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Chapter 4:

Condensation

> "Forgetting into the structure" – discourses use human memories
> to produce such precarious things as the system of language

3. Forgetting and condensation

> "It is possible to live almost without memory, indeed, to live happily, as the animals show us; but without forgetting, it is utterly impossible to live at all."[1] And: "One forgets not by cancellation but by superimposition, not by producing absence but by multiplying presences."[2]

Between these two statements the space opens up which will now be explored. We must first realize that in most theories forgetting is seen as a kind of accident, as a slipping away or fading, in short: as a loss.[3] The normal case of preservation is contrasted with forgetting as a nuisance, a weakness that must be avoided and that can be kept within tolerable limits through discipline or training; learning is thought of as an enrichment, forgetting correspondingly as a loss of mental economy.

And both Nietzsche[4] and Eco definitively rule out an ars oblivionalis.[5] Nietzsche, however, and this is the decisive break, fundamentally re-evaluated forgetting. In his frontline position against historicism, he emphasized that the past, indiscriminately piled up, threatens to suffocate the

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[1] Nietzsche, Friedrich: On the Utility and Liability of History for Life [1874]. In: The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Vol. 2, Unfashionable Observations. Stanford (Cal.): Stanford UP 2001, p. 89.

[2] Eco, Umberto: An Ars Oblivionalis? Forget it! In: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, Vol. 103, Nr. 3, May 1988, p. 260.

[3] „Some men in the presence of considerable stimulus have no memory owing to disease or age, just as if a stimulus or a seal were impressed on flowing water. With them the design makes no impression because they are worn down like old walls in buildings, or because of the hardness of that which is to receive the impression. For this reason the very young and the old have poor memories; they are in a state of flux, the young because of their growth, the old because of their decay. For a similar reason neither the very quick nor the very slow appear to have good memories; the former are moister than they should be, and the latter harder; with the former the picture has no permanence, with the latter it makes no impression." (Aristotle: De memoria et reminiscentia. Quoted from Yates, Frances A.: The Art of Memory [1966]. In: Selected Works, Vol III, London/NY: Routledge 1999, p. 33).

[4] "But he [the man] also wondered about himself and how he was unable to learn to forget and always clung to what was past; no matter how far or how fast he runs, that chain runs with him." (Nietzsche, On the Utility…, op. cit., p. 87 (add.. H.W.)).

[5] Eco on a questionable semiotic basis... (op. cit., pp. 255ff.).

present; a targeted aggression is therefore necessary in order to master the overpowering past, and forgetting appears as a dispensation that opens up the necessary space for action in the first place.

In the search for theories that expand on this idea, we once again come across psychoanalysis, and now the Freudian model of the 'Mystic Writing-Pad.'[6] And at the same time we have to realize: Although the Mystic Writing-Pad is one of Freud's most prominent ideas, has been quoted endlessly and, as Assmann shows, constitutes the second major field of metaphor within memory theories alongside the 'storehouse-metaphor,'[7] neither memory theory nor media theory have actually been able to integrate it into their models; and in particular a semiotic interpretation of the 'Mystic Writing-Pad' is still lacking.[8]

Freud begins with a question directly related to media theory:

> "All the forms of auxiliary apparatus which we have invented for the improvement or intensification of our sensory functions are built on the same model as the sense organs themselves or portions of them: for instance, spectacles, photographic cameras, ear-trumpets. Measured by this standard, devices to aid our memory seem particularly imperfect, since our mental apparatus accomplishes precisely what they cannot: it has an unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions and nevertheless lays down permanent – even though not unalterable – memory-traces of them. As long ago as in 1900 I gave expression in 'The Interpretation of Dreams' to a suspicion that this unusual capacity was to be divided between two different systems (or organs of the mental apparatus). According to this view, we possess a system Pcpt.-Cs., which receives perceptions but retains no permanent trace of them, so that it can react like a clean sheet to every new

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[6] Freud, Sigmund: A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad' [1925]. In: F., S.: General Psychological Theory. Papers on Metapsychology. NY: McMillan 1963, pp. 207-212.

[7] "In a concise, groundbreaking essay on the subject, Harald Weinrich has established that in the field of memoria metaphorics there is not, as one might assume, a colorful, unmanageable abundance of images. In his opinion, there are only two central metaphors: the wax tablet and the magazine. They have their specific origins and belong to certain traditions. The magazine metaphor comes from the context of sophistry and rhetoric, the pragmatic development of language skills and memory capacity within the framework of a learnable technique of persuasive speech. The wax tablet metaphor elaborated by Plato, on the other hand, refers not to an artificial but to natural memory. This appears as a mysterious divine gift and is located in the innermost part of the human soul. Weinrich summarizes his thesis with the following words: 'The duality of the memoria image fields is a fact of occidental intellectual history. It is probably connected with the duality of the phenomenon of memoria; the magazine metaphors are mainly gathered around the pole of memory, whereas the table metaphors are gathered around the pole of remembrance.'" (Assmann, Aleida: Zur Metaphorik der Erinnerung. In: A., A.; Harth, Dietrich (ed.): Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer 1991, p. 13 (transl. H. W.)).
"A particularly interesting metaphor of memory is the palimpsest. It is the book without a fixed form, the dynamized book. Thomas De Quincey has precisely described the technical process in which the expensive parchment successively becomes the carrier of various inscriptions: What in antiquity bore the manuscript of a Greek tragedy could be purified by careful preparation and in late antiquity accommodate an allegorical legend, in the Middle Ages a chivalric epic. Contemporary chemistry and philology in combination were able to follow the path of oblivion in the opposite direction. [...] De Quincey sees this as an image for the retrograde explosive power of memory [...]. Freud's description of the Mystic Writing-Pad as a model of memory comes very close to De Quincey's model of the palimpsest. [...] The writing metaphor is much more complicated than the memory metaphor. The topological order of the magazine suggests organization, economy, availability – all aspects that artificial memory has over natural memory. The imagery of writing and overwriting, of retaining and deleting [...] leads away from the artificial back to the constitution of natural memory. In the artificial memory of mnemonics, storage and retrieval are symmetrical [...]. In natural memory they fall apart. [...] Between writing and reading, distortions, shifts, obscurations and, last but not least, forgetting occur." (Ibid., pp. 19-22 (transl. H. W.)).

[8] Lacan and Derrida, of course, will have to be discussed.

perception; while the permanent traces of the excitations which have been received are preserved in 'mnemic systems' lying behind the perceptual system."[9]

Freud is thus laboring over a riddle; while the technical writing systems basically have only one capacity and are either capable of unlimited recording (slate) or of storing permanent traces (paper), the psychic apparatus seems to be able to do both; and the division into two organs of the psychic apparatus, Pcpt.-Cs. and memory system, cannot satisfy as long as it cannot be clarified how the two interact.

