

THICKNESS ON THE MARGINS OF DISCOURSE

Jean-François Lyotard, translated by Antony Hudek

2011 sees the long-awaited appearance in English translation of Jean-François Lyotard's Discourse, Figure. To mark this event, we are pleased to publish here an extract from the book, along with texts on the significance of this work by a number of prominent Lyotard scholars. The book was Lyotard's thesis for his Doctorat ès lettres, and was first published in French in 1971. Amongst many other points of interest, Discourse, Figure stages an encounter between three major theoretical perspectives in 20th Century French thought – phenomenology, structuralism, and psychoanalysis – as well as one between the disciplines of philosophy, linguistics, and art theory. In keeping with the focus of Parrhesia, we have chosen to excerpt here a chapter which deals primarily with a philosophical theme: a reading, at once sympathetic and critical, of the philosophy of language of Gottlob Frege. Part of the interest of this chapter is that it belies what remains a common (though uneducated, and excessively generalised) criticism of poststructuralist thought: that it endorses a Saussurean notion of sense as the product of a closed system of language and neglects the Fregean thesis on the importance of extra-linguistic reference (thought by many 20th Century philosophers to be decisive). Lyotard here mobilises Frege towards a critique of Saussure, while also distancing himself from Derrida's wariness of reference. Nevertheless, Lyotard does not adopt Frege uncritically, and his reflections on language in Discourse, Figure remain far from those of many philosophers in the Analytic tradition influenced by Frege. These reflections are closely interweaved with his analyses and arguments concerning the phenomenology of perception, the unconscious, and the aesthetic experience of art. The reader unfamiliar with Discourse, Figure will be able to get an impression of the wider theses of the work, and hence some contextualisation of the excerpt presented here, from the texts which follow it in this feature. - Eds

A decade before Saussure, Gottlob Frege had understood and developed this effect of positionality, establishing that the words' opening onto reference belongs to actual discourse and not to the virtual system of language [*langue*], suggesting moreover that there is silent meaning or thickness, on this side of significations, lodged this time at the heart of discourse itself, in its form. The separation of the two vectors that allowed Benveniste to locate the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs overlaps exactly with the distinction Frege posits between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. This last remark is more than a mere anomaly, for Frege's reflection goes far beyond a formalist revision regarding propositional calculus; it follows a Kantian lineage when it starts from the separation between an $a = a$ type equation, which is analytical, and the equation of the $a = b$ variety, which implies an increase in knowledge, but needs to be justified. Above all, Frege's reflection culminates in an organization of the space of discourse and thought that will serve as reference for the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations* as much as for the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, becoming, with its intersecting dimensions, the matrix of intentional as well as analytical philosophy. It is important to return to the point where, on the one hand, the exclusion of designation in favor of signification, and on the other, the burying of the *Sinn*'s key structure under intentional analyses, are not yet completed, where the union of the two great Kantian themes of the transcendental as subjectivity and the transcendental as structure is not undone, but on the contrary refined—especially since Frege's conclusions find, in certain results and omissions of structural linguistics, an echo that makes his reflection all the more timely.

An expression such as $a = b$ encapsulates the entire problem of the sign. If it turns out to be true, it would mean that one could take b instead of a ; but a is not b , and their difference is maintained in the formulation of their identity. What constitutes this difference? If b differed only from a as an object (*als Gegenstand*), for example through its form and not in the way it designates (*bezeichnet*), the expression $a = b$ would have the same knowledge value as the expression $a = a$, and their difference would be trivial. However, their difference is so important that it contains the entire opposition between the analytic and the synthetic, the entire increase of knowledge. The difference, then, consists in the way in which the designated is given respectively by a and by b .² Let us assume M is the point where the three median lines x, y, z of a triangle intersect. One can designate M as the point of intersection of x and y , or y and z . These two designations each indicate (*deuten*) a different way of presenting the designated object: this is what grants the statement “the point of intersection of x and y is the point of intersection of y and z ” a positive knowledge value. One must therefore distinguish between the sign’s *Bedeutung*, its designation, involving the exteriority of the designated, and its *Sinn*, consisting in the way the object is given (*die Art des Gegebenseins*). The *Bedeutung* of the expression “point of intersection between x and y ” is the same as that of the expression “point of intersection of y and z ,” but not its *Sinn*.

