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## The *semiotic chora* and the inner life of language<sup>1</sup>

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Benveniste concludes one of his last articles<sup>3</sup> with a call to “go beyond” the linguistics of signs and take account of the semantic dimension of discourse; following the semiology envisaged by Saussure, he announces a “second-generation” semiology, which is both “intra-linguistic” and “trans-linguistic,” aspiring to a “meta-semantics” built on a “semantics of utterance.” The semantic order, he continues, is identified with the world of verbal acts and discourse. The reference to a semantics of utterance therefore indicates, first and foremost, an opening up of linguistic studies, to the subject, to history, and to society, with an interest in anthropology, mythology, literary theory, psychology and psychoanalysis.

This call to go beyond theory is not very explicit but may be better understood in the light of Benveniste’s particular regard for the work of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva. Roland Barthes’s “semiological adventure” underwent various phases, from a psychosociology of the signs of human communication – underpinned by a commitment to social criticism – to a desire to discern a method for objectively analyzing meaning. He subsequently abandoned the second quest, and instead highlighted the subjectivity of the analyst and the intimacy of the act of reading and interpreting a text. It only remained for him then to deal with the transfer to his chosen object, moving from the original question: “here is the world: is there any meaning in it?”<sup>4</sup> to the question: “what is the meaning *for me*?”<sup>5</sup> When he entered the Collège de France, in 1977, to take up the chair of literary semiology, he was in his fourth phase – that of a “morality” of the sign and of a “second semiology,” which he tells us is “the body’s thought in a state of language.”<sup>6</sup> His model is a semiology of music, which permits a better understanding of the text’s significance. An ethics of form is replaced by an ethics of esthesia or sensibility, still based on language but a language full of affects.

This “second semiology” is not the “second-generation” semiology referred to by Benveniste, even though Barthes is indebted to him for the notion of significance, which Kristeva traces back to the *modi significandi* of Modist grammar (second half of the twelfth century).<sup>7</sup> Benveniste has Saussure’s project in mind; he is probably also referring to “semanalysis,” and the “translinguistic analysis of texts and works” he is planning recalls the notion of intertextuality, introduced by Kristeva – a reader of Bakhtin – or of what she was to

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks go to Rosemary Rodwell for her translation of this paper from the original French. Translations of texts quoted from other sources are also hers.

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<sup>3</sup> Émile Benveniste, “Sémiologie de la langue,” *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, T. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 43-66

<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, “Éléments de sémiologie,” *Communications* 4 (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 160.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *La préparation du roman I et II, Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1978-1979 et 1979-1980)* (Paris: Seuil/Imec, 2003), 178.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 48.

<sup>7</sup> According to Julia Kristeva, Benveniste told her that the term “significance” may have been used by Jean Paulhan’s father (see Julia Kristeva, in “La linguistique, l’universel et le ‘pauvre linguiste,’” *Autour d’Émile Benveniste* (Paris: Seuil, 2016), 135).

call a “supralinguistics.”<sup>8</sup> In this set of cross-references and reciprocal influences, we should point out that Barthes publicly recognized the major impact of Kristeva’s theoretical thinking on his own work; and that Lacan too, in his seminar, demonstrated the attention he paid to her work, particularly upon the publication of *La Révolution du langage poétique*.<sup>9</sup>

My purpose is not to unravel the historic web of concepts or to retrace a semiotic route; rather, by adopting the path followed by Kristeva, in her questioning of meaning, I shall attempt to take from semanalysis what can be clarified by lateral views, in order to show its impact on complex thinking about language. In order to do this, I shall first review the main initial concepts, before proceeding to examine afresh what appears to me to be a fundamental notion; this will lead on to the question of what links language to life, in its diversity as well as its unity.

## 1. Since semanalysis

### 1.1 A critical epistemology of meaning

In her semiotic lexicon, J. Rey-Debove gives this short definition of semanalysis: “Theory of the meaning of discourse and texts taking account of the speaking subject’s involvement;”<sup>10</sup> she specifies that she is talking about the split subject (conscious/unconscious) of psychoanalysis. This represented a psychoanalytical turning point for semiology and, in order for the relationship between language theory and theory of the unconscious to take shape, it was necessary, Kristeva tells us, “from Freud and Lacan onwards, for semiology to be transformed, to be alert to the unconscious, in a *semanalysis* which makes an object of study out of what has always been excluded from epistemological scrutiny, namely the *production* of meaning and its *work*.”<sup>11</sup>

The general semiotic project that Kristeva outlined in the 1970s calls into question the very foundations of semiological knowledge: the sign, the subject, and its socio-historical position. The increased number of meanings and subjects of utterance, both psychological and social, is supported by references to psychoanalysis and a materialist philosophy of Marxist inspiration. Added to this was the proposal for a possible formal modeling of generation of meaning. The introduction of analytical thinking into *semiosis* aimed to open up reflection on signs and systems to material, tangible, social and historical *production* of signifying practices.<sup>12</sup>

The work gathered together to form the first *Recherches pour une sémanalyse*<sup>13</sup> ends with a complete annotated index of the fundamental concepts which enable the problems to

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Kristeva recounts her conversations with Benveniste, regarding the use of these terms: “I particularly remember having told him that infra- and supra-linguistic were not sufficient for me, and I asked him if the term “translinguistic” appeared to him to be suitable for talking about texts in which a psychosomatic experience is manifest, leading to the transformation of linguistic codes and rules: to the “style,” to that productivity I had just discovered while commenting on Raymond Roussel’s flamboyant texts.” (Kristeva, “La linguistique, l’universel et le ‘pauvre linguiste,’” 100).

<sup>9</sup> Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> Josette Rey-Debove, *Lexique sémiotique* (Paris: PUF, 1979), 127.

<sup>11</sup> Julia Kristeva and Dana Rudelic-Fernandez, “Psychanalyse et linguistique,” in *L’apport freudien, éléments pour une encyclopédie de la psychanalyse*, ed. P. Kaufman (Paris: Larousse, 1998), 747.

<sup>12</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Sémiologie,” *Encyclopaedia Universalis* (Paris: EU SA France, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Σημειωτική: Recherches pour une Sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

be grasped in all their originality. Kristeva indicates that some of these concepts are taken from different authors and that the studies presented “merely *set out an open* topic of analysis.”<sup>14</sup> Reading this index reveals the main themes of an original plan, perceived through an abundance of theory which is disconcerting to begin with. Emphasizing the complexity of signifying activity, Kristeva notes that the place of semiotics can only be specified by means of a general theory of symbolic functioning, whose development supposes a semiological approach. The “science of discourse” thus hoped for could only be conceived of in connection with other scientific fields. Since the semiology of the future had to be radically critical, not only did the related sciences become its “*challenged object*” and the borrowed concepts “subverted premises,” but the theoretical edifice under construction was itself being undermined. This “troubled theory of the non-representable” could therefore only allow itself “intervention-concepts” and subsequently abandon the idea of a “supralinguistics.”

