

**THESES OF PhD DISSERTATION**

NORBERT MAKK

**SYSTEM OF SIGN IN HEGEL**



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## 1. Objectives of the Thesis

My primary objective of this dissertation was to examine the notion of sign in Hegel's system. This examination – being though an example of a structural and systematic analysis of a certain notion – explains the whole systematic coherence via a deep insight into various inquires of different pieces of the Hegelian corpus. During my analysis I focus on an issue: a notion itself can be a system in itself. An interpretation of this system can give a renewed meaning to the whole system, which we normally call: the Hegelian philosophy.

The notion of sign understood as a system leads to a second objective of my dissertation: that is to put the Hegelian understanding of the sign as a system into an external relation. Saussure's scientific research on sign as a system and his strive to found a new discipline of signs greatly influenced the scientific thought of language and renewed the meaning of structuralism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, it is an example of the scientific approach of modernism with a clear visibility on its underlying structure. Based on this a comparison of Hegel's and Saussure's sign theory is not a description of merely different grasps of the same theme anymore but allows us to look at a relation between the notion of metaphysical, encyclopedic science (Hegel) and its modern version (Saussure), which tends to reduce its realms to a specific discipline.

Summarized: objective of my dissertation is to build up a new case to the current international and interdisciplinary Hegel-renaissance via an analysis and comparison of Hegel's and Saussure's sign system, furthermore via an exemplification of their disagreements on starting points of a/the science and their identically holistic structural and functional analysis of sign systems.

Saussure's theory led to a reinterpretation and resuscitation of 19<sup>th</sup> century's structuralism, to which post-structuralism was and is a critical reaction. Therefore contrasting Hegel and Saussure means an interaction of metaphysical idealism and structuralism, moreover post-structuralism. This latter direction was explored only marginally (via Derrida), but it can provide another aspect the Hegel-renaissance at present.

## 2. Methodology

Fundamental method of the dissertation is a detailed analysis of texts, whereby individual sentences and words are analysed step by step with an examination of their internal and external contexts. Any interpretation can build on results of this analytical approach only. In most cases original and/or published texts are used (analysing body texts from Hegel's paragraphs in his *Encyclopaedia*, and using appendices for explanation only), e.g. I prefer to use Saussure's own manuscripts besides his *Introduction to general linguistics*, which is being a disputed source however cannot be omitted because of its eighty-years-influence on semiotics.

## 3. Theses of the achieved results

Notion of sign in Hegel is analysed from more point of views, having a holistic view on the whole system and not only in the *Encyclopaedia* where it is commonly examined but at other places, which are not usual or seem not to be important for an exploration like this at the first sight.

During the analysis a system-wide importance of the notion of the sign will be shown. System of sign – appears in the title as well – means that the notion of sign can be interpreted as a key factor that is not a partial realm within the system, but includes the main principles of the Hegelian system as such.

Language, being the widest and most used area for signs, corresponds with problems and structures of logic in Hegel. Hence logic (Notion) and object (Being) are coincident, therefore language coincides with questions on reality, cognition and mediation as such. Analysis of sign in this way brings logical notions like shining and ground in focus to understand the existence of sign from a logical point of view. Existence of sign, i.e. its principle of sensual shining leads to my third main topic: arts as concrete form of existence of signs.

In Chapter 4 I analyse Saussure's conception of sign from an aspect of comparison with Hegel's system of sign that was analysed above. Result of this examination is an interaction of a self-reduced science of linguistics and Hegel's system of sciences.

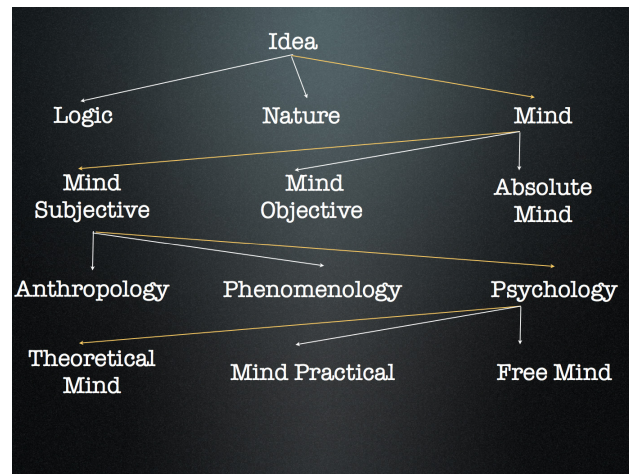
### 3.1 Results of Chapter 1.