This is not to suggest that if reference is objective, signification would be subjective. To emphasize how far he stands from a psychologizing interpretation, and to locate signification precisely within objectivity, Frege provides a new coupling where signification is this time opposed to “representation” (*Vorstellung*). The latter can vary from one subject to the next, while signification is independent of the word’s or the expression’s formulation. The phrase “a new day is born” can elicit various representations, images, feelings, depending on the listener, but each and every listener, if knowledgeable of the English language, will understand it in the same way. Thus emerges the concept of a non-reifying objectivity, for which Frege provides as model the image of the moon in the lens of a telescope: “I compare the moon itself to the reference (*Bedeutung*); it is the object of the observation, mediated by the real image projected by the object glass in the interior of the telescope and by the retinal image of the observer. The former I compare to the sense [*signification*] (*Sinn*), the latter is like the idea [*repräsentation*] (*Vorstellung*) or experience [*intuition*] (*Anschauung*).”³ Signification is thus endowed with the same objectivity as that of the physical image in the “objective”: it is *einseitig* [one-sided] and depends on the position of the observation point, but is the same for all the observers standing in any one place. Hence signification has no more to do with persons than designation; what does is the world of images that signification can give rise to in each of us. The correlation between our representations and, say, the text of a poem is unverifiable, “free”; similarly, the dream separates us from the objectivity of *Sinn*, pressing us into another element that is not communicable, or at least not easily so.

If Frege chooses not to dwell on this relation between the sign and *Vorstellung*—since the problem he sets out to elucidate is not that of the expression of “subjectivity” but rather that of the position of objectivity in discourse—his analysis of the two dimensions of meaning is, for its part, crucial. As Frege writes, a “proper noun”—that is, any sign or group of signs, whether words or not, to which corresponds a definite object and not a concept or a relation —“expresses its sense [*signification*] (*drückt seinen Sinn aus*), stands for or designates its reference (*bedeutet oder bezeichnet seine Bedeutung*). By means of a sign we express its sense [*signification*] and designate its reference (*wir drücken mit einem Zeichen dessen Sinn aus und bezeichnen mit ihm dessen Bedeutung*).”⁴ This duality of the dimensions of meaning [*sens*] is inescapable: it is pointless to object that, after all, one can make do with signification [*signification*] alone, and that nothing forces us to look for the reference behind the sign. To the skeptic who wonders why we should need to have “moon” find a respondent in reality, Frege answers: “when we say ‘the Moon,’ we do not intend to speak of our idea [*repräsentation*] (*Vorstellung*) of the Moon, nor are we satisfied with the sense [*signification*] (*Sinn*) alone, but *we presuppose a reference (sondern wir setzen eine Bedeutung voraus)*.”⁵

When what is at issue is no longer the proper noun but the declarative statement, Frege will go on to assert just as vehemently the inalienable character of the search for the designated. Understood in its totality, the declarative statement possesses an objective thought content, independent of the thinker; just as in the case of the proper noun, signification is not subjected to the whims of the speakers’ imaginations. But what about reference, of the dimension of designation in such a statement, to which not *one* object can correspond? Can we