## 1.2 Formalism and analogy

The new semiology called for the development of models conceived of as formal systems, whose structure was analogous to the structure of the systems studied. Asserting, while at the same time transcending, the incompatibility between the logic of a closed scientific system and the signifying practices whose language is “potentially infinite,” a “set of abbreviations (numbers)” had to be found, which would be capable of describing how these practices worked. The use of formulae, theorems, and axioms taken from set theory, meta-mathematics, and symbolic logic, was justified by the search for an artificial language of isomorphic variables for the diverse semiotics being studied. It was, in fact, the paragrammatic conception of poetic language, inherited from Saussure’s research on anagrams and leading to a tabular representation of textuality according to the image of a network of connections, which called for a formalization of material and semic relations in the dynamic space of the text. The connections first shown up by semantic analysis were converted into a pseudo-formalization founded upon the idea that it is the relationships between elements that are signifying and on an analogy between the mathematical infinite and the infinite of language. Mathematicians were able to discredit such a use of formal language, which was judged to be vague and even inconsistent. But the establishment of this principle had only metaphorical value, functioning simply as a “caricature” of the paragrammatism revealed by a more empirical description. It was to do with simulating the arrangement of sense markers which go beyond syntactic-semantic linking. This transfer of logic, when subjected to the ideal of exact knowledge, was fairly quickly abandoned.

## 1.3 Significance

The epistemological act which determines the semanalytical approach to texts and discourses is an opening up of the structure of the sign and the linguistic system to an “outside,” so as to grasp the productive dynamic of meaning in forms, the *process of significance*. From this point of view, the decisive contribution is the distinction made by Freud between the latent content of dreams and the thinking manifested when recounting the dream. The discursive surface manifestation is understood as the product of distortions and misrepresentations of another underlying text, of a different scene, which the analyst-interpreter reconstructs by means of the subject’s associative language. The conception of a dream’s *work*, with mechanisms for transforming thoughts through the forms in which it is

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<sup>14</sup> Kristeva, *Σημειωτική: Recherches*, 373.

expressed linguistically, under the effect of primary and secondary processes, is thus extended to other modes of representation and signification. The aim is therefore, through the text, to grasp the principles of its origin. Semanalysis can then be precisely defined as a “theory of textual signification, which will consider the *sign* as the specular element, ensuring the representation of this generation – this process of germination – which both inhabits and encompasses it, and whose laws it is essential to define. In other words, without forgetting that the text presents a system of signs, semanalysis opens up another scene within this system: the scene that is hidden beneath the screen of the structure, and is significance *as a process whose structure is simply a marginal effect.*”<sup>15</sup>

The text is thus split into a *pheno-text*, the text as it is presented in its material, sequential composition, and a *geno-text*, which is the matrix form, and is reconstructed by analysis. To this distinction of method may be added the notion of *signifying differential*; it has no definite linguistic dimension but describes a constellation of signifiers linked by formal or semic relationships. It may be considered as the trace of the “potential infinite” which characterizes language.

This model of a two-tier text is inspired by the distinction established by Chomsky in generative linguistics, between profound structure and surface structure, and even more so by the contrast pointed up by the Russian linguist, Shaumyan, between genotype and phenotype.<sup>16</sup> The opposition does not postulate a process of genesis based on a previous text which would logically and structurally precede the development of the finished product; it indicates that meaning is the outcome of a conflict of tendencies between the circuit of representations and affects and the processes of symbolic thought. *Significance* describes “this *work* of differentiation, stratification and confrontation that is practiced in language.”<sup>17</sup> The general principle of significance explained in *La révolution du langage poétique*<sup>18</sup> and taken up again later is a dual one. The text is thus the result of a dynamic tension and power movements between two production authorities: *the semiotic* and *the symbolic*.

#### 1.4 The literary text model

*Intertextuality*, taken from Bakhtin,<sup>19</sup> is one of the “intervention-concepts” which was decisive for textual criticism. The term *transposition* was subsequently associated with it.<sup>20</sup> Textual analysis has to proceed by segmentation and cross-checking, discerning what the utterances repeat and transform: the places of *dialogism*. Because of the over-determination of signs and the conception of the text as reading-writing, produced by a dialogue between texts and cultures, semanalysis resorts to the discourses and documents of science, history and philosophy. It situates the text in its relationship with other semiotic practices; it questions the discursive norms and esthetic codes in which or against which the text is set.

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<sup>15</sup> Kristeva, *Σημειωτική: Recherches*, 279.

<sup>16</sup> Sebastian Shaumyan, *Applicational Grammar as a Semantic Theory of Natural Language* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) and *A Semiotic Theory of Language* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Kristeva, *Σημειωτική: Recherches*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique*.

<sup>19</sup> See Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhaïl Bakhtine le principe dialogique suivi de Écrits du Cercle de Bakhtine* (Paris : Seuil, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> Julia Kristeva and Elisabeth Bélorgey, “Les modèles linguistiques et pragmatiques de la communication,” *Revue Internationale de Psychopathologie* 7 (Paris: PUF, 1992), 381-407.

Initial studies have privileged the works of writers considered as “sensitive” to the process of transforming culture and ways of writing (Joyce, Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Artaud, and so on). Kristeva laid down as a precondition to semiotic analysis “the ability to identify with the activity of the person producing the discourse, with the writer.”<sup>21</sup> The commentary is then akin to a sort of renewal of the act of producing the text, in the order of conceptualization. As it was for Barthes, it is about understanding the manifestation of the sensory in forms of literary writing. “Literary creation,” Kristeva reminds us, “is that adventure of the body and of signs which bear witness to the affect.”<sup>22</sup> Symbolization takes place on two levels: in the drama of the passions depicted and in the forms of portrayal themselves, with the techniques of style aiming to transfer the heterogeneity of meaning into the semantic content of a language and the rhetoric of a discourse.

Semanalysis, whose name remains identified with that of its inventor, is a type of analysis with two aspects: a semiological aspect without which it would only be a philosophy or a metapsychology, and a hermeneutic aspect, without which it would merely be a branch of semiotic studies. Kristeva, like Barthes, was aware of the multiplicity and mobility of signifying elements and turned away, just as he did, from the idea of a logical, formal systematization. While pursuing, by means of other routes, numerous investigations into language and texts, particularly literary ones,<sup>23</sup> and ever attuned to the senses transmuted into style, she resolutely took up her stand in the field of a psychoanalysis that was open to philosophy and the sciences.<sup>24</sup> Her work as a semiologist created a rupture in the development of language sciences. For some people, who stressed the hazardous nature of the method and the risk of interpretation being sidetracked, the approach could not claim to be scientific; while for others, including myself, it is an incentive to continue in the spirit of enquiry, because of its very audacity and the challenges it poses.