**Thesis:** Sign structure in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* is an application of Hegelian logical movements. Signifier corresponds to Shining (Schein), signified to Essence (Wesen).

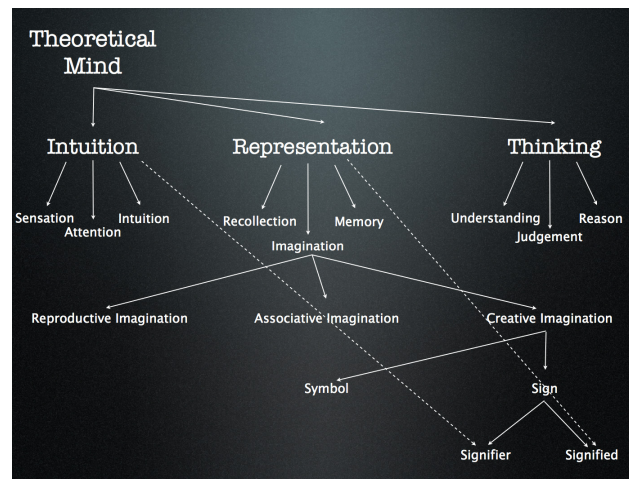
First step was to examine §459 of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*.

Systematic examination of sign that is beginning of its specific science and basic notions can be found under the title of *Psychology*, within the Theoretical Mind. The assignment of sign into psychology fits into the tradition that corresponds signs and symbols with states and impressions of soul.

Within the Theoretical Mind *Representation (Vorstellung)* has three main parts: *Recollection (Erinnerung)*, *Imagination (Einbildungskraft)* and *Memory (Gedächtnis)*. *Creative Imagination (Phantasie)* is a part of Imagination, which is called as Imagination that creates symbols and signs. Sign is the supreme form of Imagination: as such it means the essence of Imagination.



Structure of sign in Hegel consists of two parts in a traditional way: signifier and signified. Signifier refers to signified via its stored meaning in Memory (and not by any of its attributes). All this is described as the operation of the internal structure of the Theoretical Mind: the signifiers exists via the operation of Intuition, the signified via the operation of Imagination and meaning via the operation of Memory.



Theoretical mind has a circular structure: Intuition, Imagination and Thinking are connected to each other and Thinking refers back to Intuition again and again: its content is originating from the sensual source. However intuition makes thinking its object: intuition can look at the notional gestalts without sensuality (this is the place of mediated intellectual intuition in Hegel). Additionally and most importantly the thinking determinates the intuition, hence thinking is primordial: Being is Notion means that there is no other Being than Being that is Notion in itself. There is no duality, meaning a discrepant existence of intuitions and beings in existence and our perception and thinking of those. Notion is namely preceding Being: Being is only an extremity, boundary of Notion. Thinking is therefore preceding Intuition, and Intuition is only an extremity, boundary of Thinking.

Sign is a basic structure in Hegel's philosophy, its importance is not restricted to a certain signifying activity or to a sphere of communication. Result of the first chapter is that Hegel's encyclopaedic concept of sign is based on other structures in his Logic, however sign as such is not a logical entity: in Logic there is no place for sensual shining.

### 3.2 Results of Chapter 2

**Thesis:** The structure of essence in Hegel's logic builds the ground for the sign in the sphere of mind. The shining/appearance is identified with the signifier, the signified is identified with the ground. The sign itself proves to be the immediate mediator.

The intuition used as a sign shows the structure of shining: it shines but this shining ceases and remains (*aufheben*) with something else showing up. The essence shines through the intuition that is used as sign. This corresponds to the self-reflection of essence: to that discrepancy that is the negation of negation: the unessential (the shining, the signifier) and the essential (signified) are the elements of one structure, the same way as the shining is within the essence, too. I do not want to say here that the elements of the sign (signifier and signified) would be external to each other. Their essence is to create the actuality of the intelligence. They go through those stages of reflection that are necessary for creating the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of language. The mere sign is only a shining, and its reflection is the one that signifies something which establishes its ground as well: the ground of intuition and representation is the same: the positioning intelligence. The sign-relation diverges from the actual sign-creation and will appear (*Erscheinung*), gains existence. Shining's perfect form is appearance, in which the common ground becomes visible. The sign-relation that is getting more and more to positivity (as sound, speech and: language) becomes more actual (*Wirklichkeit*) and at last it will be substantialized (*Substanz*) in memory.