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simply do without it? “Is it possible that a sentence as a whole has only a sense [*signification*], but no reference?”⁷ When I assert that “Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep,” the sentence possesses signification but seems to lack a dimension of designation since, in all probability, no object corresponds to one of the proper nouns it contains (Odysseus). Frege’s answer to this question warrants our attention. When, he argues, we listen to the epic poem in an aesthetic attitude, what fascinates us through the musicality of language is signification, and the images and sentiments it arouses. “Hence it is a matter of no concern to us whether the name ‘Odysseus,’ for instance, has reference, so long as we accept the poem as a work of art.” But “the question of truth would cause us to abandon aesthetic delight for an attitude of scientific investigation.”⁸ For we are inclined to want the proper noun to possess not only a signification but also a designation; on its own, the thought content of the statement leaves us unsatisfied. “It is the striving for truth that drives us always to advance from the sense [*signification*] to the reference [*designation*].”⁹

In the above answer we see the first sketch emerge of a complete table of the attitudes of speech that would force us to reflect on the language of art. When the statement is grasped for the *Vorstellung* it can generate, the grip on the axis of language occurs at the pole of images, which is individual, and this approach determines the aesthetic existence of speech, the poetic. A second grip should be possible through signification alone, stripped of its phantasmatic resonances as well as its referential power; it would then induce a formalist attitude, using language as an objective totality in that the signifieds would always be verifiable from one speaker to another—which would imply that we remain confined to the order of articulated language—and thus as a *closed* totality, since there would be no need to reveal signification by pitting it against something beyond itself. But Frege seems to suggest here that such a formalism is impossible since it is not in our power to summon words, and groups of words, in thought without referring their signification to an “object” that is not in them, but outside. This explains why this second type of grip on language finds no place in Frege’s terminology, and why he considers the language of knowledge a form of speech in search of the absent object of which it is speaking. Thus all language is essentially open onto non-language: the discourse of knowledge requires a transcendence directed toward things, within which it hunts down its object, while the discourse of art requires the opposite transcendence, issuing from the images that come to inhabit its words. On the one side defining speech, which tries to force the designated into invariant structure relations and to assimilate completely the designated into signified; on the other, expressive speech striving to open itself up to the space of vision and desire and to produce figurality with the signified. In both cases, language fascinated by what it is not, attempting in the latter case to *possess* it—this is the phantasy of science—on the other to *be* it—the phantasy of art.

It is with considerable insight that Frege sees as a motive running through the discourse of knowledge a striving, a *Streben*, a desire, thus provoking (this logician, this professor) in the meticulously sanitized problematic of knowledge a crack through which the theme reputed as being most foreign to knowledge could creep in, whereas it is doubtless its core: the theme of desire. Frege even shows that the transcendence that refers every utterance to an object is essentially unknown to language: “If anything is asserted there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have reference. If one therefore asserts ‘Kepler died in misery,’ there is a presupposition that the name ‘Kepler’ designates something; but it does not follow that the sense (*Sinn*) of the sentence ‘Kepler died in misery’ contains the thought (*Gedanke*) that the name ‘Kepler’ designates something.” This could almost be Kant’s refutation of the ontological argument: existence is not a concept. Frege adds, “If this were the case, the negation would have to run not ‘Kepler did not die in misery’ but ‘Kepler did not die in misery, or the name ‘Kepler’ does not have a reference.’”¹⁰ Note in passing this proof’s method: by negation.

Yet an elementary Kantianism still lingers in the sketch of the table of meanings. In it the expressive and cognitive forms of discourse remain separate, just as the celestial body and its retinal image are in the comparison of the telescope. Wanting-to-know and having-lost are not articulated with one another; art is not seen as “memory” of an identity of the word and the thing of which science is the forgetting and the desperate repetition in the possessive register; knowledge as desire is not articulated with misrecognition as phantasy. No doubt Frege is absolutely right to stay clear of the totalizing dialectics of the sensory into sensible, a dialectics