## 2. Verbal acts and language activity

I will resume this exploration of meaning and language from the viewpoint of a theory of verbal acts set within the perspective of an interpretative semiology; this is a variant of semanalysis, but free from materialist philosophy and less fully committed to psychoanalytical interpretation, reinforcing its linguistic foundation. Although I began by linking Kristeva’s conceptual enterprise, at its outset, to the work of Benveniste – a major leading figure in verbal act linguistics – it was to Antoine Culioli’s theory of enunciative operations that I turned in order to fulfil the demand for an interpretation based on the analysis of forms, while remaining open to disciplines related to linguistics in the study of language. Very early on, Kristeva paid heed to the work of Culioli, whose early publications date back to the 1960s. She got to know him and, on several occasions, invited him to explain his theory of language, particularly through lectures at the Roland Barthes Centre. His linguistic theory of verbal acts coincided, she states, with her own semiological

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<sup>21</sup> Kristeva, *Σημειωτική: Recherches*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Soleil Noir, Dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 33.

<sup>23</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Le temps sensible, Proust et l’expérience littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Les nouvelles maladies de l’âme* (Paris: Fayard, 1993) and *Sens et non-sens de la révolte: Pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Fayard, 1996)

investigations, going beyond the artificial separation between the “psychic system” and the “language system.”<sup>25</sup>

## 2.1 Signifying activity

Verbal act linguistics according to Culioli – also called the theory of predicative and enunciative operations – do not look like the outcome of what Benveniste appeared to be planning, even if a certain similarity of thought is evident in matching comments and comparable forms of expression. Verbal act linguistics set itself the task of studying *the cognitive-affective activity of language through the diversity of languages systems, texts and situations*. The word *through* indicates that the aim is to use the forms of language (or languages) in texts and thus attempt to account for the operations and representations which underlie the signifying activity, and in so doing become reunited with Benveniste’s psychological and anthropological preoccupations. We have to insist on language seen as an activity (Humboldt’s *Tätigkeit* or *Energeia*), that is to say as both process and action. The act of utterance is defined as an activity of production and of interpretative recognition of interpretable forms (texts). It is not simply “the formal apparatus of enunciation” (Benveniste); it has its antecedents in the philosophy of language, notably among the Stoics, with the Greek *lekton* and, for Seneca, the *dictum* and the *enuntiatio*; it is also to be found among medieval philosophers, with the *complexe significabile* (complexly signifiable or by complex) or, again, the *complexe enuntiatibile* (complexly enunciative or by complex), which we might compare with the “system of complex representation based on physical and cultural attributes”;<sup>26</sup> epistemologically, this is the foundation of theory, at a first level of representation, namely notional representations whose linguistic projection corresponds to a second level, that of signifying textual forms; while the third level in the model is the system of metalinguistic representation.

In this way, through the construction of observables and reasoning, the linguist seeks to simulate and understand the connections between the first two levels, by analyzing the arrangements of markers formed by utterances – the term marker referring to the perceptible sign of mental operations; these are responsible for the move from level I, of which we have merely the trace, to level II. Three levels are distinguished: 1) notional, the level connected with representations and mental operations; 2) linguistic, the level of the representatives constituted by forms; and 3) metalinguistic, the level of modeling and formalization, with a dynamic conception of the construction of meaning in texts (interpretable forms), which the analyst seeks to deconstruct and reconstruct. This distinction seems to be in harmony with the dual authority of text generation and the process of significance, according to semanalysis. But the theory of enunciation would be too limited, in Kristeva’s view, if it were to restrict itself to an activity dependent on an intention to signify, even if this is not reducible to a wish to speak or to an intention, conscious or non-conscious. Psychoanalytical technique – in the sense of a *technè*, an art of interpreting where conjectural reason (German *erraten*, to guess) plays a major role<sup>27</sup> – provides us with valuable lessons in that it follows the progress of

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<sup>25</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Le langage, la sublimation, les femmes,” in *La haine et le pardon* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 349-356.

<sup>26</sup> Antoine Culioli, *Notes du séminaire de DEA 1983-1984* (University of Paris 7, Department of Linguistic Research, Poitiers, 1985), 20.

<sup>27</sup> According to a study of Freud’s thinking, *technè* (*ars*) is the mode of conceptualization at the origin of psychoanalysis, inseparable from the procedure for investigating psychic processes that are otherwise inaccessible and the method of treating psychological disturbances based on this procedure. See Giovanni Vassali, “La psychanalyse naît de l’esprit même de la technique grecque,” *Penser/rêver* 1 (2002): 211-256.

speech from the inside, constructing and deconstructing the thought being sought; as, too, does literary creation, which gives free rein to language interpreting itself. Both of these steer us towards the idea of what it is that takes place within us during language activity, without always becoming externalized. To the “ability to identify with the activity of the person producing the discourse, with the writer,” posited by Kristeva (above), Culioli responds with this statement: “I put myself in the place of a subject who is discovering his own language and who, while he gradually organizes what will become a text in a language system, asks himself what he is doing when he does this.”<sup>28</sup> But here, the text corresponds to a sequence, oral and written, taken from discursive exchanges which can be analyzed on the terms and with the means of formal linguistics; while the textual model of semanalysis is the literary text, a model informed by the experience of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, while the linguist’s epistemological prudence limits the investigation to what can be controlled by observation, experimentation and reasoning, semiology dares to go further in its interpretation. I shall therefore examine what is on the margins of the linguistic theory of utterance, but is nonetheless hypothetically present and assumed to be active in language; and this will bring us closer to the views promoted in semanalysis.

## 2.2 The *semiotic chora* and epilinguistics

In a 1992 article,<sup>29</sup> Kristeva asks herself the question: “Does a Freudian ‘linguistics’ exist?” In opposition to the concept of the Cartesian subject which underpins structural and generativist linguistic theories and to the transcendental Ego of Husserl’s phenomenology on which pragmatics is said to be based, she takes up position in the Freudian camp and proposes the contrasting image of a divided and conflictual subject. She then returns to the contributions of her previous work, in particular the distinction between a *semiotic chora*, linked to pre-linguistic modalities of meaning, and a symbolic, existential phase. The general pattern of significance presented in *La Révolution du langage poétique* and returned to later is thus a dual one. The “semiotic chora” or *the semiotic* refers to that authority of significance which is this side of articulated language – the locus of the subject’s instinctive heterogeneity which is semiotized in pre-linguistic signs organized into rhythmic groupings (vocal or graphic, gestural and kinesic elements). The *symbolic system* is superimposed upon this authority; without this, utterance is not possible, since the so-called thetic phase – to follow Husserl’s line of thinking – describes that moment of structuring in language, when an identified subject differentiates himself from objects, thus marking out in his speech a position upon which the locating and setting up of relationships realized in his signifying activity is conditional. The observation of certain pathological languages, like the reading of some modern texts, can then be linked to the destabilizing irruption of the semiotic into the symbolic: the *negativity* which operates in language.

