing knowledge of the truth by surrounding the revelations of the gods with obscurity and shadow. They were even suspicious of metaphors, enigmas, equivocal phrases, as being a way out or a refuge for divination, and used to allow the priest to retire and hide in case of error. *(On the Pythian Oracles, 25,* 406 F407 B).

Here oracular language is equated with the transposed and obscure language of poets.

Second witness: Artemidorus of Ephesus, author of the famous *Key to Dreams,* who summarizes and systematizes an already rich tradition. First of all, the interpretation of dreams is constantly put into relation with that of words, sometimes by resemblance;

> In the same way that masters of grammar, once they have taught children the value of letters also show them how to use them all together, so I will add some final and brief indications to be followed, so that even a beginner can easily find instruction in my book *(III, Conclusion).*

and sometimes by contiguity;

> It is also necessary, when dreams are mutilated and do not offer a hold so to speak, that the interpreter of dreams adds something by himself from his experience, and especially to those dreams where one sees either letters that do not present the complete sense, or a word that has no relation with the thing; the interpreter of dreams must then use either metathesis, changes, or additions of letters of syllables (I, 11).

In addition, Artemidorus opens his book with a distinction between two kinds of dreams, and this distinction clearly indicates its origin: "Among dreams, some are *theorematic,* some are *allegorical.* They are theorematic whose fulfillment resembles that which they have made apparent. . . . Allegorical by contrast are those dreams that signify certain things by means of other things" (I, 2). This opposition is probably copied from that of literal and transposed, two rhetorical categories, but it applies here to non-linguistic matter. We find moreover a connection, unintended perhaps, between dream images and rhetorical tropes even in Aristotle, who, on one hand asserts that "to make metaphors well is to perceive resemblances well" *(Poetics,* 1459a), and, on the other hand, that "the most skilful interpreter of dreams is he who can observe resemblances" *(On Prophesying by Dreams,* 2); Artemidorus also writes that, "the interpretation of dreams is nothing more than the connection between likeness and likeness" (II, 25).

Let us now return to the principal hermeneutic activity: textual exegesis. In the beginning it is a practise that implies no particular theory of the sign, but rather what we might call a strategy of interpretation, varying from one school to another. We have to wait until Clement of Alexandria to find an effort in the direction of semiotics at the heart of the hermeneutic tradition. First of all, Clement very explicitly enunciates the unity of the symbolic domain—marked, by the way, by the systematic use of the word "symbol". Here is an example of the enumeration of the varieties of the symbolic:

> The formalities that took place with the Romans for testaments, such as the presence of scales and small change to evoke justice; manumission to represent the division of goods, and the touching of ears for an invitation to serve the mediator *(Stromates,* V,55,4).

All these procedures are symbolic, as is also indirect language:

> Aeteas, king of the Scythians, to the people of Byzance: "Do not interfere with the collection of contributions or my horses will drink water from your rivers." By means of this symbolic language, the Barbarian was announcing the war that he would wage against them. (V, 31,3).

If the assimilation between non-linguistic symbolism and linguistic symbolism takes place here, nevertheless a clear distinction is maintained between symbolic and non-symbolic language (indirect and direct). Scripture contains passages written in both languages, but different specialists will initiate us into their reading, the Didaskalia on one hand, the Pedagogue on the other.

Clement is also the author of some reflection on the writings of the Egyptians, who profoundly influenced the interpretation of writing during the following centuries. Clement's reflections are a revealing example of his

tendency to treat different substances in the same terms, and more particularly of applying rhetorical terminology to other kinds of symbolism (visual in this case). Clement asserts the existence of several kinds of writing that the Egyptians used. One of them is the hieroglyphic method. Here is the description:

> The hieroglyphic genus expresses in part things in themselves (chirologically) by means of primary letters, and in part it is symbolic. In the symbolic method, a species expresses things through imitation, another kind written so to speak in a tropic method, while a third kind is clearly allegorical by means of certain enigmas. Thus, the Egyptians, if they wanted to write the word "sun" drew a circle, and for the word "moon" they drew the figure of a crescent; this being the cyriological genus. They wrote in the tropic manner, diverting meaning and transposing signs in view of a certain relation. In part they substituted them with other signs, and in part they modified them in different ways. So that, in wanting to transmit the praises of kings through religious myths, they inscribed them on bas-reliefs. And here is an example of the third kind of writing, that which uses enigmas: they represent other plants as serpents because of their sinuous course; the sun on the other hand they drew as a scarab because the scarab forms a ball of dung that he rolls in front of him (V, 4, 20-21).

In this well-known text, several points are worth noting: first of all the possibility of finding the same structures through different substances: language (metaphors and enigmas),writing (hieroglyphic),painting (imitation). This type of unification already marks one step towards the constitution of a theory of semiotics. On the other hand, Clement proposes a typology of the entire domain of signs; the brevity of his proposition makes it necessary for us to make certain hypothetical reconstructions. One might summarize the classification thus:

- Hieroglyphic Writing
  - chirologic (literal)
  - symbolic
    - by imitation(chirology)
    - tropic
    - by allegory and enigma

Two points evidently cause a problem in this distribution: the fact that the literal method (chirological) appears in two distinct places on the sketch, and that allegory, considered in rhetoric as a trope, in this instance forms a class by itself. In order to try and maintain the coherence of the text, we might propose the following explanation based on the examples cited. First the chirological kind and the symbolic chirological kind have at the same time common and divergent traits. They share in common the fact.that this relation is *direct.* The letter designates the sound, as the circle does the sun, without any detour. They possess no other significance, prior to this one. They can also be distinguished however. The relation between letter and sound is *unmotivated* while that of the sun and the circle is *motivated.* This difference in turn can arise from other causes passed over in silence here. Thus the opposition between chirological and symbolic kinds is that of the unmotivated for the motivated; whereas the opposition at the heart of symbolic writing between the chirologic kind and other kinds is that of the direct or the indirect (transposed).

On the other hand, the deciphering of tropic writing implies two steps: the pictogram designates an object (by direct imitation). This in turn evokes another, through resemblance, or participation, or contraries, etc. What Clement calls enigma or allegory, implies in turn three relations: between the pictogram and the scarab—direct imitation; between the scarab and the ball of dung—contiguity (metonymic); finally between the ball of dung and the sun—resemblance (metaphoric). The difference between tropes and allegory is thus in the length of the chain: one diversion only in the first case, two in the second. Rhetoric had already defined allegory as a prolonged metaphor; but for Clement, this prolongation does not follow the surface of the text. It operates in some way without moving, in depth.