by which he was hardly tempted as far as we know. Frege nevertheless falls victim to the same psychologism that haunts the *Critique of Pure Reason* (but which Kant will progressively shed as he advanced in the critique of his criticism) when he places *Vorstellung*, and all the power of meaning that poetry attaches to the image, on the side of the individual subject and of a communication-less interiority opposed to an objective and universally observable exteriority supposedly belonging to science. As if this subject and this object were not fragments from a primary explosion of which language was precisely the initial spark; as if reality, far from being that about which there is never anything but unanimity, could be approached otherwise than as that which is lost and must be found again; and as if, on the other hand, poetry and art in general didn't have everything to do not with *Vorstellungen* but with tried-and-true objects. The real and the imaginary are not faculties, nor levels, nor even poles. One certainly cannot avoid falling into this spatializing of Being; it finds justification precisely in the explosion that divides by unifying, since this exteriority and this unity are space itself. But one must continually resist the convenience, even up to the validity of this imagery if we want to recapture what made and continues to make possible the polarization of the object and the subject, of the thing and the image, of science and art, that is our lot.

It would naturally be unfair to ask of Frege's article what it is not meant to give (despite the fact that this "mistake" awaits every text, as it is the general law of reading). But what it does give—the transcendence and the test of commutation—deserves thorough consideration. Frege's double question is: what does it mean to say $a = b$? And under what conditions can one say it? This is the problem of synthetic judgment, here understood in terms of semiology and no longer of criticism, which is how it comes up directly against the problem of arbitrariness and the modern theme of the two meanings of meaning. The answer to the first question is that one says $a = b$ when a and b are expressions that refer to the same object. "The Stagirite philosopher" and "Alexander's tutor" are equivalent expressions because they share the same reference and aim for the same object. One thus sees what for Frege grounds the synthesis of judgment or, as one would say, governs the sentence's formation, namely, the discourse's opening onto what it speaks of. We can replace a phrase with another without betraying the truth when both have the same referent in sight. The synthesizing process at work in the production of discourse must be seen as the movement of the speaker from one observation point to another from where the object seen from the first point will still be recognizable; as the experience of a mobility whose rule is to leave the aim [*visé*] untouched. In this description of synthetic judgment two primary metaphors are seen to come into play, that of moving and of seeing. To speak is to jump from one reference point to another without letting what one is speaking of out of one's sight. The object is constituted as a horizon line toward which the utterances, like glances cast in its direction, will converge. A description remarkably close to the one we can venture, and which Husserl did, of perceptual experience and the constitution of the visual object: a unit of drafts, site where these grips take hold, where these instantaneous caresses take shape, into a thickness in which the object holds back like an X. We recognize the kind of negativity at the heart of Frege's analysis—visual transcendence—and what matters most in this transcendence: the remote gift in the mobility that engenders depth. This is the ekthesis of all synthesis, the originary explosion in which the sequence of linguistic terms stretches out, the $a = b$.

This vertical negativity does not do away with internal conditions regulating the syntagmatic chain, which limit the right to commute a and b , even when they share the same reference. The close study of these proscriptions is of great interest, revealing as it does the presuppositions of a methodology from which we will barely need to stray in what follows. Frege identifies three types of such restrictions, all of which have to do with subordinate clauses. When I state "Copernicus believed that the planetary orbits are circles,"¹¹ my statement is true despite the fact that, taken separately, the subordinate is false, as lacking *Bedeutung*. I can replace this statement with this one: "Copernicus believed that the apparent motion of the sun is produced by the real motion of the Earth," in which this time the subordinate, taken separately, is true (since it possesses a referent), without this substitution altering the truth value (*Wahrheitswert*) of my statement. This particular trait also applies to all subordinate clauses completing verbs such as to say, etc., that express a conviction, an appearance, a goal, an order, a request, or a denial.¹² A first obstacle to a selection determined solely by the consideration of the reference lies therefore in *indirect* speech, where words are no longer taken for what they designate (as is the case in direct speech) but

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rather only for what they signify. Thus in the expression “I believe it is raining,” “it is raining” counts in fact as thought content (*Gedanke*), not as reference to “actual,” real rain. The rule is therefore that the *Bedeutung* of a proper noun (or of a clause) taken indirectly is its *Sinn*. We will return to this rule, which is of the highest importance and comes into play each time language is taken as object.