In the Mystic Writing-Pad he now finds the first technical medium that also combines both functions. The familiar construction of wax plate and cover sheet, today usually connected by a sliding mechanism, only appears to completely erase the current entries because, as Freud observed, permanent traces remain in the wax.

> "We need not be disturbed by the fact that in the Mystic Pad no use is made of the permanent traces of the notes that have been received; it is enough that they are present. There must come a point at which the analogy between an auxiliary apparatus of this kind and the organ which is its prototype will cease to apply. It is true, too, that, once the writing has been erased, the Mystic Pad cannot 'reproduce' it from within; it would be a mystic pad indeed if, like our memory, it could accomplish that. None the less, I do not think it is too far-fetched to compare the celluloid and waxed paper cover with the system Pcpt.-Cs. and its protective shield, the wax slab with the unconscious behind them, and the appearance and disappearance of the writing with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception. […] It is as though the unconscious stretches out feelers, through the medium of the system Pcpt.-Cs., towards the external world and hastily withdraws them as soon as they have sampled the excitations coming from it. […] If we imagine one hand writing upon the surface of the Mystic Writing-Pad while another periodically raising its covering sheet from the wax slab, we shall have a concrete representation of the way in which I tried to picture the functioning of the perceptual apparatus of our mind."[10]

Freud is aware that the technical metaphor has clear limits. The permanent traces have no function within the system and, as the text itself notes, they can no longer reach the surface on their own. In this respect, the image describes the path from perception to memory, but not the path that runs in the opposite direction; this path seems blocked, and a recovery of memory content in the process of remembering seems to fall out of the model.

If this is not a simple defect in the model, we will have to ask what thesis or intuition lies behind the chosen arrangement. And now three determinations become important. Firstly, it is striking that Freud does not describe memory as a lucid coexistence of memory traces, but rather identifies it with the unconscious in precisely the opposite way. The permanent traces are withdrawn from consciousness, and it is therefore only logical that the technical metaphor blocks recovery too.

Secondly, this corresponds with the fact that the permanent traces in the wax layer overlap and are therefore no longer decipherable as such; this, too, no longer seems to be a defect of the picture, but rather a direct part of it. And thirdly and finally, the motif of superimposition points beyond the text itself: superimposition, addition or accumulation would be techniques that could moderate between the overwhelming multiplicity of perceptions and the necessarily limited capacity of memory; thus, the transition to an economic conception becomes possible, even if this is not formulated in the text itself, as already mentioned.

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[9] Freud, A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,' op. cit., p. 208.

[10] Ibid., pp. 211f.

The three determinations mentioned are particularly interesting when the question is not about memory but about forgetting. While psychoanalysis normally links forgetting and the unconscious to the process of repression and is interested in the reasons that have caused repression in individual cases and collectively, a completely different understanding of the unconscious is indicated here: the unconscious appears as a precipitate that perception always and inevitably leaves behind, and almost independently of repression, as the immobilized equivalent of life's events:

> "On the Mystic Pad the writing vanishes every time the close contact is broken between the paper which receives the stimulus and the wax slab which preserves the impression. This agrees with a notion which I have long had about the method in which the perceptual apparatus of our mind functions, but which I have hitherto kept to myself. My theory was that cathectic innervations are sent out and withdrawn in rapid periodic impulses from within into the completely pervious system Pcpt.-Cs. So long as that system is cathected in this manner, it receives perceptions (which are accompanied by consciousness) and passes the excitation on to the unconscious mnemic systems; but as soon as the cathexis is withdrawn, consciousness is extinguished and the functioning of the system comes to a standstill."[11]

To repeat: this is a very different conception of forgetting than the common understanding of psychoanalysis normally assigns to it. It is not individual events that are forgotten (and others are preserved in a memorable or potentially memorable way), but basically all perceptions are 'forgotten' into the unconscious. And this unconscious, one can add with the image of the wax tablet, receives its imprint in this process.

Forgetting into the structure is thus the formula that I would like to propose for the following considerations, taken from the text of the Mystic Writing-Pad. It forms a bridge both to Lacan's language-theoretical considerations and back to the data universe and the thesis that it could be a matter of a 'mnemopathic' overall arrangement;[12] if forgetting does not mean losing, the initial question is already posed differently and the possibility of describing forgetting as a discursive process emerges; a concept that can possibly be introduced into a media theory or semiotics.

On this path, a second category of Freud must first be considered, a second pillar on which a 'theory of forgetting' can be based. What is more than astonishing about the Mystic Writing-Pad text is that although Freud makes the connection to the interpretation of dreams, and the Mystic Writing-Pad almost forces an association with superimposition/addition/accumulation, the concept of *condensation*, which is central to the Interpretation of Dreams, is not used.

The concept itself is so well known that a presentation is largely superfluous. Nevertheless, it seems useful to reiterate some of Freud's definitions, especially since a very self-serving use of the model will be made in the following.

In condensation, Freud had discovered one of the decisive mechanisms of dream work.

> "The first thing which becomes clear to the investigator in the comparison of the dream content with the dream thoughts is that a tremendous work of condensation has taken place. The dream is reserved, paltry, and laconic when compared with the range and copiousness of the dream thoughts. The dream when written down fills half a page; the analysis, in which the dream thoughts are contained, requires six, eight, twelve times as much space."[13]

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[11] Ibid., pp. 211f.

[12] (Note on translation:) The book makes a contribution to the media theory of computers; and the first two sections of the chapter describe the Internet and its ideal of indiscriminate storage as a 'mnemopathic' fantasy...

[13] Freud, Sigmund: The Interpretation of Dreams [1900]. NY: McMillan 1913, p. 261.

The scope of the term is initially limited to the dream. But what does the concept of condensation mean precisely? Freud observes that the elements that appear in dreams often have to be assigned not a single but several meanings; several dream thoughts have thus entered into the same element of the dream and have found their common expression there. Accordingly, 'condensation' initially means the process that draws together a multitude of dream thoughts into a single dream element.

Condensation thus means psychic effort (it is not for nothing that Freud speaks of dream 'work'), necessary for distorting the dream thoughts to such an extent that they can pass the censorship and appear on the surface of the dream;[14] its main result, however, is a tremendously economical form of representation.[15]

If the level of the represented (the dream thoughts) and the level of the representation (the manifest dream content) diverge, the question arises as to how the two are structurally connected. And Freud finds the answer once again in the field of association psychology. As in the 'Psychopathology of Everyday Life,' he investigates the thought connections that motivated the dream elements in individual concrete cases and reconstructs them as a network that supports the individual elements.