If one accepts that the difference between tropic writing and allegorical writing is that between two *or* three relations, the place of symbolic chirological writing becomes clear. It comes before the others because it demands the constitution of a single relation, that between the circle and the sun, the image and its meaning (there is no detour). Such an interpretation would explain the classification proposed by Clement and would show at the same time the underlying theoiy of signs.

Even apart from this essential (but hypothetical) theoretical contribution Clement remains a most important figure for he paves the way for Saint Augustine regarding two essential points: 1) the material variety of symbolism—which can be perceived by any of the senses and which can be linguistic or non-linguistic—does not diminish its structural unity; 2) the symbol joins itself to the sign as does the transposed sense to the literal sense, thus rhetorical concepts can be applied to non-verbal signs.

THE AUGUSTINIAN SYNTHESIS

DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SIGN

St. Augustine is not trying to be a semiotician; his work is organized around an objective of a completely different nature (religious); it is only along the way, and in the interest of this other objective, that he formulates his theory of the sign. However, the interest that he brings to semiotic problematics seems to be greater than he admits or even than he thinks: in effect, throughout his life he will continue to come back to these same questions. His thoughts about these questions do not stay constant, and it will be necessary to observe them in their evolution. The most important texts, from our point of view, are: a treatise from his youth, considered sometimes as inauthentic, *Principles of Dialectic* or *On Dialectic,* written in 387; *On Christian Doctrine,* the central text in all respects, written—at least the part in which we are interested—in 397; and *On The Trinity,* which dates from 415. Numerous other texts, however, contain important indications.

In *On Dialectic,* we read the following definition: "A sign is that which shows itself to the senses, and which, outside of itself, shows something more to the spirit. To speak is to give a sign with the aid of articulated sound" (V). We shall retain many of the characteristics of this definition. First, it is here that a property of the sign makes its appearance which will subsequently play a significant role in what is to follow : that of a certain non-identity of the sign to itself, which rests on the fact that the sign is originally double: sensible *and* intelligible (nothing similar is to be found in Aristotle's description of the symbol). On the other hand, even more strongly than in the past, it is asserted that words are only one kind of sign; this assertion is only the more accentuated in the later writings of Augustine. Now, *it* is this assertion which is fundamental to the semiotic perspective.

The second important sentence is the following (the opening of Chapter V of *On Dialectic):* "The word is the sign of a thing, able to be understood by the listener when proferred by the speaker." This is again a definition, but a double definition, because it brings out two distinct relations: the first between the sign and the thing (this is the framework of designation and signification); the second between the speaker and the hearer (this is the framework of communication). Augustine links the two at the interior of one single sentence, as if this co-existence did not present any problems. The insistence on the communicative dimension is original: it was absent in the Stoics, who developed a pure theory of signification, and it is much less evident in Aristotle, who spoke, it is true, of "states of soul"; thus of speakers, but who left this context of communication entirely in the dark. We have here a first indication of the two principle tendencies in Augustinian semiotics: its eclecticism and its tendency towards psychologizing.

The very ambiguity that produced the juxtaposition of several perspectives is repeated in the analysis^of the sign when it is broken into its constitutive elements (in a particularly obscure page of the treatise). "There are these four things to be distinguished; the._word, the expressable *(dicible),* the expression *(dictio),* and the thing." Of the explanation that follows (made difficult by the fact that Augustine takes as his example of a thing the *word),* I shall retain only what will enable us to understand the difference between *dicible* and *dictio.* Here are two exerpts:

> In a word, all that is perceived, not by the ear but by the spirit, and that the spirit keeps in itself, is named *dicible,* expressable. When the word exits from the mouth, not in its own name, but to signify some other thing, it is named *dictio,* expression.

And:

> Suppose then that a pupil has been asked by a grammarian in this way: to what part of speech does the word *arma,* arms, belong? The word *arma* is enunciated here with regard to itself; that is, it is a word enunciated with regard to the word itself. That which follows: "to which part of speech does this word belong?" is added, not for itself, but with respect to the word *arma;* the word is understood by the spirit or enunciated by the voice: if it is understood and seized by the spirit before it is enunciated, it is thus the *dicible,* the expressable, and, for the reasons that I have given, if it is made manifest outside by the voice, it becomes *dictio,* expression. *Arma,* here only a word, was, when it was pronounced by Virgil, an expression. It was in effect not pronounced with regard to itself, but in order to signify either the wars in which Aeneas fought, or the shield and other armor which Vulcan made for Aeneas.

On the lexical level, this series of four terms apparently comes from an amalgam. As J. Pepin has shown, *dictio* translates *lexis; dicible* is the exact equivalent of *lekton;* and *res* could be there for *tughanon;* which would give in Latin an exact copy of the Stoic tripartition of signifier, signified, and thing. On the other hand, the opposition between things [resj and words [verba] is familiar; we shall see it later in the rhetoric of

Cicero and Quintilian. The telescoping of the two techniques creates a problem, because we then have at our disposal two terms which designate a signifier, namely *dictio* and *verbum.*

Augustine seems to resolve this terminological imbroglio by reconciling it with another ambiguity which is already familiar to us: that of meaning belonging at the same time to the processes of both communication and designation. Thus on the one hand, we have one term too many; on the other, a double concept: simultaneously *dicibile* will be reserved for the experienced meaning *[sens vecu]* (here in opposition to Stoic terminology), *dictio* being attracted towards the referent meaning *[sens referant]. Dicibile* will be experienced either by the one who speaks ("understood and grasped by the spirit before the enunciation") or by the one who hears it ("that which is perceived by the spirit"). *Dictio,* in turn, has a meaning which, (like the *lekton),* plays between the sound and the tiling, not between the interlocuters; it is what the word signifies independent of its users. *Dicibile* participates simultaneously in the stages of the following succession: first the speaker conceives the meaning, then he enunciates the sounds, finally the one spoken to perceives, first the sounds, then the meaning. *Dictio* operates in the simultaneity: the referent meaning is realized at the same time as the enunciation of the sounds: the word only becomes *dictio* if (and when) "it is manifested outside by the voice." Finally, *dicibile* is proper to propositions envisaged in the abstract, whereas *dictio* belongs to each individual enunciation of one proposition (the reference is realised in the *token,* and not the *type,* propositions, in the terminology of modern logic).

At the same time, *dictio* is not simply of the senses; it is the enunciated word (the signifier), provided with its denotative capacity. *Dictio* is "the word which exits from the mouth," that which is "shown outside by the voice." Reciprocally, *verbum* is not the simple sound, as one would be tempted to imagine, but the designation of the word as word, the metalinguistic use of language. It is the word which "refers to itself; that is, in a question or discussion about the word itself .... That which I call *verbum* is a word and signifies a word."