If we consider the signifying activity of language as a symbolic activity of representation, and regard enunciation linguistics as an attempt to comprehend how this operates in language; and if Kristeva’s early studies were trying to “grasp through language what is foreign to its habits and disturbs its conformism”<sup>30</sup> – whereas for Saussure, in a little-known formulation, semiology is “the study of what happens when humans attempt to signify

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<sup>28</sup> Antoine Culioli and Claudine Normand, *Onze rencontres sur le langage et les langues* (Paris: Ophrys, 2005), 182.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Kristeva and Elisabeth BÉlorgey, “Les modèles linguistiques et pragmatiques de la communication,” *Revue Internationale de Psychopathologie* 7 (Paris: P.U.F., 1992), 381-407.

<sup>30</sup> Kristeva, *Σημειωτική: Recherches*, 25-26.



their thinking by means of a necessary convention”<sup>31</sup> –, are we condemned to set two methods in opposition to one another: an investigation that is subject to empirical observation and formal analysis that can be scientifically validated over against a more conjectural interpretation of meaning?

Kristeva’s thinking about language has been described as speculative and Culioli’s as mentalist, and I would like to redefine here how the latter conceptualized the terms epilinguistic or epilanguage, in order to show how language as an activity, in its functioning, can include semiotics, in the sense that Kristeva gave to it, and how it can go beyond the duality of the conceptual schema.

The notion of epilinguistics was first defined as a non-conscious metalinguistic activity, in the sense that it is not conscious of itself in the way that the linguist is, and is often understood as the ordinary activity of speakers who, correcting themselves, modulating or reformulating utterances, or questioning ways of expressing themselves, manifest a pre-consciousness of the language act, in the course of utterance. It serves, moreover, to describe a reflective process that is internal to language, underlying the activity of the speaker. Following the biological model of epigenesis, epilinguistics (a better word would be epilanguage), functions as a generator of forms based on forms, and as a creator of affinities and differentiation. This movement, comparable to the *clinamen* of atomists, has been described by Culioli as “permanent anamorphosis.”<sup>32</sup> For him, epilanguage activity is of the order of “silent rationality,” alongside the “rationality of explicit demonstrative performance,”<sup>33</sup> the rationality which operates in a discursive exchange, when one says something *for* others, *about* and *with a view to*.

This area of indeterminate meaning and its forms of expression is also linked to the idea, expressed by Wittgenstein,<sup>34</sup> of the “halo” surrounding a word, which is created by the possible values of this word, and might always be present in a semi-consciousness when the context and situation of a usage distinguishes one of its values. The psychologist William James also talks about the “halo” enveloping mental images, saying that there exists a feeling of unarticulated relationships and bands of affinity in the thought and words of a language, through psychic resonance.<sup>35</sup> For Culioli, who freely cites Wittgenstein and James and repeats this idea of a “halo,” the meaning of a term is the complex of representations it triggers which, by a series of interactions, is reduced to an utterance “rich in all its related echoes, in all the paraphrastic families, because each one of the terms will evoke something else.”<sup>36</sup> He also continually insists on the abundance, the proliferation arising from epilinguistic activity, that “chaos” hiding behind a “veil of order,” as he puts it, borrowing an

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<sup>31</sup> From a handwritten note by Saussure quoted by Johannes Fehr in a work which gives pointers enabling us to better understand the linguist’s semiological project: *Saussure entre linguistique et sémiologie* (Paris: P.U.F, 2000), 123.

<sup>32</sup> Antoine Culioli and Claudine Normand, *Onze rencontres sur le langage et les langues* (Paris: Ophrys, 2005), 110.

<sup>33</sup> Culioli and Normand, *Onze rencontres*, 73.

<sup>34</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Bemerkungen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964)

<sup>35</sup> William James, *Psychology: the briefer course* (New York: Harper, 1961)

<sup>36</sup> Antoine Culioli, *Variations linguistiques. Entretiens avec Frédéric Fau* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2002), 180.

image from the pianist Alfred Brendel, quoting Novalis.<sup>37</sup> And he comments on the expression, saying that this veil – the veil of linear order – sometimes prevents the unveiling of the surface’s underside, adding: “I am generalizing about language activity where, under the veil of order (syntax, schema, habitual semantics, adjustment to others), a text allows epilinguistic chaos to appear, the shimmering beneath the surface of which Mallarmé speaks.”<sup>38</sup>

It would seem possible to assign the same language reality to the two expressions of epilinguistic “chaos” and “semiotic chora.” We can identify it with what Lacan names “lalangue” and link it with the “associative chains” (Freud) reconstructed by the psychoanalyst in the text of dreams, or with what Saussure calls “associative links” between elements of language or the paragrammatism which he tested, in his own way, in his search for anagrams.

To give a more linguistic basis to this reality, let us return to Saussure’s conception of language as a system of differences. This concept, according to which there are only relative and negative oppositions in language, is expressed more clearly in what Saussure calls the “final quaternion.”<sup>39</sup> The quaternion’s schema is composed of four terms: sign, form, signification, and figure, and of three links: a form relating to signification (and vice-versa), a form relating to other forms (the general difference of forms only existing according to the difference of significations), and a signification relating to other significations (the general difference of significations only existing according to the difference of forms) – a triple relationship to which may be added the vocal figure, which becomes a signifying form when it includes the semiological relationship. In this schema the sign, as a significant form – indissociably form and signification – can only be opposed to the figure,<sup>40</sup> which appears thanks to the suspension of the semiological relationship and the concatenation of signs. We should add to this clarification Saussure’s explanation of the term image, present in “acoustic image” (or verbal image), correlated to “concept” in the schema of the sign, and which would take the name of signifier. Defending himself from the wish to suggest, by using this term, a resemblance linked to what is represented, he states that “*image* is taken in the most general sense of *figure*, having some evocative power, speaking to the imagination.”<sup>41</sup> It is a quotation I would like to put side by side with the following declaration by the poet René

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<sup>37</sup> The quotation borrowed by Brendel from Novalis is as follows: “Beim Kunstwerk soll das Chaos durch den Flor der Ordnung schimmern” (In the work of art, chaos must shine under the veil of order) (Culioli and Normand, *Onze rencontres*, Note 1, 97).