The second case in which selection finds itself restricted occurs when the subordinate, separated from the entire set of propositions, does not constitute an autonomous thought content. When I declare that “Whoever discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery,”¹³ I am unable to think the subordinate separately. Of course I can utter the clause for its own sake “. . . whoever discovered the elliptical form of the planetary orbits,” but its *Sinn* does not form an independent thought content, as one cannot transform this subordinate into a main clause. It possesses moreover no distinctive *Bedeutung*, thus preventing me from replacing such a subordinate by another with the same reference: since its signification is only a part of the signification of the whole set of propositions, by modifying this part I modify the thought content of the whole. Finally one must isolate the case—the most common in ordinary language—where the thought content is not expressed in the set of propositions taken as whole (main + subordinate), and where, therefore, there is more *Gedanken* than clauses. For example, causality, reservation, or mediation can be suggested by the disposition of clauses without any one proposition, or part thereof, corresponding to it.¹⁴ In this case, the use of the rule of selection with equal *Bedeutung* must come after an analysis of the utterance detecting the presence or not of an implicit notion. Thus in the statement “Napoleon, seeing the threat to his right flank, personally led his Guard against the enemy position” I can replace the relative subordinate clause by another of equal *Bedeutung*—for example, “suffering from liver problems”—only after making sure that no sequential relation holds between the sight of the threat and the decision to take personal command of the Guard.

One notes that the method used by Frege constitutes a kind of experimentation with propositions that is, long before it became known as such, the *commutation* test itself. When am I entitled to replace *a* with *b*? The most basic condition is that both must have the same reference, that is, converge in the depth of discourse’s transcendence. An added condition is that the change in signification resulting from the selection—this time in the linear dimension of discourse—should not produce nonsense. One understands nonsense to be inevitable if, as is the case with certain indirect subordinate clauses, the expression’s reference is identified with its signification; it is inevitable, too, if the subordinate clause’s *Sinn* is an integral part of the *Sinn* of the whole clause or if, conversely, a non-expressed “signification” emanates from the statement’s organization itself. These cases can be subsumed under two overarching instances. The speaker does not speak in her or his name but reports the object of a thought, an utterance, a wish, or an order for whose content she or he does not take responsibility. In the spatial metaphor this translates as: from the observation point 1 with a view on object X, I express what is said, thought, wanted, or ordered from the observation point 2 with regard to this same object. Thus it is clear that the object of my statement is not object X but rather what occurs at point 2, that in this way the actual transcendence of my discourse aims for this point and not for my object, and consequently that the *Bedeutung* of the terms I use to express what occurs at point 2 is indeed these terms’ *Sinn*, that is, the thought content corresponding to them. The sole condition of having to keep one’s sights on object X no longer suffices to measure my movement from one observation point to another; for what is at issue in my discourse is the view of the other observation point on X—that is, the other’s gaze—and to express it requires respecting its perspective, not unlike certain Gothic altarpieces organized according to “inverted” perspective, which would be to the figure what reported speech is to discourse. The method of selection brings out in subordinate clauses that are apparently similar as to their meaning, the radical difference resulting from a change of reference, such as between “the firefighters claim that a house is on fire” and “the firefighters are heading toward a burning house.” It is remarkable that this method, which we know, forty years after Frege, will become instrumental¹⁵ for phonology and structural linguistics, and which was already the whole secret behind Leibniz’s logic,¹⁵ far from confining itself to discourse’s longitudinal dimension, of bringing to the fore only structural invariants—that is, a measured and horizontal negativity, a formal law—first relies on the transcendence of vision, on the reference to the object of which one speaks, and declares as ground rule, as a rule more radical than formal laws, the safeguarding of *intuitus* [immediate contemplation]. The first situation where the freedom of selection is hindered consists

therefore in the fact that actual discourse can include in itself another discourse, aiming for another object.