In a text written some years later, *On Order,* the compromise will be formulated in a different fashion: designation becomes an instrument of communication:

> Man not being able to have a solid society with man without the aid of speech by which he transmits his soul and thoughts to another, reason understands that it was necessary to give names to things, that is, certain sounds provided with signification, so that, because they cannot perceive the spirit by means of the senses, men will make use of the senses as so many interpreters in order to unite their minds (II, XII, 35).

In Chapter VII of *On Dialectic,* Augustine gives another example of his synthesizing spirit. He introduces there a discussion on what he calls the force *(vis)* of a word. Force is that which is responsible for the quality of an expression as such, and which determines its perception by the listener. "The force is relative to the impression which words produce on whoever is listening." Sometimes force and meaning are considered as two kinds of signification: "Our examination results in the word having two significations, one for revealing the truth, the other for watching over its propriety." One suspects that what is going on here is an integration of the rhetorical opposition between clarity and beauty with a theory of signification (an integration which is, however, problematic, because the significance of a word is not to be confused with its figurality, or perceptibility). The kinds of this "force" recall equally the rhetorical context: force is shown by sound, by meaning, or by the agreement of the two.

One can see a development of the same theme in *On the Teacher,* written in 389. Here the two "significations" seem to become the property of either the signifier or the signified: the function of the first is to act on the senses; that of the second, to assure the interpretation. "All that which is emitted as a voiced sound articulated with signification. . . strikes the ear in order to be perceived, and is entrusted to the memory in order to be known" (V, 12). This relationship will be explained with the help of a pseudo-etymological reasoning. "What if, of these two things, the word takes its appellation from the first, and the name, from the second? for "word" can be derived from "strike" *(verberare-verbum),* and "name" from "to know" *(noscere-nomen),* so that the first term would thus be called a function of the ear, and the' second a function of the soul" *(ibid).* In this double process, perception is submitted to intellection, because from the instant we understand, the signifier becomes transparent for us. "Such is the law, bestowed naturally with a very great force: when signs are heard, attention is directed towards the signified things" (VIII, 24). This second formulation, proper to the treatise *On the Teacher,* seems to be a step backwards with respect to what we-found in *On Dialectic,* because Augustine no longer conceives here that the signified can also have a perceptible form (a "force") which strikes the attention.

Let us now pass on to the central treatise, *On Christian Doctrine.* Given its importance in our context, a brief glance at its whole plan will be justified. We have here a work devoted to the theory of interpretation-and, to a lesser degree, to the expression—of Christian texts. The unfolding of the expose is built around several oppositions: signs-things, interpretation-

expression, difficulties arising from ambiguity-obscurity. We can present its plan in the form of a schema, where the numbers designate the four parts of the treatise (the end of the third and fourth parts not having been written until 427, thirty years after the first three):

(things (1)		
		obscurities (2)
	interpretation	
(signs		ambiguities (3)
	expression (4)	

We shall not stop here on the apparent meaning of Augustine's ideas with respect to the manner of understanding and enunciating discourse (H.I. Marrou has already shown the originality of this). What will be retained above all is the synthesizing procedure, already present in the plan. Augustine's project is, in the beginning, hermeneutic; but he adds on to it a productive part (the fourth book), which is the first Christian rhetoric. In addition, he encases the whole within a general theory of the sign, where a properly semiotic procedure unites with what we distinguished above under the headings "Logic" and "Semantics." This book, more than any other, must be considered as the first properly semiotic work.

Let us now take up the theory of the sign which is formulated in it. If we compare this theory to the one in *On Dialectic,* we see that there no longer exists any sort of meaning other than experienced meaning. Thus the incoherence of the schema diminishes. What is even more surprising is the disappearance of the thing, or referent. In effect, Augustine indeed speaks about things and signs in this treatise (and in that he is faithful to the rhetorical tradition, as it was maintained since Cicero), but he does not envisage the first [things] as the referents of the second [signs]. The world is divided into signs and things, according to whether or not the object of perception has a transitive value or not. The thing participates in the sign as signifier, not as referent. Let us note before going on that this overall affirmation is moderated by another assertion, which however remains more an abstract principle than a characteristic proper to the sign: "things are learned by signs" (I, II, 2).

The articulation of signs and things extends to two essential functions, using and enjoying. In fact, this second distinction is located within tilings; but things to be used are transitive like signs, and things which can be enjoyed are intransitive (now here we have the category which allows the opposition of things to signs).

> To enjoy, in effect, is to attach ourselves to a thing by love of the thing itself. To use, on the contrary, is to restore the object which we use to the object which we love, if however it is worthy of being loved. (I, IV, 4).

This distinction has an important theological extension: in the last analysis, no thing except God is worthy of being enjoyed or cherished in itself. Augustine develops this idea in speaking of the love which man can have for his fellow man:

> It is to be asked whether man is to be loved by man for his own sake or for the sake of something else. If for his own sake, we enjoy him; if for the sake of something else, we use him. But I think that man is to be loved for the sake of something else. For happiness is to be found in the Being who is to be loved for Himself. Even though we do not have this happiness in its reality, the hope of possessing it consoles us. But "cursed be the man that trusteth in man" (Jer.17.5). But no one ought to enjoy himself either, if you observe the matter closely, because he should not love himself on account of himself but on account of Him who is to be enjoyed (I, XXII, 20-21).

It follows that the only thing which is absolutely not a sign (because it is the object to be enjoyed par excellence) is God; which, in our culture, reciprocally colors with divinity every final signified (that which is signified without signifying in turn).

The relation between signs and things having been thus articulated, we are now given the definition of the sign. "The sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the sense" (II, I, 1). We are not far from the definition given in *On Dialectic,* only "thought" has replaced "spirit". Another formulation is more explicit: "Our only reason for signifying, that is, for making signs, is to bring forth and transfer to another mind the action of the mind in the person who makes the sign" (II, II, 3). It is no longer a question of defining the sign, but of a description of the reasons for the activity of signifying. It is not any the less revealing to see that there is no question here of the relation of designation, but only of communication. That which signs present to the mind, is the experienced meaning, that which the enunciator carries in his spirit. To signify is to exteriorize.

The schema of communication will be specified and developed in some later texts. Thus in the *Beginner's Catechism* (dating from 405), Augustine begins with the problem of the slowness of language in relation

to thought. He states his frequent dissatisfaction with the enunciation of a thought and explains it thus:

> The reason for it is above all that this intuitive conception floods my soul like a rapid flash of lightning, while my speech is long, slow, and quite different from it [my intuitive conceptions]. In addition, even while it is unfolding itself, this conception is already hidden in its retreat. It leaves however in the memory, in a marvelous manner, a certain number of imprints, which subsist during the course of the brief expression of syllables and which allow us to fashion the phonetic signs known as language. This language is Latin, or Greek, or Hebrew, etc., whether the signs are thought by the spirit or expressed by the voice. But the imprints are neither Latin, Greek, or Hebrew, nor do they belong as such to any nation (II, 3).