It turns out that each element of the dream is connected by manifold associations with other elements of the dream, with remnants from the day's life, linguistic associations, with wishes and hidden preferences; and it often turns out that dream elements form "a common mean", a kind of a compromise between two dream thoughts,

> "taken over unchanged from an indifferent impression and bound up with the psychologically significant experience by means of the most abundant associations. Not only the combined idea […] however, but also each of the separate elements […] penetrates deeper and deeper into the confused tangle of the dream thoughts."[16]
> "[The individual element] is a veritable nucleus, the centre for the dream of many trains of thought […]. Here we find ourselves in a thought factory, in which, as in the 'Weaver's Masterpiece': 'One tread moves thousands of threads,/ The little shuttles fly back and forth,/ The threads flow on unseen,/ One stroke ties thousands of knots.' […] [The impression emerges] that the elements […] have been accepted in the dream content because they were able to show the most extensive connections with the dream thoughts, and thus represent nuclei in which a great number of dream thoughts come together, and because they have manifold significance for the dream interpretation. The fact upon which this explanation is based may be expressed in another form: Every element of the dream content turns out to be over-determined […]."[17]

The recourse to the psychology of association and the image of the network changes the substance of the concept of condensation. The economic idea of a quantitative accumulation becomes a structural one. And if each 'node' receives its weight and meaning through the number of links it attracts, this is so directly reminiscent of the structuralist image of language that a transition to linguistic theory seems almost compelling at this point. Freud himself offers the connection when he writes:

> "The condensing activity of the dream becomes most tangible when it has selected words and names as its object. In general words are often treated as things by the dream,

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[14] Ibid., pp. 283ff.

[15] Emphasized above all in Derrida, Jacques: Writing and Difference [1967]. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1978, pp. 200, 210ff.

[16] Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, op. cit. p. 264f.; see also p. 276.

[17] Ibid., pp. 265f. (add. H.W.).

and thus undergo the same combinations, displacements, and substitutions, and therefore also condensations, as ideas of things. The results of such dreams are comical and bizarre word formations."[18] And, even more clearly: "A word being a point of junction for a number of conceptions, it possesses, so to speak, a predestined ambiguity, and neuroses […] take advantage of the conveniences which words offer for the purposes of condensation and disguise quite as readily as the dream."[19]

Nevertheless, the association with language should be put on hold in favor of a further definition that Freud takes from another medium, namely photography. He observes that dreams often superimpose faces and persons and draw together the characteristics of different persons in a single one; and this reminds him of Galton's photographic experiments. "I have adopted the method employed by Galton in producing family portraits, by which he projects both pictures upon one another, whereupon the common features stand out in stronger relief, while those which do not coincide neutralize one another and become obscure in the picture." And he concludes: "The construction of collective and composite persons is one of the chief resources of the activity of dream condensation."[20]

The association with Galton brings two new features to the concept of condensation. On the one hand, it is a purely mechanical process; a photographic plate is exposed to different but 'similar' motifs, which are superimposed and form a new, common content when added together. "Finally," writes Lorenz, "Galton presents the definitive record: the mixture of 100 faces condensed into one."[21] The place of accumulation is the photographic plate. This mechanical memory is parallelized with the dream mechanism of condensation; a very simple mechanical process is held up as a mirror to the hitherto irreducibly psychic process of condensation, with the result that the distance between the two is reduced and the condensation itself moves into the vicinity of technical/mechanical processes.[22]

The decisive innovation, however, is a different one. When Freud says that the similarities emerge in the superimposition, while the differences are erased and disappear, this means that the material undergoes a fundamental transformation in the condensation. What appears as a relatively unspectacular effect on the photographic plate essentially means that although concretes enter into the process of condensation, the result of the condensation is not something concrete as well, but an abstracted representation that favors similarities and has said goodbye to differences. Freud's assertion, then, is that a mechanical accumulation (repetition) gives rise to an effect of generalization or idealization. And this is indeed a point. The possibility now arises of thinking processes of abstraction in general according to this pattern; and when Galton himself had written: "The ideal faces obtained by the method of mixed photography seem to have much in common with the so-called abstract [...] ideas",[23] another new and unexpectedly direct reference to the theory of language opens up here.

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[18] Ibid., p. 277.

[19] Ibid., p. 315.

[20] Ibid., pp. 274f.; see also p. 297ff.

[21] Lorenz, Thorsten: Der kinematographische Un-Fall der Seelenkunde. In: Kittler, F. A.; et. al. (eds.): Diskursanalysen 1. Medien. Opladen 1987, p. 111 (transl. H. W.); "[Marey's] technique also consists of multiple exposures on a fixed plate." (Ibid., p. 119 (transl. H. W.)).

[22] Lorenz's argument amounts to reducing the Freudian concept to its technical/media counterpart (…"the photo-technician Freud simply read his Galton closely"…, ibid., p. 115 (transl. H. W.)); as with Kittler, technology is seen as antecedent, the historical parallel development of psychoanalysis and media technology definitively brought together on the terrain of the latter. Even if one does not share this project, it may be worth pursuing the functional parallels, and all the more so as Freud himself repeatedly used technical metaphors. "A symbolic order is represented technically in order to gain a model for its functioning." (Lorenz, op. cit., p. 113 (transl. H. W.)).

[23] Lorenz quotes Galton (Lorenz, op. cit., p. 113).

And finally, Freud has a model in which the idea of an associative network and the aspect of quantitative accumulation come together. This is the concept of facilitation ['Bahnung'[24]], which Freud conceived as early as 1895 in 'Project for a Scientific Psychology.'[25] Still strongly oriented towards the scientific ideal of objectivity, Freud had written:

> "According to psych[ological] knowledge, the memory of an experience (that is, its continuing operative power) depends on a factor which is called the magnitude of the impression and on the frequency with which the same impression is repeated. Translated into theory: Facilitation depends on the [magnitude of the impression] $Q\acute{\eta}$ which passes through the neurone in the excitatory process and on the number of repetitions of the process."[26]

Derrida has shown that the concept of facilitation brings a new connotation of violence to the concept of the associative network.[27] Facilitation and path-breaking presuppose a resistance to be overcome, and there is a connection both to the 'protective shield' ['Reizschutz'] in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,'[28] and to Nietzsche, who famously traced memory back to pain and painful engraving.[29]

A short-sighted reference to neurological facts, as is often attempted, is certainly inadmissible at this point as well.[30] However, the idea that existing pathways are reinforced by use is an idea that can also be incorporated into very abstract models; and it is relevant above all because it assumes an interrelationship between use and system, even more clearly than Galton's composite photography. If Galton already layered individual events into an overall result, repetition now emerges as a form building force. The network of associations appears as the result of processes of formation, and the 'condensation' as a process in which a quantitative process becomes structurally relevant.[31]

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[24] (Note on translation:) The German term 'Bahnung' contains 'Bahn' which means lane or path; and the English version of Derrida's 'L'écriture et la différance' translates Freud's ‚Bahnung' accordingly as „breaching (lit. path-breaking)" (Derrida, Writing and difference, op. cit., p. 200).

[25] Freud, Sigmund: Project for a Scientific Psychology [1895]. In: The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 1, London: Hogart 1991, pp. 283-398.

[26] Ibid. p. 300 (add. H. W.).