<sup>38</sup> Culioli and Normand, *Onze rencontres*, quotation from Stéphane Mallarmé: “Si, tout de même, n’inquiétait je ne sais quel miroitement, en dessous, peu séparable de la surface concédée à la rétine—il attire le soupçon (...)” [If, even so, I know not what shimmer was troubling, underneath but not too far from the surface granted to the retina—it attracts suspicion (...).] (*Le Mystère dans les lettres*)

<sup>39</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Écrits de linguistique générale*, ed. Simon Bouquet and Rudolf Engler (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 42.

<sup>40</sup> De Saussure, *Écrits de linguistique*, 202. “Parmi les choses qui peuvent être *opposées* au son matériel, nous nions, essentiellement et sans aucune défaillance future dans le détail, qu’il soit possible d’*opposer* l’idée. Ce qui est opposable au son matériel c’est le *groupe son-idée*, absolument pas l’*idée*.” [Among the things which may be *opposed* to physical sound, I deny, in essence and without any future fault in the detail, that it is possible to *oppose* the idea. What is opposable to physical sound is the *sound-idea grouping*, and absolutely not the *idea*.]

<sup>41</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Troisième cours de linguistique générale (1910-1911), d’après les cahiers d’Émile Constantin* (Oxford – New York – Seoul – Tokyo, 1993), 76 (my emphasis).

Char: “(...) the word not only describes but represents, and immediately imposes one or several *figures*.”<sup>42</sup>

We should remember, for our purposes, that figures, without restricting them to the vocal, constitute so many available components, detached from their possible values, while preserving the memorial traces of their uses; but they are also loaded with a potential for significance in a field of attraction and repulsion, according to a set of variable forces and intensities. I consider this configuration to be a mode of functioning that is internal to language, and within a language system – including in its gestural and bodily dimension, to which I shall return. It allows us to understand semantic variations, diachronic as well as synchronic, according to situations and contexts; the formation of morphosemantic fields, by relative motivation; the phonic or graphic connections between figural elements; the stress, melodic and rhythmic patterns which superimpose themselves onto prosodic and sentential schemata, vocal timbres too; in the written version of a language, the topographies of writing; the drawing of words and letters; and the visual space in which these are inscribed. I recognize in this mode of functioning what Kristeva says about “semiotic potential,” and I include in this what she calls *signifying differential*, which Michel Arrivé<sup>43</sup> likens to the “homophonic semantic contagion” of Damourette and Pichon.<sup>44</sup> The grammarians say that the “tendency towards semantic contagion” is not conscious but manifests itself in the aesthetic use of language: “All the evocative power of phonetic strings comes into play in poetry, and from this point of view we should no longer even restrict ourselves to the over-confined law of homophonic semantic contagion. Phonetic strings, syllables, and even phonemes, in addition to their onomatopoeic value, have a mnesic value arising from all the words of which they are part, and I am convinced that this semantic burden is constantly present in the speaking subject’s subconscious.”<sup>45</sup>

Saussure thought of language as a “treasure trove” of forms stabilized by usage and deposited in the memory, and he likened it to the consciousness (semi-consciousness or pre-consciousness, depending on circumstances) of speaking subjects; while Culioli compares this “treasure” to the mental activity of language, which is non-conscious. The semiotic-epilinguistic is the living matter of language’s dynamic memory, the “zone of turbulence”<sup>46</sup> where it diffracts and becomes iridescent, as well as where it recovers its forces.

### 2.3 The sense of the sensory

In an interview, Culioli declared that with epilinguistics “one is in some ways (...) ‘liberated’ from the constraints of relationships with others, from linearity, from the very fact that there are social sanctions if you diverge too much from an inevitable conformity. So you

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<sup>42</sup> René Char, *Sous ma casquette amarante*, Interview with France Huser (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1980), 829 (my emphasis).

<sup>43</sup> Michel Arrivé, *Langage et psychanalyse, linguistique et inconscient, Freud, Saussure, Pichon, Lacan* (Paris: PUF, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> Jacques Damourette and Edouard Pichon, *Des mots à la pensée. Essai de grammaire de la langue française*, volume I (Paris: Éditions d’Artrey, 1930).

<sup>45</sup> Damourette and Pichon, *Des mots à la pensée*, 163.

<sup>46</sup> See Antoine Culioli and Dominique Ducard, “Un témoin étonné du langage,” in *Espace théorique du langage. Des parallèles flous*, ed. Claudine Normand and Estanislao Sofia (Brussels: Academia, 2012), 129-172.

reflect<sup>47</sup> on the representations you use, without being at all conscious of them, you make developments, derivations, rather in the way that Deleuze and Guattari talk about rhizomes.”<sup>48</sup> From these remarks, let us retain the idea that the signifying activity of language turns back on itself and the subject, escaping from the constraints of communication and surrendering to an inner language, once it has withdrawn from verbal exchange and discursive activity and thus been freed from the rules which operate in interaction because of the need to adjust to others for the purpose of mutual understanding.

The writer who “absents himself from company at the moment of writing,” finding himself “alone with his language. (...) alone with this language against him,”<sup>49</sup> as the poet André du Bouchet says, undergoes this experience of a tension between the tumult of language and the expressible, the utterable; he thus develops, through a greater receptivity to language which slips out of reach, a keener attention to his own activity: “critical awareness, which is constantly dislodging words, goes hand in hand with the very notion of poetry. It is made and unmade.”<sup>50</sup> Let us also remember, along with the poet, that “In words, before the meaning is deciphered, there are *figures*,”<sup>51</sup> or again: “a word: it is not the meaning, but first and foremost the thrust of the meaning which is communicated, or rather, *imprinted*.”<sup>52</sup> This expression, “thrust of the meaning” leads us away from semantic content, whose construction the linguist seeks to understand in ordinary utterances; it brings us closer to more hidden links, the “*buried links*” which the writer Julien Gracq talks about, evoking the “immense artistic potential” that is language, because of the “multiple internal connections and delicate nervous anastomoses which are awakened at the least slightly sensitive touch, creating a fundamentally vibrant texture, a harmonic instrument.”<sup>53</sup> It also evokes for us the notion of meaningful direction or direction of meaning (*Bedeutungsrichtung*) proposed by the psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger and repeated by the phenomenologist of existence Henri Maldiney.<sup>54</sup> For the latter, meaning-direction, as distinct from meaning-signification, which is conceptual and thematic, is the source of meaning and is to be found in the roots of words. More generally, this is what directs people in their sensory communication with the world and with others, in an esthetic relationship in the order of what he calls the pathic (feeling). Furthermore, meaning-direction returns us to the sensorimotor experience and the dynamic scheme of one’s own body, the first referent for our behaviors and representations.