Augustine envisages thus a state of meaning where meaning does not yet belong to any given language (it is not at all clear whether there exists or not a Latin or Greek signified outside of the universal meaning; it would seem not, because language is described only in its phonetic dimension). The situation is not very different from that which Aristotle described: there, as here, the states of soul are universal, and languages, particular. But Aristotle explained this identity of psychic states by the identification to itself of the referent-object; now here, in Augustine's text, it is not a question of the object. We shall notice as well the instantaneous nature of the "conception" and the duration necessary to discourse (linear); more generally, the necessity of thinking of the linguistic activity as provided with a temporal dimension (marked by the role of imprints). Here again there are many of the characteristics of the process of communication (the whole page is witness, moreover, to a very nuanced psychological analysis).

The theory of the sign present in *On the Trinity* is yet another development of that of the *Catechism* (like that which figures in Book XI of the *Confessions).* The schema here remains purely communicative.

> Are we speaking to another? The word *[verbe]* remaining immanent, we make use of a spoken word *[parole]* or some sensible sign in order to call forth in the soul of our listener, by this sensible evocation, a word *[verbe]* similar to the one which remains in our soul while we are speaking. (IX, VII, 12).

This description comes very close to that of the act of signifying, present in *On Christian Doctrine.* On the other hand, Augustine distinguishes

even more clearly here between what he calls the *word* which is the antecedent to the division into language, and the linguistic *signs* which allow us to know it.

> One thing is the meaning of the word, this word whose syllables—whether they are pronounced or thought—occupy a certain space of time; another different one is the meaning of the *word* which is imprinted on the soul with all that is known (IX, X, 15). This [latter] word in fact belongs to no tongue, to none of those which are called the tongues of nations, of which our Latin tongue is one. . . . For the thought that is formed by the thing which we know already is the word which we speak in the heart: which word is neither Greek nor Latin, which belongs to no language. But when it is needful to convey this to the knowledge of those to whom we speak, then some sign is assumed whereby to make it understood. (XV, X, 19).

Words do not directly designate things; they only make them expressed. What they express is not always the individuality of the speaker, but an interior, prelinguistic word. This, in turn, is determined by other factors—two, it would seem. These are, on the one hand, the imprints left in the soul by objects of knowledge; on the other hand, immanent knowledge whose source can only be God.

> It is necessary for us to go on as far as that word of man. . . which is neither pronounced in sound nor thought in the manner of sound, which is necessarily implied in all language, but which precedes all the signs by which it is translated, and is born of the immanent knowledge of the soul, when this knowledge expresses itself- in an interior word, whatever that really is (XV, XI, 20).

This human process of expression and signification, taken in its entirety, forms an analogy with the Word of God, whose exterior sign is not a word, but the world. The two sources of knowledge, in the end, amount to only one, to the extent that the world is the divine language.

> The word *[verbe]* that sounds outwardly is thus the sign of the word that shines inwardly, and which, before all others, merits the name of word. That which we utter with the mouth is only the vocal expression of the word: and if we call this

> expression a word, it is because the word assumes it in order to translate it outwardly. Our word becomes thus in some way a material voice, assuming this voice in order to manifest itself to men in a sensible fashion, as the Word of God was made flesh, assuming this flesh in order that itself also might be manifested to man's senses (XV, XI, 20).

We see being formulated here the doctrine of universal symbolism, which will dominate the medieval tradition.

To summarize, one could establish the following sequence (which is repeated, symmetrically inverted, either with the speaker or the listener):

divine power — immanent knowledge / objects of knowledge	interior word	exterior thought word	exterior spoken word

In particular, we see how the relationship word-thing is found to be charged with successive mediations.

Concerning semiotic theory, it remains that the materialist doctrine of the Stoics, which rested on the analysis of designation, is found, in Augustine, progressively but firmly ousted by a doctrine of communication.

CLASSIFICATION OF SIGNS

It is especially in *On Christian Doctrine* that Augustine devotes himself to classifying signs and thus to nuancing the very notion of sign. The other writings permit a refinement of the details. What immediately strikes us in the Augustinian classifications is precisely their high number (even by effecting certain regroupings, we still have at least five oppositions), as well as the absence of real coordination among them. Here as elsewhere, Augustian gives evidence of his theoretical ecumenism, in juxtaposing tilings which could be linked together. We shall thus examine these classifications, and the oppositions which underlie them, one by one.

1. According to the mode of transmission

This classification, destined to become canonical, is already an example of the synthesizing spirit of Augustine; since the signifier must be sentient, one can divide all signifiers according to the sense by which they are perceived. Aristotle's psychological theory thus joins the semiotic description.

Two facts merit attention here. First, there is the limited role of signs being perceived by senses other than vision and hearing: Augustine envisages their existence for obvious theoretical reasons, but he immediately de-emphasizes their interest. "Among the signs by means of which men express their meanings to one another, some pertain to the sense of sight, more to the sense of hearing, and very few to the other senses" (II, III, 4). A single example will suffice to illustrate the other channels of transmission:

> Our Lord gave a sign with the odor of the perfume spread on his feet (John 12.3-7). He signified his will, by the sacrament of his Body and his Blood, by tasting it first. He also gave a signification to the gesture of the woman, who, by touching the hem of her garment, was healed (Luke *22.\9-2Q).(ibid).*

These examples serve to mark the exceptional character of the signs which reside in the senses of smell, taste or touch.

In *On the Trinity,* by contrast, it is a question of only two modes of transmission of signs: sight and hearing. Augustine likes to emphasize their similarity.

> This sign, most of the time is a sound, sometimes a gesture: the first is directed to the ears, the second to the eyes, so that corporeal signs transmit to senses equally corporeal that which we have in our mind. Making a sign by gesture, is this in fact anything except speaking in a visible way? (XV, X, 19).

The opposition of sight and hearing permits us to situate, in a first approximation, words among signs (and it is the second point which interests us here). In effect, for Augustine, language is by its nature auditory (we shall return to the description of writing). Thus, the immense majority of signs are auditory—because the immense majority of signs are words. "The innumerable multitude of signs by means of which men discover their thoughts is made up of words" *{On Christian Doctrine, II, HI, 4).* The privilege of words is apparently only quantitative.