[27] Derrida, Writing and Difference, op. cit., pp. 200f., 214ff.

[28] Freud, Sigmund: Beyond the Pleasure Principle [1920]. In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 18, London: Hogarth 1955, pp. 7-64.

[29] See also: Nietzsche, Friedrich: The Genealogy of Morals [1887]. In: The Complete Works, Vol 13, Edinburgh /London: Foulis 1913, pp. 65f.

[30] „The filter characteristics of the axion would vary with its diameter which in turn might be a function of the recency of signals passing down that axion […]." (Dreyfus, Hubert L.: What Computer Can't Do. A Critique of Artificial Reason. NY: Harper & Row 1972, p. 74; Such arguments are particularly critical when direct conclusions are drawn from the brain to the computer (see for example: Minsky, Marvin: The Society of Mind [1985]. NY: Simon & Schuster 1988, p. 213, 314).

[31] It should be remembered that Freud regards the psychic mechanism as a whole as the result of a layering: "As you know, I am working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification (Aufeinanderschichtung); the material present in the form of memory-traces (Erinnerungsspuren) being subjected from time to time to a rearrangement (Umordnung) in accordance with fresh circumstances to a retranscription (Umschrift)." (Freud to Fliess 20. 10. 1895, quoted from Derrida, Writing and Difference, op. cit. p. 206). "When a town becomes a city or a child grows into a man, town and child disappear in the city and in the man. Only memory can sketch in the old features in the new picture; in reality the old materials and forms have been replaced by new ones. It is different in the case of psychic evolution. One can describe this unique state of affairs only by saying that every previous stage of development is preserved next to the following one from which it has evolved; the succession stipulates a co-existence […]." (Freud, Sigmund: Reflections of War and Death [1915]. NY: Moffat 1918, pp. 30f.

Now we need to add up. The considerations on condensation and the Mystic Writing-Pad, erasure, accumulation, superimposition and generalization can be drawn together to form a theory of memory activity which, it should no longer come as a surprise, focuses on forgetting.

Condensation would not be a mechanism of dream work alone, but the entire interaction between perception and memory could be described according to the pattern of condensation. The two systems of the Mystic Writing-Pad seem to be connected by a mechanism that reworks the abundance of current perceptions into a new, concise and economical form of mental representation. Accordingly, 'memory' is the place where current perceptions are transformed into structure. Not selection,[32] but compression seems to determine the process, the compression itself does not seem to be an irreducibly qualitative process; and finally forgetting is not losing, but becoming unrecognizable in the compression.

'Forgetting into the structure' was the formula I proposed above; it may have gained, if not evidence, at least some probability. It has the advantage that it allows a connection to the consideration about collective memory and to the question posed there as to how process turns into structure (and structure into process) in the course of tradition building. It allows the connection to the problem of how speech (as a practice) and language (as a system) relate to each other; and, by opening up a transition to semiotic, linguistic and media theoretical considerations, it suggests a de-psychologization of the model.[33]

The next section is intended to clarify whether a systematic connection between condensation and language can be shown. One point, however, should be made first; if it was said above that Freud regards condensation as, among other things, a process of generalization, then there is also a bridge to those schema theories that have already played a role in connection with Halbwachs.[34] What has been outlined suggests the idea that all idealizations, all 'abstract ideas' could in fact have emerged from a process of accumulation and erasure. If perception constantly has to deal with different concretions, it would be the task of memory to superimpose these concretions, to 'condense' them and finally to transfer them into those schemata which, as Halbwachs shows, form the bulk of the contents of memory. The schemata would be the result of a describable process of abstraction; what would fall by the wayside, as in the case of Galton's composite photographs, would be what originally distinguished the individual perceptions as individual ones.

Only from this generalization, I think, do the references emerge that make the concept of condensation really interesting for a media theory. First of all, the reference to Gestalt theory, which has shown that all perception is Gestalt perception, i.e. a re-cognition based on visual schemata with which the recipient confronts the perceived. As soon as one asks, with Kittler, how gestalts arise,[35] one comes into the immediate vicinity of Galton's composite photography, for the formation of visual schemata is only conceivable in a process of iteration, in the repeated perception of similar objects. 'Accumulation,' 'generalization through superimposition,' and 'condensation' thus also seem to dominate the formation of the gestalts, except that, as with Freud himself, the place of accumulation is not the photographic plate but human memory.

Above all, however, and now the argument has finally reached the desired point, abstraction is a characteristic of *language*.

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[32] Most theories of individual memory, as mentioned above, emphasize its selective nature.

[33] Derrida in particular has shown that this step is repeatedly present in Freud himself (Derrida, Writing and Difference, op. cit., pp. 196ff.).

[34] (Note on translation:) The first sections of the chapter are about collective memory…

[35] Kittler, Friedrich A.: Discourse Networks 1800 – 1900 [1985]. Stanford (Cal.): Stanford UP 1990, pp. 320ff.; see also: Winkler, Hartmut: Der filmische Raum und der Zuschauer. Heidelberg: Winter 1992, pp. 130ff.

4. Theory of Signification – How Does the Signified Emerge?

If condensation were a mechanism of human memory alone, it would have no place in a theory of the media. Only the fact that condensation has been interpreted in terms of language theory makes it useful for a media consideration, because only language as a semiotic system can be said to compete with other media in the same field.

So where does the bridge that Freud built from condensation to language lead? The central point has already been mentioned above: "A word being a point of junction for a number of conceptions, it possesses, so to speak, a predestined ambiguity, and neuroses [...] take advantage of the conveniences which words offer for the purposes of condensation and disguise quite as readily as the dream."[36] Does this mean that every word must now be regarded as a 'junction,' and thus as a product of condensation?

It was Lacan who took up Freud's remarks and developed them into a coherent model of language.[37] And in this model, the polarity between condensation and displacement (metaphor and metonymy) is central. "Verdichtung or Condensation", writes Weber in his Lacan commentary,

> "is the structure of the superimposition of the signifiers, which metaphor takes as its field [...]. If we examine Freud's concept of condensation, we find at first not so much the idea of substitution as that of accumulation or 'compression' [...]. A single idea or representation serves as the nodal point of different associative chains; considered from an economic perspective, this idea unites in itself the energetic cathexis of the chains with which it is in contact."[38]

And a second root of the idea, as Haverkamp shows, goes back to Saussure. "The projection metaphor, which Saussure uses to illustrate the transition from diachrony to synchrony, is made more precise by the metaphor of superimposed condensation [...]. Lacan developed these implications in an implicit critique of Jakobson by no longer speaking of the substitution that constitutes the metaphor according to the range of variation of semantic equivalents, but of a 'layering' of signifiers, in which Freud's 'condensation' takes the place of the old concept of 'metaphorical transfer' [...]. Metonymy, on the other hand, not only corresponds to 'displacement,' but characterizes the displaceability of the superimposed contexts".[39]

Lacan had adopted the polarity of metaphor and metonymy from Jakobson.[40] In a fundamental attempt to systematize the mechanisms of language, the latter had linked metonymy to the syntagmatic axis and metaphor to the paradigmatic one; the background to this were studies on

[36] Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, op. cit., p. 315.