The logical ground of sign-relation is: Ground (*Grund*). In the sphere of Mind the Intelligence is the substance, on which base the signification happens. For Ground is the identity of essence that went through the difference and then goes into existence, therefore inside the Intelligence Ground corresponds to the Imagination, which builds the signified. The signified is the identity that went through the difference, and which is the internal content of the Intelligence, however, determined by the Intuition. The Imagination (that is signified by a sign) is the Ground, on which basis the signification can happen. But this Ground is not the final, solid ground, but something mediated, something self-mediated: therefore the signified is something that stands in itself, and is not questioned anymore. The chain of signification breaks here and arrives at the actual signified, which signifies itself in itself.

The self-positing signified repeats the sign structure in itself, but this is only an internal shining – actually this is the self-positing actual ground in which the signifier gets to its appearance. This is the end-point of signification, the Imagination, that is fully a property of the Intelligence, in which all reflection volatilizes. The signifiers are reflecting to something else: to the signified, while the signified accepts and includes this reflection and posits itself in itself. This identity, self-identity, which

appears as a bound ground, as a bound, determined imagination is the object of the signifier. This is an answer to a common question of the sign-theories: what makes the signifier and the signified distinct – and at which point can be ensured that the chain or process of signifying arrives at its signified? This regards the process of signification arrives at the signified if the reflection that reveals the signification becomes its own object. It can be described as a moment where we are not asking and exploring for any further meaning, but that is ours: the mediated content is immediately ours (this is the understanding of the sign). The sign is the immediate mediator, because the reflection of the mediation becomes the reflection of self-mediation within the signified.

Summarized: during the analysis of the ground I proved that the ground of signifying is the Imagination. Although this ground is not a solid fundament but a mediated and in itself mediating self-reflection or self-positing.

The existence of sign systems is not actual in the Intelligence in itself or in the logical Idea, but because of the sensual shining principle it reveals itself in the highest regions of mental (spiritual) activity: in absolute mind. This revelation's most spectacular realm is art, which is investigated in Chapter 3.

### 3.3 Results of Chapter 3

**Thesis:** The Hegelian philosophy of art aligns the artworks into a series from symbol to sign. The specific, classical sculptural gestalt of the Greek Gods is actualizing the nice individuality via an immediate mediation, creating a third form of mediation besides symbol and sign.

The sign proves to be the immediate mediator, which carries out mediation while it does not become thematic, i.e. remains immediate: its disappearing and unessential existence shows the essential. One can speak of sign (in contrast to symbol) only if this disappearance happens without reminiscences. The artworks are formations that are not totally disappearing in their signifying that is carried out by themselves. The individual pieces of artworks are differing from each other in a scale from symbol to sign, i.e. in a scale of this disappearance.

It can be stated that the idea of arts, the ideal is an individual creation in Hegel's view, and appears as nice individuality. This creation is a "thing", viz. a "dual



thing”, which contains several oppositions. It is dual in a sense that it is a “sensual shining of the idea,” where the sensual being and ideal content stand opposite to each other. The second duality’s first side is this mentioned first duality itself (sensual being vs. ideal content). The second side of the second duality is that this dual structure is a unite entity, in which the sensual side proves to be shining, that gives up the immediation of its being.

Investigating the phenomena of arts on a horizon of sign-theory it can be stated that this structure is a higher actuality of the sign in the absolute mind. The sign system does not create an intersubjective language, which is a mediation in the realm of the finite, but in the artwork the infinite turns up: the artwork mediates the infinite in its own finite reflection. The “absolute realm” is the realm of freedom, which includes the theoretical and practical level as well. The artwork as sign can be understood in front of this background.

The distinction that is made by Hegel between sign and symbol in the *Encyclopaedia* is an important factor in the philosophy of arts as well. The symbol is symbolic because it has a natural and not arbitrary connection to the signified. Opposite to that the sign is arbitrary and loses its own being and separateness. The artworks are quasi-signs (symbols or signs), but their sensual side cannot fully disappear, because then they would not be capable of fulfilling the requirement to be the “sensual shining of the idea”. The ideal form of the artworks, the Greek statue of God is a third mode of quasi-signs within the realm of arts: it is the immediate mediator, where the signifier is the signified and the mediation happens immediately (God is present in the statue). This form of artwork that is posited only in the Greek ancient times winds up the boundaries of the Hegelian system, because of its strong accent of immediation.