2. According to origin and usage

A new distinction produces two pairs of kinds of signs; but it is possible to unite them, as Augustine himself does, into one unique category. This distinction is prepared for in the first book of *On Christian Doctrine;* this part of the work begins with a division between signs and things. As soon as it is made, however, the distinction is abolished, for signs, far from being opposed to things, are themselves things—"thing" being taken in the largest

sense of all that is. "Every sign is also a thing, otherwise it would be nothing at all" (I, II, 2). The opposition can only be constituted on another level—a functional, and not a substantial one. In effect, a sign can be envisaged from two points of view: a thing as such and a sign as such (this is the order which the expose of Augustine follows):

> Writing on things, I first of all warned that one should only consider them for what they are, and not for what they signify beyond themselves. Now in treating signs, I am warning that one not pay attention to what the things are, but on the contrary to the signs that they represent, that is, to what [the things] signify (II, I, 1).

The opposition is not between things and signs, but between pure tilings and sign-things. Nevertheless, there exist things which owe their existence solely to the fact of their being used as signs; these evidently most closely approach pure signs (without being able to reach the limit). It is this possibility of signs to put in parenthesis their nature as things which allows the new categorisation introduced by Augustine.

He will oppose, in effect, natural signs and intentional signs *{data).* This opposition has often been badly understood, being seen as the more common opposition of natural-conventional in Ancient thought; a study by Engels cleared up this point in a most useful way. Augustine writes: "Among signs, some are natural and others are intentional. Those are natural which, without any desire or intention of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves" (II, I, 2). The examples of natural signs are: smoke for fire, the tracks of an animal, the face of a man. "Intentional signs are those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of showing, insofar as they are able, the motion of their souls, that is, all that they are sensing and all that they are thinking" (II, II, 3). The examples of intentional signs are above all human (words), but also linked up here are animals' cries, announcing the presence of food or simply the presence of the emitter of the sounds.

We see how the opposition between natural and intentional signs is linked to that between things and signs. Intentional signs are things which have been produced in view of their use as signs (origin) and are only used towards this end (usage). To put it in another way, they are things whose function as thing has been reduced to a minimum. Intentional signs are thus those which come closest to being pure signs (non-existent). These intentional signs are not necessarily human, and there is no obligatory correlation between the natural or intentional character and their mode of transmission (the classification of these modes comes up

with respect to intentional signs; however, it is not clear why). Let us note W also that words are intentional signs, which after their auditory nature, j constitute their second characteristic.

We can also see in this opposition the echo of the one found in a passage in Aristotle and commented on above *{On Interpretation, 16a)-* However, the example of the cries of animals, which appears both here and there but in opposite classifications, will permit us to situate better the position of Augustine. For Aristotle, the fact that these cries had no need of any institution sufficed for them to be considered as "natural." For Augustine, on the contrary, the intention of signifying, attested to, permits him to include them among intentional signs: intentional here is not the same as conventional. We shall suppose that this distinction belongs to Augustine: based on the idea of intention, it agrees completely with its general project which, as we have seen, is psychological and oriented towards communication. This distinction also permits him to overcome the objection which Sextus addressed to the Stoics: namely that the existence of signs does not necessarily imply a logical engendering structure: certain signs are given in nature. We also perceive that the integration of two kinds of signs is produced here; these two kinds of signs had remained completely isolated in all of Augustine's predecessors:the sign in Aristotle and the Stoics becomes "natural sign," the symbol in Aristotle and the combination of signifier and signified in the Stoics becomes "intentional signs" (however, the examples are always the same). The term "natural" is a little misleading: it would perhaps be clearer to oppose signs which *already exist* as things with signs which are *created purposely* with an end toward signification.

3. According to social status

Such a terminological precaution would be all the more desirable in that Augustine introduces, elsewhere in his text, the subdivision—much more familiar as we have seen—of signs into natural (and universal), and institutional (or conventional). The first kind are understandable in an immediate and spontaneous manner; the second kind require a learning process. In fact, in *On Christian Doctrine,* Augustine only envisages the case of signs by institution, and this with regard to an example which apparently goes in the opposite direction.

> The signs that the actors make, in dancing, would not have any meaning if they got it from nature and not from the institution and consent of men. Otherwise the public crier in early times would not have had to explain to the Carthaginian populace what the dancer wished to express during the pantomime. Many old

> men still remember this detail, as we have heard them say. Now, we must believe them, for even today if anyone unacquainted with such trifles goes to the theatre and no one else explains to him what these motions signify, he watches the performance in vain (II, XXV, 38).

Even the pantomime, at first glance a natural sign, needs a convention, and thus a learning process. Thus, Augustine takes up again, within his typology, the opposition applied habitually to the origin of language (as Sextus had already done before him).

This opposition is not—any more than the preceding ones—explicitly articulated to the others. We can assume that if Augustine does not give any examples here of natural signs (in the sense that we have just seen it), it is because his treatise is explicitly devoted to intentional signs. Now, natural signs would only be found among signs which were already existing; the sign intentionally created implied a learning process and thus institution. But is every sign which already exists natural, that is to say apprehensible outside of every convention? Augustine does not say so, and counter-examples come easily to mind. Nevertheless, in the *Beginner's Catechism,* he describes as natural a sign which in *On Christian Doctrine* figured among non-intentional signs.

> Impressions are a production of the mind, just as the face is an expression of the body. Thus, anger, *ira,* is designated one way in Latin, another way in Greek, in yet another way everywhere else, due to the diversity of tongues. But the expression on the face of an angry man is neither Latin nor Greek. Thus, someone who is angry says, *"Iratus sum";* no one except the Latins will understand him. But if the passion of his soul, inflamed, shows up on his face, transforming the expression, all observers will be able to judge: "Here is an angry man" (II, 3).

Same assertion in the *Confessions:*

> Gestures are like the natural language of all peoples, made up of facial expressions, winks of the eye, and movements of the limbs, and also of the tone of voice which betrays the sentiment of the soul in pursuit, possession, rejection, or flight from things (I, VIII, 13).

Natural signs (the example is however debatable for us) share here in the universality of impressions on the soul, whose properties we have already

seen. Augustine, approaching Aristotle in this, sees the relation between words and thoughts as arbitrary (conventional), and that between thoughts and things as universal, and therefore natural.

This insistence on the necessarily conventional nature of language allows us to guess how little hope Augustine puts in motivation: to his eyes, motivation cannot be substituted for knowledge of conventions.

> Everybody looks for a certain resemblance in the fashion of signifying, so that signs themselves reproduce, as much as possible, the signified thing. But since one thing can resemble another in many ways, such signs cannot have, among men, a determined meaning unless men agree unanimously to it. *(On Christian Doctrine,* II, XXV, 38).