[37] Lacan, Jacques: The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud [1957]. In: L., J.: Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English. NY/London: Norton, pp. 412-444; L., J.: The Signification of the Phallus [1958]. In: Écrits., op. cit., pp. 575-584, L., J.: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis [1964]. NY/London: Norton 1981.

[38] Weber, Samuel M.: Return to Freud. Jacques Lacan's dislocation of psychoanalysis. NY: Cambridge UP, pp. 67f.

[39] Haverkamp, Anselm: Einführung in die Theorie der Metapher. In: H., A. (ed.): Theorie der Metapher. Darmstadt: WBG 1983, pp. 15f. (transl. H. W.). In Saussure himself, the corresponding passage reads: "To show both the autonomy and the interdependence of synchrony we can compare the first to the projection of an object on a plane surface. Any projection depends directly on the nature of the object projected, yet differs from it [...]. In linguistics there is the same relationship between the historical facts and a language-state, which is like a projection of the facts at a particular moment." (Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, op. cit., p. 87). Saussure's text is therefore initially more about the relationship between two points of view; to find an indirect statement about the entry of diachrony into synchrony and a precursor of condensation in this is an intelligent but relatively far-reaching interpretation.

[40] Jakobson, Roman: Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances. In: J., R.: Fundamentals of Language. S-Gravenhage: Mouton 1956, pp. 55-82.

aphasia, which had shown that patients with so-called contiguity disorders[41] resort to metaphorical expression, while patients with similarity disorders resort to metonymies, e.g. try to name typical contexts.[42] From this, Jakobson had concluded that Saussure's two concepts are in fact complementary to each other; juxtaposition (contiguity) and substitution/selection (similarity) represent the 'coordinate system' in which language as a whole is spanned.

Lacan now takes up the model and reinterprets it at the same time. The weighting shifts; if traditionally the axis of similarity appeared to be privileged and Saussure and Jakobson assumed a symmetry of both dimensions, now contiguity begins to dominate similarity, with the consequence that the metaphor (and the condensation) becomes dependent on the displacement.[43]

Lacan, similar to Derrida,[44] clearly considers contiguity (juxtaposition, displacement) to be the fundamental mechanism, and this tendency has persisted in theory formation to this day.[45] If we nevertheless ask specifically about condensation, there are at least three determinations that Lacan offers.

The first has already been mentioned in the context of 'externalization':[46] the model of stratification that makes the meaning of linguistic elements dependent on the set of attested contexts in which the element has appeared in the past.[47] In this context, condensation is largely equated with the accumulation of connotations, compatible with the image of language as a network, which has also already been referred to.

The second definition is incomparably more difficult, because condensation and metaphor are at the same time the mechanism that generates the *signifieds*.

> "Metaphor's creative spark", writes Lacan, "[...] flashes between two signifiers, one of which has replaced the other by taking the other's place in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present by virtue of its (metonymic) connection to the rest of the chain. One word for another [substitution]: this is the formula for metaphor […]."[48]

The quoted, as I said, is difficult. Lacan starts from the observation that in a metaphorical expression two signifiers do not appear side by side, as the traditional comparison-theory of

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[41] Loss of the ability to string language together; agrammatism, telegram style.

[42] Similarity disorders are word-finding disorders; contiguity and similarity were the traditional terms of association psychology; see, for example, Yates: "These are the principles of what we call association, though he [Aristotle] does not use this word […]. Beginning from 'something similar, or contrary, or closely connected' with what we are seeking we shall come upon it. This passage has been described as the first formulation of the laws of association through similarity, dissimilarity, contiguity." (Yates, The Art of Memory, op. cit., p. 34 (add. H. W.)).

[43] A reconstruction of this development can be found in Haverkamp (op. cit., pp. 17ff.).

[44] Derrida, Writing and Difference, op. cit., pp. 218f., 225ff.

[45] A presentation of the corresponding positions can be found in the 'Articulation' section of this work.

[46] (Note on translation:) 'externalization' is one of the key words in the first chapter of my book (pp. 48ff.).

[47] Once again in the wording: "But it suffices to listen to poetry, which Saussure was certainly in the habit of doing, for a polyphony to be heard and for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a musical score. Indeed, there is no signifying chain that does not sustain – as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units – all attested contexts that are, so to speak, 'vertically' linked to that point." (Lacan, The Instance of the Letter…, op. cit., p. 419).

[48] Ibid. p. 422 (add. H. W.); see also: "Metaphor is, quite radically speaking, the effect of the substitution of one signifier for another in a chain, nothing natural predestining the signifier for this function of phoros [Greek: carrier] apart from the fact that two signifiers are involved, which can, as such, be reduced to a phonemic opposition." (L., J.: Appendix II: Metaphor of the Subject. In: Écrits, op. cit, p. 756 (add. H. W.)).

metaphor had assumed; rather, the metaphor takes the position of another signifier;[49] it displaces it from the manifest chain, and this in the literal sense that displacement has in the context of psychoanalytic argumentation. And Weber explains:

> "A clearly determined relationship of presence and absence of the signifier is thus described here: the replaced, absent signifier is driven under the bar, as it were, into the realm of the signified – one could say it is 'repressed' – yet, as an excluded and absent signifier it still remains present through its syntagmatic relationship to the rest of the chain. This suppression, in the most literal sense, is, however, in no way a removal, lifting or surpassing of the bar itself: though it may be crossed over, it still stays in place, for the repressed signifier remains a signifier even in the position of the signified.
>
> Thus, if metonymy marks the proper function of the signifier – that is, the formation of the signifying chain – the function of metaphor is no less indispensable […] Metaphor confers its name on that movement of dependence, already noted in Saussure: the self-precipitation of the signifier as signified, which in virtue of the differential structure of signification must have always already been a signifier, in order to become a signified. 'One sees,' writes Lacan, 'that metaphor occurs at the precise point where sense takes place in non-sense.'"[50]

It must be borne in mind that the traditional concept of the signified is thus defined in a new way. The signified (the meaning) is not – as with Saussure – taken for granted as the other side of the signifier, but Lacan asks how the formation of signifiers comes about in the first place. And he sees the mechanism of metaphor as fundamental, because the displacement of the original signifier below the threshold of consciousness and the 'precipitation' can be directly observed here.

The background, no doubt, is the experience of the psychoanalytic cure, "how this sort of analysis can reduce the text the most highly charged with meaning to insignificant trifles"[51] It seems hopeless to assign meanings in the traditional sense to the chain of signifiers produced by the patient, because the actual meaning of what is said will always appear between the lines. Speech will circle around it and in omissions or substitutions mark the places where the actual meaning has been pushed under the 'bar,' '[present] as an excluded and absent signifier it still remains present through its syntagmatic relationship to the rest of the chain.'