Among the theoretical propositions which postulate a close link between bodily activity and symbolic activity in language, I would like to flag up the theory of the gestural nature of signs, both visual and spoken.<sup>55</sup> According to this conception, language is deeply

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<sup>47</sup> Questioned about the use of the verb “reflect,” which appears to contradict the unconscious nature of the activity, Culioli states that he used it to mean “it goes around in our heads.”

<sup>48</sup> Culioli and Normand, *Onze rencontres*, 109-110.

<sup>49</sup> André du Bouchet, *Entretiens avec Alain Veinstein* (Paris: L’Atelier contemporain & Institut National de l’Audiovisuel, 2016), 39.

<sup>50</sup> Du Bouchet, *Entretiens*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Du Bouchet, *Entretiens*, 71.

<sup>52</sup> André du Bouchet, *Un mot: ce n’est pas le sens...* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Editions VVV Editions, 2013)

<sup>53</sup> Julien Gracq, *En lisant en écrivant* (Paris: José Corti, 1980), 255.

<sup>54</sup> See Henri Maldiney, *Penser l’homme et la folie* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Million, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> David F. Armstrong, William C. Stokoe and Sherman E. Wilcox, *Gesture and the nature of language* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

rooted, ontogenetically and phylogenetically, in its corporal base, and a linguistic description that starts from the viewpoint of gesture and neuromuscular activity allows the theory to be unified, by not separating the levels of analysis (phonological, morphological, syntactical, and semantic). Gesture is in fact understood as a neuromuscular activity of a semiotic order (from spontaneous gestures of communication to more conventional gestures) or of a linguistic order (for conventionalized visible or vocal signs). The verbal sign, in the word, is a functional unit corresponding to a class of equivalence involving coordinated movements carried out with a view to an end.

Highlighting sensorimotor action in perception and the cognition deriving from it, which underlies language, Armstrong *et alii* resort to the notion of *image schemata*, which are not abstract relationships between symbols and an external, objective reality, but relate to what organizes our experience and understanding at the level of bodily perception and movement. These embodied image schemata cover a perceptual field which includes the visual, the auditory, and the kinesthetic, and they betray the intermodal nature of language. I might also mention the theory of embodied and situated cognition,<sup>56</sup> according to which sensorimotor interactions with the environment are integrated, schematically, with semantic knowledge.

These studies match the widely shared hypothesis of embodied cognition,<sup>57</sup> which makes cognition depend on experiences linked to a body endowed with various sensorimotor capabilities, in a biological, psychological and cultural environmental context, and which refers more specifically to the idea of embodied action or enaction. We might also mention the wider-ranging hypothesis of the mathematician René Thom<sup>58</sup> which sees profound unity in the living system, based on a continuity between the biological and the symbolic. It establishes an equivalence, in phylogenesis and ontogenesis, between physiological reactions and conceptual representations. Language finds its origin in what conditions the psyche, both animal and human. If thought is a simulation of the world, language is a sort of mimesis of biophysical interactions. According to this conception of a semiophysical continuum, the creation of language signs is a “symbolic bifurcation” and the significations of symbol-forms are due to a series of transfers, by diffusion and derivation, of signifying qualities attached to morphodynamic schemata present in the physical world experienced by subjects. Thom acknowledges that his model is speculative but it is surely of heuristic interest.

Without neglecting the work done in cognition sciences and neurosciences, which seek to naturalize meaning, the semio-linguistic point of view leads me to maintain the theory that language is a semiotic mediation between the pheno-physical world and the world of (re)presentation, according to a schematization by François Rastier;<sup>59</sup> or perhaps like an interpreter in a chain process, according to Peirce; or an interpretive relationship between the external and internal world, according to Benveniste. We shall also bear in mind, based on Peirce’s semiotics,<sup>60</sup> that the thought-sign includes three elements: the representation

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<sup>56</sup> Lawrence W. Barsalou, “Perceptual symbols system,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22 (1999): 577-660.

<sup>57</sup> Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> René Thom, *Apologie du Logos* (Paris: Hachette, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> François Rastier, “L’action et le sens pour une sémiotique des cultures,” *Texto!* (June 2001) [on line]. Available on: [http://www.revue-texto.net/Inedits/Rastier/Rastier\\_Action.html](http://www.revue-texto.net/Inedits/Rastier/Rastier_Action.html)

<sup>60</sup> Charles S. Peirce, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 2 (1868): 140-157.

function, the application of a thought-sign to another, and the material quality of the sign – what is felt and, he states, is why bodily movements may accompany our feelings and affects.

But let us return to Kristeva's work, for she approached the semiotics of gesture at a very early stage,<sup>61</sup> referring to ethnography and to what mythical tales tell us about words, in order to highlight the practice and production of words, outside the circle of communication and signification contained in them. Gesture has an indicative or anaphoric function, as bedrock of the voice and written form, and *anaphoricity* becomes the basic function of the semiotic text: the sense is *indication* and the sign is anaphora. Kristeva thus invites us to depart from the linguistic model and categories for analyzing gesture based on American kinesics, and its attempt at formalization, notably in the works of Birdwhistell.<sup>62</sup> The study she devoted, much later, to an account of Saint Teresa of Avila's mystical experience<sup>63</sup> marks a return to anaphoricity. It is through *contact* with the Other, through *touch* – primary sensoriality in the embryogenesis and the relational life – that the subject, indissociably body and soul, is moved. And Julia Kristeva says of this subject that it is *deictic/anaphoric* (*Ecce*: here is, *Haec*: this), and has a demonstrative function: it is the sensory point of the infinite that is affecting it. From this detour we will note the semiotic continuity-discontinuity between the gestural body and verbal language, two modes of contact with the other, in the de-signation and the co-presence.

Studies of gesture have substantially increased and, indeed, have soared in the recent past, with an international association being created in 2002.<sup>64</sup> Its objective was to promote work on human gesture, in multiple disciplinary fields (anthropology, linguistics, psychology, history, neuroscience, communications, art history, and so on) and in relation to different activities: verbal interactions, work, artistic performances, cultural body techniques, technologies, and so on. It appears that the function of communication and the cognitivist option have come to dominate these studies.

But to limit ourselves to language gestures – considering that spoken language is an activity involving posture, mime, verb and gesture – I would suggest that the mimicry of language, to borrow the expression of the anthropologist Jousse, quoted by Kristeva, is a secondary function of motor ability: gesture is reconfigured by the language within a language system. Word gesture is polyvalent (symbolic, iconic and indexical functions<sup>65</sup>), diagrammatic and rhythmic, idiosyncratic and cultural, subjective and normalized (types of situation, discursive genres of words, language actions). Gesture is movement organized into dynamic configurations and the gesture is a *figure of meaning* that is converted into a signifying form when it includes a semiological relationship, according to the Saussurian schema previously shown.