Motivation does not do away with convention; the above argument, summed up in one sentence, is developed at length in *On The Teacher,* where Augustine shows that one can never be certain of the meaning of a gesture without the aid of a linguistic commentary, and thus of the institution which language is. By this very fact Augustine refuses all decisive importance to the natural-conventional (or arbitrary) opposition; the attempts of the eighteenth century, taken up by Hegel and Saussurc, to found thereon the opposition between signs (arbitrary) and symbols (natural), find themselves already surpassed.

This "arbitrariness of the sign" leads naturally to polysemy.

> Since things are similar under multiple aspects, let us be careful not to take as a rule that a thing always signifies what, by analogy, it signifies in one place. For the Lord used the word "leaven" in the sense of a reproach when he said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Matt. 16.11), and in the sense of a praise when he-said "The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who put leaven in three measures of flour in order to make all the dough rise" [Luke 13.20-21] *(On Christian Doctrine*, III, XXV', 35).

4. According to the nature of the symbolic relationship.

After the classifications into intentional-non-intentional, and conventional-natural, Augustine envisages a third time the same facts and arrives at yet another different articulation: that of *literal* signs with *transposed* signs *(translata).* The rhetorical origin of this opposition is evident, but Augustine—like Clement before him but in a more precise manner—generalises in terms of signs what rhetoric said of the meaning of words.

Here is how the opposition is introduced:

> For signs are either literal or transposed. They are called literal when they are used to designate objects on account of which they were created. For example, we say "an ox" when we are thinking of an animal which all men using the Latin language call by that name just as we do. Signs are transposed when the very objects which we designate by their literal signs are used to designate another object. For example, we say "an ox" and by that syllable understand the animal which is ordinarily called by that word. But again, that animal makes us think of the evangelist, that the Scripture, according to the interpretation of the Apostle, designated by these words: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn" (I Cor.9.9) *(On Christian Doctrine,* II, X, 15).

Literal signs are defined in the same way as intentional signs: they have been created with respect to their usage as signs. But the definition of the transposed sign is not exactly symmetrical: these are not "natural" signs, in other words those which have an existence before being used as signs. They are defined, more generally, by their secondarity: a sign is transposed when its signified becomes, in turn, a signifier. In other words," the literal sign is based on one single relationship; the transposed sign, on two successive operations (we have already seen that this idea appeared in Clement.

In fact, we are Immediately situated within intentional signs (since Augustine is preoccupied exclusively with them), and it is within them that we reiterate the operation which served to isolate them: literal signs are simultaneously created purposely with respect to a use as signifier, and at the same time used according to this initial intention. Transposed signs are equally intentional signs (the only examples given are words), but instead of being used according to their initial destination, they are diverted for a secondary use: just as things were when they were turned into signs.

This structural analogy—which is not an identity—explains the affinity between transposed signs (linguistic, however), and non-intentional signs ("natural" and non-linguistic). It is not an accident if the examples are joined together: the bull does not owe his existence to semiotic finality, but he *can* signify; he is at the same time a natural sign and (a possible ingredient of) a transposed sign. This third approach to the same phenomenon

is, from a formal point of view, the most satisfying: it is no longer an empirical contingency which serves to distinguish between signs (already existing or created on purpose, immediately comprehensible or through the use of a convention), but a difference of structure: the symbolic relationship, simple or double. At one stroke, language no longer forms a class apart within signs: one part of linguistic signs (indirect expressions) is now to be found on the same side as non-linguistic signs. The formulation of this opposition, based on an analysis of form and not of substance, represents the most important theoretical acquisition of Augustinian semiotics. Let us notice at the same time that this very articulation contributes to the partial erasing of the difference between the two phenomena, which had been more or less separate in Aristotle (symbol vs. sign), in the Stoics (signifier-signified vs. sign), or in Clement (direct language vs. symbolism).

The origin of the literal-transposed opposition is rhetorical; but the difference between Augustine and the rhetorical tradition is not only in the extension which leads us from the word to the sign; it is the very definition^of the 'Hranspo_sejl" which is new: it is no longer a word which changes meaning, but a word which designates an object which, in turn, conveys a meaning. This description can in effect be applied to the example cited above (like the bull, the Evangelist, etc.) which does not resemble a rhetorical trope. On the following page, however, Augustine gives another example of a transposed sign, which conforms perfectly to the rhetorical definition. Rather than a confusion between two kinds of indirect meaning, what is in question is probably an attempt on Augustine's part to enlarge the category of transposed meaning in order to permit him to include Christian allegory. In talking about the difficulties which arise during interpretation, he envisages two kinds of difficulties, which indeed correspond to these two forms of indirect meaning. The opposition will be better formulated in *On the Trinity,* where Augustine conceives two kinds of allegory (in other words, transposed signs), according to words or according to things. The origin of this distinction is perhaps in one of the sentences of Clement, who believes however that it is a question of two alternative definitions of one and the same notion.

Another attempt at subdivision within transposed meaning will lead later on to the celebrated doctrine of the fourfold meaning of the Scriptures. The question remains controversial, to know whether, yes or no, Augustine founded this doctrine. We have at our disposal several series of texts. In one, represented by *De utilitate crecendi,* 3, 5, and by a completely parallel but shorter passage in *De Gen. ad lit. lib. imperf., 2,* we can distinguish in a very precise way four terms: history, etiology, analogy, and allegory. But it is not certain that these are meanings, properly speaking. Rather, it is probably a question of different operations to which one would

submit the text to be interpreted. In particular, analogy is the process which, in order to explain a text, consists in having recourse to another text. Etiology has a problematic status; it consists of looking for the cause of the event or fact evoked by the text. It is an explanation, thus a meaning, but it is not certain if the meaning belongs properly to the text analysed; the meaning rather is supplied by the commentator. Thus there- remain only two meanings: historical (literal) and allegorical. The examples which Augustine gives of the latter indicate, however, that he is not distinguishing among kinds of allegorical meanings in the way that the tradition after him will do. These examples include: Jonas in the whale for Christ in the tomb (typology in later tradition); the punishments of the Jews during the Exodus as stimulus not to sin (tropology); the two women, symbols of the two Churches (anagogy). It must be added here that Augustine does not distinguish either between spiritual meaning and transposed meaning (he gives the same definition to both). If we compare him with later tradition, codified by St. Thomas, we find the following redistribution:

	Literal meaning	Transposed meaning	Spiritual meaning
Augustine	literal meaning	transposed meaning	
Thomas	historical meaning		spiritual meaning

To summarize: there is only one essential dichotomy for Augustine (literal-transposed): the rest is of little importance.

There is one more text, however, which should be examined here. It is found in *De Gen. ad lit.*, I, 1; Augustine is talking here about the contents of the various books of the Bible: there are those, he says, which evoke eternity, others which report facts, others which announce the future, others which give rules for behaviour. This is not the same as asserting a fourfold-meaning in the same passage; nevertheless, the theory is here in embryonic form.