But can what has been outlined in this way also provide a model for general language? First of all, it is interesting that Lacan's argumentation has obviously not left Freud's association-psychological basis. If the repressed signifier, which has become the signified, actually remains connected to the elements of the rest of the chain, this is only possible through its associative links with them.[52] The net thus also (and perhaps precisely) carries elements that have no place in the manifest chain; and certain associations cross the 'barre,' even if they are not consciously accessible. The traditional concept of the signified is thus not avoided without reason; Saussure's signified would be available, lucid and the property of the subject; Lacan, however, wants to emphasize that language, and even general language, precedes the subject, culture, and

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[49] This is the theory that the metaphorical expression replaces another, 'literal expression' in the text; this theory is controversial.

[50] Weber, Return to Freud, op. cit., pp. 57.

[51] Lacan, The Instance…, op. cit., p. 416.

[52] However, this is in no way a 'syntagmatic' relationship, as Weber says, because the terms syntagmatic and absent are fundamentally incompatible.

speech[53] and that all speech speaks other than what it says. This idea comes close to the outlined theory of 'forgetting' and the Mystic Writing-Pad.

It finds its limit where it imposes on the individual chain and the individual act of repression what will actually have to be conceived as a process in intersubjective space (and a statistical effect over an infinite number of acts of utterance). Lacan here extends the tradition of psycho-analysis, which has always focused its attention on the individual case rather than on 'the' language, in a peculiarly unbroken way, and he makes it difficult to think of the formation of signified in general according to the outlined pattern. But this is precisely the claim.

Finally, the third determination results from the negative reference to metonymy. The most general property of the signifiers is that they can be distinguished from each other and that they can be added to build the syntagmatic chain. Both converge in the determination that they are interchangeable, that instead of one word there could also be another, and Lacan calls this abso-lutely fundamental mechanism 'metonymy.' Compared to the traditional definition, the term is greatly expanded in this respect; only the exchange 'word for word' is used – for instance in the example of ship/sail; the special case of the synecdoche becomes a privileged example of the functioning of selection. In this respect, the Lacanian formula 'mot à mot' means two things: 'word for word ahead in the chain' and: 'word exchanged for word.'[54]

> "The actual function of the signifier, we recall, is embodied in metonymy, insofar as the signifier can only be determined as such by being related differentially to other signi-fiers, that is by means of the contiguity of a discontinuous concatenation. The signifier only 'is' element of a signifying chain, which in turn is part of a network of such chains. The constitution and reproduction of this network, as a concatenation of intrinsically meaningless elements, constitutes the operation of metonymy."[55]

If we look back from here to condensation and metaphor, the impression could arise that metonymy has to do with the materiality of the syntagmatic chain present, but that metaphor has to do with the side of the signified, both of them neatly separated by the 'barre.' That this is not the case is shown by Lacan's critique of linearity[56] and his indication that metonymic selection is also dependent on the barre and the space beyond the barre.[57] Lacan thus attacks Saussure's and Jakobson's two-axis theory itself and would not recognize the categories 'present'/'absent' in any way.

Especially if it seems sensible from a media-theoretical perspective to insist on the difference between the external space of linear texts and the internal space of memories, it must be made clear that Lacan's conception does not support this demarcation; in no case can memory (and

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[53] See: Lacan, The Instance…, op. cit, p. 414; "This signifying game of metonymy and metaphor is played […] where I am not […]: I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking." (Ibid., p. 430).

[54] Weber, for example, criticizes the fact that the choice of the term 'metonymy' levels the difference between metaphor and metonymy (W., Return to Freud, op. cit., p. 61).

[55] Ibid., pp. 64f.

[56] Lacan's argument was discussed in the first chapter.

[57] "Metonymy thus could be said to actualize the differential articulation of the signifier. The distinctive particula-rity of such an occurrence – in the sense of the falling-out mentioned above – is that its particularization is always at issue, implicitly at least, since the metonymic movement depends upon something else, upon another missing signifier: indeed, upon another scene and stage, what Freud, in German called 'the other scene' of the unconscious, in order for it to 'take place.' […] Put another way, one could say that metonymy names the Saussurean 'bar,' insofar as it dislocates the sign. This formulation provides a fresh look at the dis-located place of the signifier, which, however, remains barred. For its place is none other than that marked by the bar, which divides the sign right down the middle while at the same time turning it inside out, forcing it to point elsewhere. Lacan's formula for metonymy […] represents this movement". (Weber, Return to Freud, op. cit., p. 65).

the linguistic code) be thought of as a place of presence or the subject as an instance connecting both places;[58] and once again it becomes important in this respect that it is forgetting and not memory that moves to the center of the model.

However, the question should be addressed to Lacan as to whether – and if so, in what sense – all signifieds are actually repressed and thus unconscious. Where the model suggests that Saussure's horizontal line is identical with the boundary between consciousness and the unconscious, it becomes a mystery how subjects (illusory or not) can deal with language and understand language (illusory or not) as a collection of signifieds; there would be nothing to elucidate in terms of language theory if the subjects were not dominated by the idea of having the signified at their disposal and being 'at home' in language; and it is precisely this idea that seems to be constitutive of linguistic functioning.

Against the favoring of metonymy, it should be insisted that the manifest chains are not confronted with the unconscious, but with language as a combined conscious-unconscious structure. Only from this perspective is it possible to ask about the significance of conventions and intersubjectivity and to include the systemic character of language.

And finally, speaking of condensation only makes sense if its quantitative-statistical-cumulative aspect is not lost in the course of the argumentation. Condensation will also have to be assigned a place outside the actual chains, a place where something can 'precipitate,' in order to then confront the material-present chains as an instance of persistence.

5. Semiotic Conclusions: Condensation, Language, Discourse and System

This is precisely where the proposal put forward here comes in. It essentially states that language and memory – conceived as a machine of forgetting – constitute this arena.

It should be undisputable that language must be thought of as a precipitate and as the product of a condensation – both in the direct sense of Freud and Lacan. However, it is now crucial to move beyond psychoanalysis to a generalized model: As soon as one asks what is precipitated and what is condensed, there is only one possible answer that simultaneously names the most general semiotic mechanism imaginable: *it is speech that is precipitated in language*. And language, conversely, represents the condensed product of all past linguistic events.[59]

This formula initially means that the linguistic structure is made radically dependent on material utterances, on speech. Speech is ingested by language, is 'forgotten' into the linguistic structure. So when Assmann/Assmann write, "As a rule, the stream of speech flows into the sea of forgetting,"[60] this is right and wrong at the same time; wrong if forgetting means losing, and right if what has been forgotten is nevertheless preserved in the condensation; and when Dotzler (quoting Babbage) says that there is no danger of a person's actions falling victim to oblivion

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[58] "[Signifier und Signified] of the Saussurian algorithm are not in the same plane, and man was deluding himself in believing he was situated in their common axis, which is nowhere." (Lacan, The Instance…, op. cit. pp., 430f. (add. H. W.)).