Here we already begin to see the outlines of the critique of structural linguistics that we will need to develop. Such a critique does not apply to the strategic choice of language level [*niveau de langue*], otherwise perfectly legitimate, but to the double consequence this choice entails, which needs to be circumscribed. On the one hand, the aim [*visée*] of the discourse in question is covered up, the words are no longer taken for their “truth value” but for their *Sinn*. This blocking out of reference is what will simultaneously allow speech to be treated as a chain, the extraction of the units articulated in the latter, and their organization into a system. The closure of language—structuralism’s fundamental hypothesis—is the correlate of this epistemological relation, in which the other’s discourse is not considered according to its own aim [*visée*] but to mine (the linguist’s discourse). Reference as “truth value” is driven out of the language under scrutiny, lodging itself between the scrutinized and the scrutinizing language. The relation between discourse thus objectified and its object is lost in its specificity, which is that of a sighting; at best, this relation can be restituted only as a theory of “context,” which assumes that the scrutinized discourse and its object are of the same nature and can be dealt with according to the same methodology, with the result of doing away with the possibility of all “truth value.” On the other hand, by objectifying the other’s discourse, by making it into an object identical in nature and position to that about which it speaks, one transforms words into signs: one ceases to hear them, one strives to see them, thereby granting them a semantic thickness comparable to that of a sensory sign—which is the opposite effect of that by which the linguistic units are organized in the transparent system. One notes how these two effects are contradictory: as signs, the elements of discourse are opaque; as units deprived of reference, they are mere terms. Signification’s effect of thickness brings the contradiction to a head, by implying that the element of the system is opaque.

As for the other overarching instance that places a limit on the scope of the selection between *a* and *b*, one could say that it consists entirely in the laterality of meaning and in the polysemy of signs. If we sometimes find ourselves unable to replace a subordinate clause with another of equal *Bedeutung* (or truth value), this is because it partakes fully of the statement—for example as the relative clause of a hinge itself unspecified—or because it forms the necessary moment of a meaning not supported expressly by a group of words but that emanates instead from the form itself of discourse, and from the position words and phrases occupy in discourse. In one case the terms await their signification from their articulation in the statement; in the other, on the contrary, this articulation generates lateral, secondary significations (*Nebengedanken*): in the first case the discourse’s organization evacuates polysemy by actualizing one of the word’s *Sinne* and eliminating the others; in the second it maintains or produces polysemy at the next higher level by combining the significations thus obtained. What does this mean? That mobility is the rule of ordinary language; that the point from where the object of which we are speaking is seen and uttered is not static like an observatory, but rather that the signification with which we endow the object is always produced only at the juncture of two operations, one of which consists in eliminating secondary meanings while the other consists in reconstituting them; and that, therefore, once beyond the level of elements, if one focuses no longer on the terms but on the living statement, one must be prepared to concede, after Frege, that “the clause expresses more through its connexion with another than it does in isolation.”¹⁶ And one must acknowledge that a certain movement is not what in language makes it confusing but what makes it possible, just as sight would be impossible if the eye were deprived of its capacity to move around the thing. What impedes selection in the semantic order in which Frege situates himself is, in the final analysis, that in this order one is not really in the presence of the discontinuous, that one is not dealing here—as is the case with distinctive or significative units—with fixed intervals separating and unifying terms that the trajectory of selection could reveal without ambiguity. Here this trajectory, this motion is as good as already integrated into words. It constitutes their polysemy, which could be considered its testimony, since it is the sedimentation upon them of the torsions the speakers inflicted on their initial meaning, of the ebbing and flowing through which the speakers dragged them, only to deposit them, in the lexicon, laden with new significations acquired in the course of these wanderings.¹⁷

Frege’s analysis thus teaches us not only that there are two axes of discourse that intersect perpendicularly on