In his effort to specify the status of transposed signs, Augustine compares them with two connected semantic facts: ambiguity and falsehood. Ambiguity holds his attention at length: beginning with *On Dialectic,* where difficulties in communication are divided up according to whether they are due to obscurity or to ambiguities (this subdivision can already be found in Aristotle). The latter allow, as one of their subdivisions, ambiguities due to transposed meaning. The same hierarchical articulation reappears in *On Christian Doctrine:* "The ambiguity of Scripture arises either from terms taken in the literal meaning, or terms taken in the transposed meaning" (III, 1, 1). By ambiguity due to the literal meaning, we mean

an ambiguity where semantics has no role; this kind of ambiguity is thus auditory, graphic, or syntaxic. Semantic ambiguities simply coincide with those which are due to the presence of a transposed meaning. The possibility of semantic ambiguities based on lexical polysemy is not envisaged.

Transposed signs, which are a species of the genus "ambiguity," must be, by contrast, clearly distinguished from falsehoods, even though neither of the two really say what is true, if they are taken literally.

> God keeps us from attributing to them [the parables and figures in the Bible] a false character. Otherwise it would be necessaiy to inflict with the same epithet the long series of figures of rhetoric, and particularly to metaphor, thus named because it carries a word from the thing which it properly designates to another thing which it improperly designates. When we say, for example, the waving corn fields, pearled vines, the flower of youth, snowy hair, there are certainly not in the things named either waves, pearls, flowers, or snow; thus it is necessary to term as falsehood the transposition which brings about these terms? *(Against Falsehood,* X, 24).

The explanation of this difference is given shortly after: it resides precisely in the existence of a transposed meaning, absent in falsehoods, which allows the restitution of truth to tropes. "These words and these actions. . . are made in order to give us the intelligence of the things to which they are referred" *(ibid).* Or again: "Nothing of that which is made or said in a figured sense is a falsehood. Every word must be related to what it designates, for those who are in a position to understand its signification" *(Against Falsehood,* V, 7). Lies are not true in a literal sense, but they do not have a transposed meaning, either.

5. According to the nature of the designated, sign or thing.

Transposed signs are characterised by the fact that their "signifier" is already a completely separate sign; we can now envisage the complementary case, where it is no longer the signifier but the signified which is in turn a complete sign. We shall in fact unite under this heading two cases which remain isolated in Augustine: that of letters, the signs of sounds, and that of the metalinguistic use of language. In each of these cases, the sign is designated, but in the first case what is in question is the signifier, in the second case, the sound signified.

a) letters

Concerning letters, Augustine always keeps to the Aristotelian saying: letters are the signs of sounds. Thus, in *On Dialectic*

> When it is written, it is not a word, but the sign of a word, which, presenting its letters to the eyes of the reader, shows to his spirit that which he must verbally emit. What, in fact, do letters do, if not present themselves to the eyes and, in addition, present words to the spirit? (V).

The same in *On The Teacher:*

> Written words. . . must be understood as signs of words (IV,8).

Or in *On Christian Doctrine:*

> Words are shown to the eyes not by themselves but by the signs which properly belong to them (II, IV, 5).

And in *On the Trinity:*

> Letters are the signs of sounds just as sounds in conversation are signs of thought (XV, X, 19).

We find, however, brought up by Augustine, several supplementary characteristics of letters. The first, in *On Dialectic,* forms a paradox: letters are the..signs of sounds, but not just any sounds—only articulated sounds. Now, articulated sounds are those which let themselves be designated by a letter. "I call an articulated sound that which can be represented by letters" (V). Letters, one could say, repose on an implicit phonological analysis, because they represent the only invariables. Taken in a larger meaning, "writing" appears equally indispensable for language: this is the case with these "impressions" of which the *Catechism* talked about and of which words are only the translation.

In *On Christian Doctrine,* Augustine insists on the durational nature of letters, in opposition to the punctual nature of sounds: "Because, as soon as sounds have struck the air, they pass away immediately and remain no longer than they sound, we have fixed their signs by means of letters" (II, IV, 5). Thus, letters permit one to escape from the constraint of the "now" which weighs on every spoken word. In *On The Trinity,* Augustine goes even

further in the same direction: writing permits the envisaging not only of "another time", but also of "another place." These corporeal signs and others of this kind presuppose the presence of those who see us, listen to us and to whom we speak; writing, by contrast has been invented to permit us to converse also with the absent" (XV, X, 19). Writing is defined by its complicity with absence.

b) metalinguistic usage

At no time does Augustine take into consideration the fact that letters are special, in that they designate other signs (sounds). And yet, it is a situation familiar to him, because he is always interested in the problem of the metalinguistic usage of words. In *On Dialectic,* Augustine notes that words can be utilised either as signs of things or as names of words. The distinction is utilised throughout the *Teacher,* where Augustine warns against the confusions which could result from these two completely distinct uses of language.

Again in *On Dialectic,* Augustine notes in passing; "We cannot speak about words without recourse to words" (V). This remark will be generalized in *On Christian Doctrine:* "All these signs, whose lands I have briefly sketched here—it is with words that I have been able to express them; but words I could not have by any means expressed by these signs" (II, III, 4). Thus not only can words be used in a metalinguistic fashion, but they are also the only ones susceptible to being used in a metasemiotic fashion. This statement is of capital importance, for it permits us to focus on the specificity of words among signs. Unfortunately, it remains isolated and non-theorized by Augustine; nowhere does he try to link it up with the other *classifications which he outlines. One might wonder, for example, if all verbal signs (literal and transposed), possess this capacity to the same degree, or what is the property of words which enables them to assume this role. Here again, Augustine is content to observe and to juxtapose, without attaining a theoretical articulation.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Let us attempt to draw some conclusions concerning the double object of this first chapter: Saint Augustine and semiotics.

First, we have seen what is the proper position of Augustine. Throughout his semiotic work, he is moved by a tendency which consists of inscribing the semiotic problem within the framework of a psychological theoiy of communication. This movement is all the more striking in that it contrasts with his point of departure, that is, the Stoic theoiy of the sign. That is not to say that he is entirely original: the psychological perspective

was already Aristotle's. It remains that Augustine develops this tendency more than any of his predecessors; one can explain this development by the theological and exegetical usage to which he wanted to put the theory of the sign.