[59] The term 'speech' here refers to all utterances and texts, not primarily oral communication. If this is the most general semiotic mechanism, it must be noted that it has not been named by classical semiotics, and its consequences have not been examined. Either too self-evident (trivial?) or too general, it has fallen through the cracks of both the structuralist models and the post-structuralist approaches, which have directly addressed discourse, articulation, and the material chain.

[60] Assmann, Aleida; Assmann, Jan: Schrift und Gedächtnis [1983]. In: dies.; Hardmeier, Christof (ed.): Schrift und Gedächtnis. Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation. München 1993, S. 266 (transl. H. W.).

because the air, as an immeasurable library, stores all the words ever spoken,[61] this nightmare is fortunately not true either. Forgetting and preserving, the accumulation of meanings and the purification of discursive space must be thought of as intertwined, and language appears as the social machine that ensures the rapport between these two moments in a sovereign manner.

Understanding the system of language as the product of a condensation has proved its worth in connecting the two 'places' of language in a new way. The linear texts in the outer space and the semantic structure in the inner space of memory are indeed complementarily to each other. Discourse turns into system; and syntagmatic sequences turn into paradigmatic/associative relationships. And if it was said above that language represents a 'transmission belt,' then condensation now describes the transition, much more concretely, as a quantitative-cumulative process.

The view outlined in this way is already indicated by Saussure when he describes the synchronic system of language as a "product of the past"[62] or says that "language […] is a storehouse filled by the members of a given community through their active use of speaking."[63] These statements can now be deciphered as placeholders of the developmental model that links diachrony and synchrony and which has always been missed in Saussure.[64] The formulation "spatial co-ordinations [i.e. the syntagmatic sequence] help to create associative co-ordinations"[65] shows, however, how undecided Saussure was on this question;[66] and this also applies in a similar way to other authors who have put forward this thesis.

Bühler, for example, suggests that language absorbs the situations of its use in order to make them available in a conventionalized form for further use,[67] and Goody/Watt outline a semantic model which, restricted to oral cultures, interweaves the formation of tradition, language and 'structural amnesia;'[68] Flusser shows how language is processed by each writer and passed on

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[61] "Every emotion sends out waves that – strictly speaking – never cease to exist. So does every spoken word: 'The vibrations of the air, once the human voice has set them in motion, do not cease to exist with the sounds they produce.' That is why 'the air itself [...] is an immeasurably large library, on whose pages is written forever what has ever been said by men or breathed by women.'" (Dotzler, Bernhard J.: Nachrichten aus der früheren Welt – und Zukunft. Zur Programmierbarkeit der Literatur mit und nach Babbage. In: Bolz/Kittler/Tholen (eds.): Computer als Medium. München: Fink 1994, pp. 41f. (transl. H. W.)).

[62] Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, op. cit., p. 8; "[…] language always appears as a heritage of the preceding period." (Ibid., p. 71).

[63] Ibid., p. 13.

[64] Comparable: "[We] can add that everything diachronic in language is diachronic only by virtue of speaking. It is in speaking that the germ of all change is found. Each change is launched by a certain number of individuals before it is accepted for general use. Modern German uses 'ich war,' 'wir waren,' whereas until the sixteenth century the conjugation was 'ich was,' 'wir waren' (cf. English 'I was,' 'we were'). How did the substitution of 'war' for 'was' come about? Some speakers, influenced by waren, created war through analogy; this was a fact of speaking; the new form, repeated many times and accepted by the community, became a fact of language." (Ibid., p. 98 (in the original text 'ich war'… without quotation marks).

[65] Ibid., p. 128 (add. H.W.).

[66] Weber comes to the conclusion: "Diachronic 'events,' on the other hand, while they can produce facts, can never generate a language, insofar as language must possess the quality of a system." (Weber, Return to Freud, op. cit., p. 33).

[67] Bühler, Karl: Theory of Language. The representational function of language [1934]. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins 2011, p. 161.

[68] „In Durkheim's words, these [language-] categories of the understanding are 'priceless instruments of thought which the human groups have laboriously forged through the centuries and where they have accumulated the best of their intellectual capital.' The transmission of the verbal elements of culture by oral means can be visualized as a long chain of interlocking conversations between members of the group. Thus all beliefs and values, all forms of knowledge, are communicated between individuals in face-to-face contact; and, as distinct from the material

to subsequent writers,[69] and Lyotard, finally, describes at one point that language 'charged with earlier uses' always exceeds current intentions.[70]

Against the background of these statements, it is above all a systematization or radicalization that the argument presented here proposes. Reformulated into a general semiotic mechanism, this would mean: Language is *nothing* but what accumulates in the course of discourse, and it only receives its form in the transformation of discourse into system.[71] It is completely dependent on speech, but – and this would be the objection to the positions of Derrida and Lacan – it does not coincide with the actual chain, the discourse and the utterances.[72] Intertwined with memory, it forms the counterpart of speech, a place of persistence, a counter-instance.[73] Language is the structural memory of speech, and it can only function because it makes use of the distributed human memories (and their ability to forget in condensed form). Language is the instance that transforms socially cumulative syntagmatic relations into paradigmatic relations, and the immense variety of external texts into a system of 'meanings' that can be 'mastered,' concisely and economically, by the individual speaker.

And now we need to go one step further. Language itself is now to be conceived as a 'memory,' and this in a by no means metaphorical sense. The idea that the individual words (as the smallest units of language) must be regarded as 'memory' and as the result of condensation is surprisingly self-evident in theory.

> "Technology is explicitness", writes McLuhan, "[...] The spoken word was the first tech-
> nology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new

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content of the cultural tradition, whether it be cave-paintings or hand-axes, they are stored only in human memory. [...]"

"[T]he meaning of each word is ratified in a succession of concrete situations, accompanied by vocal inflexions and physical gestures, all of which combine to particularize both its specific denotation and its accepted connotative usages. This process of direct semantic ratification, of course, operates cumulatively [...]." And: „The social function of memory – and of forgetting – can thus be seen as the final stage of what may be called the homeostatic organisation of the cultural tradition in non-literate society. [...] What continues to be social relevance is stored in the memory while the rest is usually forgotten: and language – primarily vocabulary – is the effective medium of this crucial process of social digestion and elimination [...]. [...] [A] common example of the general social phenomenon which J. A. Barnes has felicitously termed 'structural amnesia' [...]." (Goody, Jack; Watt, Ian: The Consequences of Literacy. In: Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Apr. 1963), pp. 304-345, here: pp. 305-309 (add. H. W.)).