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<sup>61</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Le geste, pratique ou communication?" in *Langages*, 3rd year, 10 (Paris: Didier/Larousse, 1968), 48-64. [on line]: [http://www.persee.fr/doc/lgge\\_0458-726x\\_1968\\_num\\_3\\_10\\_2548](http://www.persee.fr/doc/lgge_0458-726x_1968_num_3_10_2548)

<sup>62</sup> Ray Birdwhistell, "Some Body Motion Elements Accompanying Spoken American English," in *Communication: Concepts and Perspectives*, ed. Lee Thayer (Washington: Spartan Books, 1967).

<sup>63</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Thérèse mon amour*, an imaginary account (Paris: Fayard, 2008)

<sup>64</sup> International Society for Gesture Studies (ISGS): <http://www.gesturestudies.com/>

<sup>65</sup> I refer to two models and typologies of gesture in speech: the Information Processing Model: Robert Krauss, Yihsin Chen and Rebecca F. Gottesman, "Lexical Gestures and Lexical Access," in *Language and Gesture*, ed. David McNeill (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 261-283; and the Sketch Model: Jan Peter de Ruiter, "The Production of Gesture and Speech," in *Language and Gesture*, ed. David McNeill (Cambridge University Press, 2000): 284-311.

The theory of the verbal act, together with the notion of *mental gesture*,<sup>66</sup> has assimilated the hypothesis that language activity is the product of a symbolic activity by gesture, according to a transmutation process of a sensorimotricity internalized in mental representations, of which linguistic markers preserve the traces in their semantic content. To describe this intermediate passing place between the corporal and the symbolic, Culioli refers to Plato's *khora* in *Timaeus* – a void in waiting –, which indicates what is situated in between the sensory and the intelligible. The Platonic *khora* is an image of this generator of forms that is the epilinguistic. As sensory things are subject to change and fluctuation whereas language tends towards stabilization, in order to recount the world, Plato seeks to establish a link between these latter and intelligible forms. This link becomes a place, the receptacle of phenomena in the state of becoming, of which it cannot be said that it is “this” or “that” or that it is “that which is such and such” (*toioûton*), as permanent realities, but only insofar as they partake of intelligible forms, of the *material*, a term used by Luc Brisson<sup>67</sup> in his translation to designate the *khora*. This receptacle of everything that is subject to generation is in the image of a nanny, or perhaps similar to the modeling of figures from the same material, which are constantly being remodeled as other figures. The *khora* “presents itself as the imprint-bearer [*ekmageiôn*] of all things.”<sup>68</sup> Plato says of this formation process, between the sensory informal and intelligible formal, that it is difficult to describe and provokes surprise.

### 3. Language as inner medium

Does “chora” then allow us to bring together linguistic theory and semanalysis? In verbal act linguistics, the terms that make up an utterance are markers, material representatives of mental representations and operations of which they preserve the trace. In production they are sensors of representations, which are configured in language and text, while in reception they are the triggers of representations. These representations of mental images evoked in language activity correspond, according to the hypotheses mentioned above, to sensorimotor sketches linked to praxis, and the imagination of the movement in the formulations is of the order of a specular imagining and a cognition based on perception and action, on which is superimposed the affectivity attached to representations, whose formal marks are diverse.

The “semiotic chora,” according to Kristeva, includes sensations, affects and drives – a limit-concept, according to Freud, related to what passes from the somatic to the psychic – and it opens up a pre-specular space to the imagination, which we might call *imaginal*. Faithful to Freudian theory, Kristeva thinks of affect as a by-product of the drive (*Trieb*), of which it is the psychic representative. Composed of *quantum* and *qualis*, “The affect is therefore the place where a *shifting quantity of the drive and its initial psychic tonality* coexist: the crossroads where the energy *quantum* becomes a subjective *quality*.”<sup>69</sup> Kristeva mentions that Freud, in an article written in French, translates *Affektbetrag* by “affective value,” the term “value” expressing a “quantitative *and* qualitative” notion. Let us say that an

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<sup>66</sup> Antoine Culioli, “Gestes mentaux et réseaux symboliques: à la recherche des traces enfouies dans l’entrelacs du langage,” *Faits de langue*, 3 (Paris: Ophrys, 2011), 7-31.

<sup>67</sup> Platon, *Timée / Critias*, French translation by Luc Brisson (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1992).

<sup>68</sup> Platon, *Timée / Critias*, trans. Luc Brisson, 149.

<sup>69</sup> Julia Kristeva, “De l’affect ou ‘L’intense profondeur des mots,’” lecture by Julia Kristeva, Facoltà Teologica dell’Italia Settentrionale, 23-24 February 2010, Milan. On line: <http://www.kristeva.fr/de-l-affect.html>

affect is differentiated by its values of *intensity* and *tonality*, and that the variety of emotions and feelings, expressed in language, are so many linguistic representatives of the *range of affects* experienced, against an indescribable and unrepresentable background. Kristeva tells us further that the amalgam of elements in various registers constitutes a “heterogeneous mind-body-soul continuity, and the experience of this heterogeneous continuity now appears to us as the essence of the intimate.”<sup>70</sup> This intimacy, when it is voiced, is expressed in “the intense depth of words,”<sup>71</sup> according to an expression borrowed from Baltazar Graciàn, or what she calls “the flesh of words,” by analogy with Merleau-Ponty’s flesh of the world. As a consequence of the Freudian conception of the affect, the heterogeneity of the unconscious drive is posited, involving “representatives of a *linguistic type*” and “openings for *affects*,” which may or may not become incorporated with the elements of language, and are components of the psyche emerging from the somatic. The affect, as the source of subjective meaning which participates in significance, is then defined as “*my interior* correlating to the *exterior* where the object of incitement, emptiness, and appeal, is situated.”<sup>72</sup>

For me personally, in my attempt to combine the linguistic concept of an epilinguistic “chaos” with the semanalytical concept of semiotic chora, the interiority of language, defined by the withdrawal from interaction and from the discursive exchange – the theatre of referencing and regulatory processes in a situation of communication – includes notional representations which are loosely linked to various kinds of figures (prosodic, phonic, graphic, lexical, syntagmatic, gestural), these in their turn being sensors of meaning. This figurative language is in tune with images of perception and action on the one hand, and on the other with a sensoriality and affects which vary in intensity and tonality, pleasure or displeasure.