Summarized: the system of artworks is constructed by Hegel via the difference between sign and symbol. Each individual piece of artwork is aligned into a matrix that shows a degree of its symbolism and position to be a sign. However all artwork needs to remain in realm of the sensual, therefore the art can never reach the clear spirituality of sign, the notional form of thinking, but remains intuitional to its last bit.

### 3.4 Results of Chapter 4

**Thesis:** Hegel's and Saussure's starting points are unlike, however their specific statements on the linguistic sign coincide. The 'difference' building the identity of Saussure's notion of sign can be grasped by Hegelian logical categories, moreover, it proves to be the underlying structure of the Hegelian notion of sign as well.

In this Chapter besides the *Introduction to general linguistics* I analyze certain Saussurean manuscripts and notes that were published recently, mainly because while the *Cours* deals with Saussure's programmatic epistemology (preconditions of a possible linguistic science), the notes show a (fragmentary) picture of Saussure's epistemology (critics of science) and more indirect traces of his analytic reflections of language.

In my analysis I point out that the Saussurean and Hegelian understanding of sign, system of signs and their statements do not bring up critical differences. The structure of the sign, its attributes are to be corresponded in the two conceptions. In Saussure the opposition of signifier-signified relies on empirical facts and observations, while in Hegel the specific notions, their relations and attributes are grounded by other parts of the system. Saussure's model is basically naïve realistic, i.e. it presupposes the observer's (scientific) consciousness and the world of observed phenomena. Between the two there is the relation of observation, however they lack of a common principle. The Hegelian world is unitary: the reason acts in the world, the individual objects are certain formations of the idea, but showing a fundamental unity and community with the observer. Therefore it is possible in Hegel that the observer, empirical sciences are not just standing next to each other, building up an agglomerate of sciences, but are part of the self-reflection of the idea: they recognize the general principle: the self-mediation of the final idea in their observed objects, building up a circle within the philosophical science, that consists of such circles.

The Saussurean system of signs cannot be interpreted as a mirror of reality, but it is more constructive: the interpretation, the functional understanding of signs is creating the "things". The "things" are the entities, that cannot exist without their signifier component. In Saussure only those entities are real for the linguist that are real for the speaker as well. The correspondence of thought and vocal picture is a

deep, world-constructing power. We are not observing a world that is preexistent by a sign system, but the sign system itself creates this world. This can be stated as the Copernican Turn of Saussure's sign theory, which opposes the nomenclatorial concept of language. Saussure's theory is a kind of an intersubjective epistemology that determines the existence of a linguistic entity by the outcome of individual subjects' judgments on identity. The 'real' (*Réalité*) in Saussure's linguistic philosophy (which is the search for the axioms for the science of language) is the identity of the linguistic entity, acknowledged at least by the subject. This identity is the difference from identity of other entities.

The deepest theoretical conjunction in Hegel and Saussure can be grasped in the structure of the identity of the linguistic sign. The difference that gives identity to Saussure's sign can be formulated by Hegelian logical categories, moreover these categories are constituting the Hegelian internal structure of the Hegelian sign's notion. The Hegelian logical notions can determine the relations in Saussure's philosophy of language. This determination can be seen as a metaphysical fundament that was rejected consciously by Saussure himself via his reduction on thematic of his science of language.

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- 1999 The Linguistic Forms of the Hegelian Idea, Diploma. (in Hungarian) pp. 1-150. o.
- 2001 “Hegel lesen -- Exemplarische Darstellung der Analyse des §459 der Enzyklopädie”, in: Vermittlung und Versöhnung, eds: Quante, Rózsa, Münster. pp. 171-187.
- 2002 „Das Zeichen in Existenz”, in: Hegel-Jahrbuch-2002, Berlin. pp. 170-173.
- 2003 „How to read Hegel?” (in Hungarian) in: Az aktuális Hegel, szerk. Rózsa Erzsébet és Michael Quante, Debrecen. 168-186. o.
- 2004 „Language of Arts in Hegel” (in Hungarian) in: Nyelvfilozófia Locke-tól Kierkegaard-ig, ed: Neumer Katalin, Budapest. 168-186. o.
- 2005 „Semiotik einer Metaphysik?” in: Hegel-Jahrbuch 2005, Berlin. pp. 171-174.
- 2006 The nice individuality, (in Hungarian) Hegel Konferencia, Debrecen.