But if the originality of detail in Augustine is limited, his synthetic "originality"—or rather, his ecumenical capacity—is enormous. It results in the first construction which, in the history of Western thought, merits the name of semiotics. Let us review the major articulations of this ecumenism: a rhetorician by profession, Augustine first submits his knowledge to the interpretation of a particular text (the Bible). Hermcneutics thus absorbs rhetoric; in addition, to it will be annexed the logical theory of the sign—at the expense, it is true, of a shift from structure to substance, since instead of the "symbol" and the "sign" of Aristotle, we discover intentional and natural signs. These two conglomerations come together again iri *On Christian Doctrine* to give birth to a general theory of signs, or semiotics, in which "signs" coming from the rhetorical tradition become in the meantime hermeneutic, which is to say "transposed signs," find their place.

This extraordinary ability for synthesis (which is not diminished by the fact that Augustine has precursors in the way of eclecticism) indeed corresponds to the historical place of Augustine, the meeting-place through which the traditions of Antiquity will be transmitted to the Middle Ages. This power is detectable in numerous other domains, which sometimes touch upon ours: thus, in particular, several passages in the treatise *On Dialectic,* where historical changes in meaning (in the etymological part of the treatise), •ire described in terms of rhetorical tropes. History now appears only to be a projection of typology in time. Again: for the first time the Aristotelian classification of associations, which are found in Chapter II of *On Memory* (by means of resemblance, proximity, contrast) will be utilized to describe the variety of these relations of meaning, synchronic or diachronic.

It is precisely here that it becomes necessary to turn from Augustine's personal destiny and ask ourselves what price knowledge had to pay in order to engender semiotics. Since language exists, the first question in any semiotic, empirically if not ontologically, becomes: what is the place of linguistic signs among signs in general? As long as one questions oneself only on verbal language, one remains within a science (or a philosophy) of language. Only the breaking up of the linguistic framework justifies the founding of semiotics. And it is precisely this which constitutes Augustine's inaugural gesture: what was said about words, in the framework of a rhetoric or of a semantic, he will carry to the level of sign, where words only occupy a place among others. But which one?

One can wonder, in looking for an answer to this question, if the price paid for the birth of semiotics was not too high. On the level of general

enunciations, Augustine does not situate words (the linguistic signs) except within two classifications. Words depend, on the one hand, on the auditory; on the other, the intentional. The intersection of these two categories gives linguistic signs. In doing this, Augustine does not perceive that he does not provide himself with any means for distinguishing them from any other "intentional auditory signs", unless it is by their frequency of use. His text could not be any more revealing in this respect: "Those signs which pertain to hearing are, as I have said, the more numerous, especially in language. But the trumpet, the flute, and the zither emit most frequently a sound, are not only pleasing but also significant. However, all these signs, compared with words, are very few" *(Doctrine,* II, III, 4). Between the trumpet which announces attack (to take an example where the intentionality is certain), and words, would not the only difference be in the larger frequency of the latter? This is all that we are explicitly offered by the semiotics of Augustine. We see, among other things, how much phonetic prejudice is responsible for the blindness before the problem of the nature of language. The necessity of attaching words to a "meaning" conceals their specificity (a purely "visual" conception of language, identifying it with writing, would suffer the same reproach). Augustine's synthesizing gift turns against him here: it is perhaps not by accident that the Stoics, no more than Aristotle, did not want to give the same name to the "natural" sign (assimilated in their writings into an inference) and to the word. Synthesis is fruitful only if it does not obliterate differences.

In fact, we have also noted that Augustine brings up certain properties of language which do not let themselves be explained by their intentional-auditory character, and above all their metasemiotic capacity. But he does not ask himself the question: what is the property of language which assures it this capacity? Now,' only an answer to this fundamental question could permit one to settle another problem, which proceeds from it, namely that of the "price" of the semiotic foundation: is it useful to unify within one single notion—the sign—that which possess this metasemiotic property and that which does not possess it (it is to be remarked that this new question contains, circularly, the term "semiotic" in itself)? Usefulness that one can not measure before knowing what is at stake in the opposition between linguistic and non-linguistic signs. It is thus from ignorance, if not from the repression—of the difference between words and other signs, that the semiotics of Augustine is born—and Saussure's, fifteen centuries later. Which makes problematic indeed the very existence of semiotics.

Augustine had nevertheless caught a glimpse of a possibility of escaping from this impasse (even though he remained, probably, unconscious of the possibility of this impasse in itself). This possibility consisted in the

extension to the domain of signs of the rhetorical category of literal-transposed. This category transcends the substantial opposition of linguistic-non-linguistic (since the category applies in the two domains). It equally transcends the intentional-natural or conventional-universal oppositions, which are pragmatic and contingent, and this category allows the articulation of two large modes of designation, for which one would be tempted today to employ two distinct terms: signification and symbolization. From there, one will ask oneself about the difference which founds them—and which indirectly explains the presence or the absence of a metasemiotic capacity. In other words, semiotics does not merit existence unless semantics and symbolics were already linked in the same gesture which founded them. This is what allows us to appreciate, sometimes in spite of itself, the founding work of Augustine.

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SEMIOTIC PHILOSOPHY?

Elmar Holenstein

ABSTRACT

The philosophical interest in semiotics arose out of its chief aim, the elucidation of the foundations and forms of knowledge. Since Locke and Leibniz it has been recognized that signs not only serve to present and communicate knowledge already given, but also open up certain domains of knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Since the use of sign systems presupposes insight into the rule-governed construction of these systems, it is more appropriate to speak of a semiotic complementation than of a "semiotic transformation of philosophy" (Apel). With the exception of elementary forms of knowledge , which are, however, fundamental, all knowledge rests on an interdependence of intuitive and semiotically mediated cognitions.

In the contemporary philosophy of science a *planificatory function* joins the *cognitive function* of signs. Signs serve to plan and steer actions and operations. The cybernetic sciences as a semiotic discipline have succeeded, for the first time since the breakthrough of modern science, in reversing the relation between the natural and the human sciences. A model from the human sciences has successfully been superposed upon natural sciences and technical disciplines.

I. *The cognitive function of signs*

In his writings on the philosophy of language, Karl-Otto Apel (1973: 271, 353) repeatedly advances a "linguistically oriented" or, in more general and pertinent terms, a "semiotic transformation" of transcendental philosophy. There are no doubt clever outsiders who will assume that philosophy has now joined the ranks of the many younger as well as older sciences already sucked into the wake of the all-pervasive and influential disciplines of linguistics and semiotics. Philosophy, in contrast to most other sciences, can counter this charge on historical grounds. Semiotics, the name included (Locke, 1690: |4.21.4), was child and ward of philosophy up to Peirce and Saussure. However, philosophy is no more subject to history than it is to fashion—apart from the fact that history consists largely of a succession of fashions. An orthodox philosopher is concerned only with the *Sachen selbst.* The basic subject matter of philosophy