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linguistic “signs”—the axis of signification and that of designation or reference. It further posits that the observance of the latter is the most elementary rule of truth; it teaches us that a discourse reported through ours finds itself deprived of its transcendence, having itself become the object of the present transcendence; lastly, it suggests that we have but one means of speaking, which is to “walk” to see and make visible, and but one means of knowing, which is to continue to move, trying out new substitutions. In his review of *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, Frege admitted to sharing Husserl’s belief that the Leibnizian definition “*eadem sunt quorum unum potest substitui alteri salva veritate*” [Those things are the same which can be substituted for one another without loss of truth.] does not deserve to be called a definition. But, he adds, “my reasons are different: since all definitions are expressions of identity (*Gleichheit*), identity itself cannot be defined. One could qualify Leibniz’s formulation as an axiom, for it exposes what is the nature of the relation of identity, and this is why it is of the utmost importance.”¹⁸ Yet this “nature” of the relation consists in the movement of substitution or selection; and this movement takes place in a positional space that is not where terms are positioned.

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NOTES

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1. Gottlob Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100 (1892): 25–50. I am indebted to Paul Ricoeur for bringing this text to my attention; cf. his *Cours sur le langage*, Nanterre, mimeographed transcript (1966–1967), folios 24 ff. There exists an English translation of Frege's article: "On Sense and Reference," in *Philosophical Writings*, eds. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), 56–78.
2. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 26; "On Sense and Reference," 57.
3. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 30; "On Sense and Reference," 60.
4. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 27; "On Sense and Reference," 57.
5. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 31; "On Sense and Reference," 61; emphasis J.-FL.
6. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 31; "On Sense and Reference," 61.
7. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 32; "On Sense and Reference," 62.
8. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 32; "On Sense and Reference," 63.
9. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 33: "Das Streben nach Wahrheit also ist es, was uns Überall vom Sinn zu Bedeutung vorzudringen treibt"; "On Sense and Reference," 63.
10. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 40; "On Sense and Reference," 69.
11. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 37; "On Sense and Reference," 66.
12. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 38–39; "On Sense and Reference," 67–68.
13. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 39; "On Sense and Reference," 68.
14. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 46–48; "On Sense and Reference," 75–77.
15. "Eadem sunt quae sibi mutuo substitui possunt, salva veritate." ["Those things are identical of which one can be substituted for the other without loss of truth."] Quoted by Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 35; "On Sense and Reference," 64.
16. Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung," 47; "On Sense and Reference," 76.
17. See Ricoeur, *Cours sur le langage*.
18. Frege, review of Husserl's *Philosophie der Arithmetik*, in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 108 (1894): 320. Husserl will ignore the distinctions put forth by Frege, starting with that between *Bedeutung* and *Sinn*, which he dismisses from the opening lines of the *First Investigation* as contrary to the common practice of using one or the other interchangeably (*Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. 2 [Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1913], 53; *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970], vol. 1, 269). Admittedly, Husserl revives this opposition when he asserts at the end of the same *Investigation* (*Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. 2, §34, 103; *Logical Investigations*, trans. Findlay, vol. 1, 332) that "If we perform the act {make a statement} and live in it, as it were, we naturally refer to its object and not to its meaning [signification/Bedeutung]." It remains nonetheless impossible to align what Husserl calls *Bedeutung* (or *Sinn* indiscriminately) with what Frege called *Sinn*. Signification for Frege is an objective reality, just as it is for Husserl (see the *Fourth Investigation*). However, the former arrives at it by means of an operation (the commutation test) that allows the intervals separating the terms and producing the meaning effect [*effet de sens*] to be determined, while the latter posits signification as a virtual "wanting-to-mean" [*vouloir-dire*] that will be actualized and animated by the "life" of a subject in search of intuition. The thought content will be construed in two, completely different, ways. Thus while there may be a superficial analogy to be drawn between the commutational test and the "imaginary variation" that leads to intuition (*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, vol. 1 (1913), §70)—since in both cases the methodological act consists in transgressing immediacy—with Frege the result of this act, the *concept*, defines itself only through an equation of the $a=b$ type, whereas on the contrary the Husserlian *essence* is a signification grasped "in person" by a positive intuition of the Ego. At work is a kind of phenomenological reversal of the relation between the content and the operational procedure: evidence is not really the *result* of imaginary variations; instead it is what never ceases to direct the activity of "fiction" through its variations. Like Leibniz, Frege attempts to understand signification in terms of a system, as opposed to Husserl, who does not relinquish the Cartesian problematic of *intuitus*.