It is difficult to design a model of the way language functions without using a topological representation, so it is better to think in terms of opening up pathways and connections, activation and inhibition, or interactions. Language functions according to various regimes of activity, with different degrees of linguistic awareness on the part of speakers, ranging from the non-conscious to reflected awareness, with the pre-conscious in between; we might define this, along with Lacan, as “that chatter through which we articulate ourselves within ourselves,”<sup>73</sup> with, in addition, the instinctual and sexual unconscious underlying everything. The language takes shape within a language system – or in several languages systems – and the texts produced by locutors evolve in accordance with the situations, conforming to discursive genres and types, in different stylistic registers.

It is also difficult to do without the relative oppositions between outside and inside, exterior and interior, even if one might agree with François Rastier in saying that language is neither external nor internal but is “a place of coupling between the individual and his environment.”<sup>74</sup> We live from permanent spoken dialogues, with others or with ourselves; we have been immersed in a bath of language since before our birth and perpetually assailed, in both our daily activity and our dreams, by perceptible linguistic signs, which are heard, read or seen. Saussure assimilates language to the consciousness of speakers and, in his

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<sup>70</sup> Julia Kristeva, *La Révolte intime. Pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse II* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 94.

<sup>71</sup> Kristeva, “De l’affect ou ‘L’intense profondeur des mots.’”

<sup>72</sup> Kristeva, “De l’affect ou ‘L’intense profondeur des mots.’”

<sup>73</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre VIII. L’éthique de la psychanalyse (1959-1960)* (Paris : Seuil, 1986), 76.

<sup>74</sup> François Rastier, “Le langage comme milieu: des pratiques aux œuvres,” *Texto !* December 2003 [on line]. Available on: [http://www.revue-texto.net/Inedits/Rastier/Rastier\\_Langage.pdf](http://www.revue-texto.net/Inedits/Rastier/Rastier_Langage.pdf)



communication diagram he traces a circuit that is both external and internal.<sup>75</sup> He sees the sign as a “two-sided psychic entity,”<sup>76</sup> while at the same time insisting on the social nature of language. Epilinguistic “chaos” and “semiotic chora” refer to the internal side of what is a dynamic internal/external system continuously being updated by an infinite process of exits and re-entries.

Acknowledging a debt to life sciences, I make a distinction between language’s *inner medium* and its *external medium*.<sup>77</sup> Adopting the model of the biological discourse in its description of the extracellular inner medium,<sup>78</sup> I would say that the *inner medium* of language is the intermediary for all exchanges between what goes to make up mental life and the exterior environment; a flow of diverse elements permanently runs through it, and it also permits a transfer of information between the different components in the form of messengers, which play their part in integrating the different functions. We might extend the analogy by noting that Claude Bernard considered the proper functioning of this medium to be the “condition of free and independent life” in beings raised in an organized setting. And I would set this formulation of the inner medium of language alongside a statement by Kristeva: “There is basically no life without psychological life. Whether it is intolerable, painful, deadly, or exhilarating, psychological life – which combines systems of representations running across language – gives access to the body and to others.”<sup>79</sup>

### **In conclusion: the life of language**

In the long preface she wrote for the publication of Émile Benveniste’s *Dernières leçons* at the Collège de France,<sup>80</sup> Julia Kristeva talked about what “the way of a life” was in language, conceived of and lived as an experience, in the search for meaning created in and by language. She quotes the phrase of Heraclitus reported by Plutarch in *De Pythiae oraculis* apropos of Apollo and the Delphi oracle, which Benveniste partly uses, applying it to the “signifying power of language, which occurs well before [the power] of saying something.”<sup>81</sup> οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει (*oute légei oute kryptei alla sémainei*: neither says nor hides but signifies.) Another possible translation of *sémainei*, is “to indicate” and this would return us to the semiotic anaphoricity emphasized by Kristeva. What is shown in the verbal act, without being stated, is significance.

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<sup>75</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) (Paris: Payot, 1971), 27.

<sup>76</sup> de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 99.

<sup>77</sup> This distinction goes back to Claude Bernard (1813-1878) who said: “Animals have two environments: an *external medium* in which the organism is situated, and an *inner medium* inhabited by the elements of the tissues” (*Leçons sur les phénomènes de la vie communs aux animaux et aux végétaux*, 1878-1879). See François Chast, “Claude Bernard: concept de milieu intérieur,” *Encyclopaedia Universalis* [on line]: <http://www.universalis-edu.com/encyclopedie/claude-bernard-concept-de-milieu-interieur/>

<sup>78</sup> See Jean-Paul Truchot, “Milieu intérieur,” *Encyclopaedia Universalis* [on line]: <http://www.universalis-edu.com/encyclopedie/milieu-interieur/>

<sup>79</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Guérir, une renaissance psychique,” in *La haine et le pardon* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 321.

<sup>80</sup> Émile Benveniste, *Dernières leçons. Collège de France 1968 et 1969*, ed. Jean-Claude Coquet and Irène Fenoglio (Paris: EHESS/Gallimard/Le Seuil, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Émile Benveniste, “La forme et le sens dans le langage,” in *Problèmes de linguistique générale II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 229.

In her reading and interpretation of Benveniste's lessons on systems of writing, Kristeva leads us to establish a connection between the "inner language" represented by writing, through its semiotization and iconization of language, and a subjectivity other than that of the cogito of consciousness and the transcendental ego of intentionality. In this, writing joins the language of poetry, whose "motivations" are of another order than that of the sign in communication and discourse. Any system of writing is an introspective analysis of language renewed by every speaker in the process of learning to read and write; this is how linguistic consciousness moves to a higher level and also how *figures* (phonographic, morphographic or logographic) are inserted into the material of the "chora."

Kristeva states that Benveniste, in his reasoning, detected "the trace of free and creative subjectivity in the duality of significance: between the nameless experience of 'interior language' and the semantics of discourse which is used to communicate and to order,"<sup>82</sup> thinking of language as a "signifying organism," "a living, generating and self-generating organism."<sup>83</sup> As a semiologist and psychoanalyst she has ploughed her own furrow, walking alongside other thinkers, and her contribution constantly encourages us to delve again into the inner life of language. And when, recalling Benveniste's declaration that "Well before serving to communicate, language serves to live,"<sup>84</sup> she says that the experience of language is "strictly speaking, a vital experience," she means that language is the hub of life, both psychological and social.

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<sup>82</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Émile Benveniste, un linguiste qui ne dit ni ne cache, mais signifie," in Émile Benveniste, *Dernières leçons*, 37.

<sup>83</sup> Kristeva, "Émile Benveniste, un linguiste qui ne dit ni ne cache," 28.

<sup>84</sup> Kristeva, "Émile Benveniste, un linguiste qui ne dit ni ne cache," 21.

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