One could find the same assumption in the status granted the *I* in the *First Investigation*. For linguistics, the *I* performs the basic function of indicator which, once placed in the system of language [*langue*], refers to the actual speaker: it is therefore a term stripped, strictly speaking, of all signification (*Sinn*), since there exists in the system no *b* for which $I = b$ would be true. On the other hand, Husserl will insist on speaking of the *meaning* [signification] of the *I* (*Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. 2, 82 ff; *Logical Investigations*, trans. Findlay, vol. 1, 315 ff) like any other deictic (see the *Sixth Investigation*, § 5). He even attempts to define two "meanings . . . built upon one another": an indicating one, residing in the "deictic intention {*hinweisenden*}" in general, and another, indicated meaning, consisting in the perceptual realization of the first meaning. When Husserl comes to qualify his

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position on the subject (*Logische Untersuchungen*, vol. 2, 21; *Logical Investigations*, trans. Findlay, vol. 2, 685—this is §5 of the *Sixth Investigation*), he will do away with indicated meaning in these terms: “we must not only draw a general distinction between the perceptual and the significant element in the statement of perception; we must also locate *no part of the meaning* [signification] *in the percept itself*.” Yet the idea of a *signification of the deictic* remains intact after this purge. What in fact entitles Husserl to use signification and designation interchangeably is his method of constituting evidence: even though one can indeed intuitively think the “content” of *this* or *I* independently of the actual reference (we then find ourselves with the abstract and empty universality Hegel speaks of in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*), this “content” is not of the same rank as that of a term like *horse* or of a phrase like *let’s go*, since these can be replaced by other terms of the system that defines them. For signification, the relevant aspect is not intuition, but substitution (or commutation).

In his remarkable critique of the *First Investigation* (*La voix et le phénomène* [Paris, P.U.F., 1967]), Jacques Derrida, it seems to me, challenges the wrong part of Husserl’s analysis of indication. No doubt, as Derrida observes, the idea of “indicated signification” is inconceivable and contrary to the principle of the ideality of meaning [*idéauté du sens*]. But, as we saw, Husserl himself abandons the idea. Furthermore, it does not suffice to justify bringing the deictic signifier back to the level of any other signifier of the system—which is in fact not far from what Husserl does. One had better, after Émile Benveniste (in “La nature des pronoms” [1956], “De la subjectivité dans le langage” [1958], and *Problèmes de linguistique générale* [Paris, Gallimard, 1966]), refer its usage to an assumed exteriority, in this case that of the speaker her-or himself: without this dimension of designation, any deictic remains inconceivable. In other words, the deictic is not merely a value within the system, but an element that from the inside refers to the outside: the deictic is not conceivable *in* the system but *through* it. This difference is of the highest importance, and does not imply any return to a “metaphysics of presence,” as Derrida fears. Frege distinguishes the moon (*Bedeutung*), aimed at through the lens of a telescope, from its image (*Sinn*), situated in this telescope’s optical system. The comparison clearly articulates that the moon is no more objective than the image; that the image is no less objective than the moon; and that the only relevant difference lies in the fact that one is inside the (optical and, by analogy, linguistic) system and the other outside of it. With Frege’s moon, and Benveniste’s deictic, thought eludes the Platonic sun of presence. The designated’s *Einseitigkeit* [one-sidedness] renders all *Erfüllung* [fulfillment] illusory.