[69] "In his struggle with language, a writer reworks the information of previous writers freshly, producing new information from it, passing it on to the next writers so that they may produce new information in turn." "So these languages have become extremely fine and valuable instruments." (Flusser, Vilém: Does Writing Have a Future? [1987], Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press 2011, p. 34).

[70] "And even then, when they [the words, sentences] are already inscribed on the page or the canvas, they 'say' something other than what they 'wanted to say,' because they are older than the present intention, charged with earlier uses, connected with other words, sentences, tones, sounds. This is precisely what creates a field, a 'world,' the 'good' human world." (Lyotard, Jean-François: Ob man ohne Körper denken kann. In: Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich; Pfeiffer, K. Ludwig (Hg.): Materialität der Kommunikation. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1988, pp. 823f. (transl. and add. H.W.)).

[71] "An dem Bau der Begriffe arbeitet ursprünglich, wie wir sahen, die Sprache". ("As we have seen, originally language [...] works on the construction of concepts." (Nietzsche, Friedrich: On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense. Oxford: Quadriga, 2019, p. 12)).

[72] On the transition from the structuralist system assumption to the concept of discourse (and on the unfortunate juxtaposition of discourse and 'thinking'), see Foucault, Michel: The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language [1969]. NY: Pantheon 1972, pp. 26ff.

[73] Of course, only a relative persistence, insofar as language is also subject to development. Saussure devoted a separate consideration to the moment of persistence (S.: Course in General Linguistics, op. cit. p. 71ff.).

way. Words are a kind of information retrieval that can range over the total environment and experience at high speed."[74]

And Foucault is more nuanced:

"And this link between language and knowledge opens up a whole historical field […]. Something like a history of knowledge becomes possible; because, if language is a spontaneous science, obscure to itself and unpractised, this also means, in return, that it will be brought nearer to perfection by knowledge, which cannot lodge itself in the words it needs without leaving its imprint in them, and, as it were, the empty mould of its content. Languages, though imperfect knowledge themselves, are the faithful memory of the progress of knowledge towards perfection. They lead into error, but they record what has been learned. […] What civilizations and peoples leave us as the monuments of their thought is not so much their texts as their vocabularies, their syntaxes, the sounds of their languages rather than the words they spoke; not so much their discourse as the element that made it possible, the discursivity of their language. 'The language of a people gives us its vocabulary, and its vocabulary is a sufficiently faithful and authoritative record of all the knowledge of that people.'"[75]

The individual words can only be 'information memories' if they accumulate the meanings made available by the syntagmatic environment of past utterances. If we add the thought that the meaning of a word is determined by the position it occupies in the network of negatively differential references, we must conclude that speech works on the network of language by fixing and successively changing positions, building up and dismantle relations, strengthening, weakening or restructuring them.

And this is the core of the statement that syntagmatic proximity turns into paradigmatic relations. Linear syntagmatic chains are reworked into n-dimensional paradigmatic references, in the 'run through the net' existing connections are confirmed, reinforced or eroded. If words, to put it more tangibly, have meaning insofar as they accumulate connotations, then this is a quantitative process, but not an accumulation of substance.

In addition, whenever language is conceived as condensation and words as 'memory,' the intersubjective dimension must also be considered; against Lacan, we have to insist that condensation is only conceivable at all in intersubjective space, as a statistical effect. Alongside persistence in time (memory), this is the second moment of inertia that language opposes to its modification through speaking.[76]

From Freud and Lacan, then, we must proceed to a more general concept of language. And this applies above all to the problem of how the connection between signifier and signified must be conceived. If Lacan had said that what appears as a signified must have been in the position of

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[74] McLuhan, Marshall: Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man [1964]. Cambridge (Mass.)/London: MIT 1994, pp. 56f.; see also: „Like words and language, money is a storehouse of communally achieved work, skill, and experience." (Ibid., p. 136) und: „The classic curse of Midas, his power of translating all he touched into gold, is in some degree the character of any medium, including language. This myth draws attention to a magic aspect of all extensions of human sense and body; that is, to all technology whatever. All technology has the Midas touch. […] Language, like currency, acts as a store of perception and as a transmitter of the perceptions and experience of one person or of one generation to another. As both a translator and store house of experience, language is, in addition, a reducer and a distorter of experience. The very great advantage of accelerating the learning process, and of making possible the transmission of knowledge and insight across time and space, easily overrides the disadvantages of linguistic codifications of experience." (Ibid., pp. 139f.).

[75] Foucault, Michel: Order of Things [1966]. London/NY: Routledge 2005, pp. 96f. (F. quotes Diderot's Encyclopedia). Foucault limits the validity of the model outlined in this way to the 'classical period.'

[76] Completely parallel in Saussure, op. cit., p. 71f.

the signifier beforehand (i.e. it is fundamentally a signifier that is precipitated as a signified),[77] this is now relatively easy to spell out; assuming the described condensation process to be valid, it is indeed a signifier (a manifest sign in external space) that establishes itself as a signified, an element of the linguistic system in memory.[78] Additionally mediated by the determination that it is not only *one* signifier which, pushed under the bar, is precipitated as a signified, but a whole number of repeating signifiers which – the precondition for 'condensation' as a quantitative cumulative process – additively define the same signifying position.

From here, an unexpectedly direct reference to the problem of abstraction arises, which, not addressed by Lacan, is the second essential condition of the formation of the signified. In connection with Galton's mixed photographs, the idea had already emerged that a simple super-imposition of image content produces abstraction effects; and Bergson had made schema memory dependent on physical-habitual repetition. Harth, who references Bergson, now proposes that this mechanism can also be fruitful for the understanding of cognitive processes: "The senso-motorically stored 'images' of past experiences make it possible to add up the perceptions made now, in the present, with earlier ones, as it were. With this observation, Bergson assigns memory a decisive role in the process of generalization. One only has to translate his body thesis into a consciousness thesis. For only when the ego 'retains' something common (a formative schema) in its consciousness in the course of its experiences, none of which is ever completely identical with the other, is it able to generalize, to abstract, to categorize."[79]

The path outlined in this way leads from the individual event (the individual utterance, the individual sign) directly to the schema, to the concept and – to the signified. Single event, repetition, cumulation and abstraction seem to be connected in a regular way; and if signifieds (concepts) are characterized by leaving behind all concrete determinations of the conceived objects, their text and their contexts and asserting a general concept in spite of the concrete differences, then repetition and cumulation are the mechanisms that moderate between single event and concept.

That language is more 'economical' than the immense surface of texts, that we 'forget' texts in order to remember language, and that language never reaches the concretion of what is to be grasped – all this has its reason here. Signifiers settle as signifieds, but they do not remain what they are; decontextualized and stratified they form a distillate; in polemic against the concrete contexts from which they originate, 'aliens,' as Bühler writes, in the contexts into which they will enter.[80]

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[77] Lacan, The Instance…, op. cit., p. 437; and in parallel: Derrida, Jacques: Of Grammatology. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1997, p. 73.

[78] Since Lacan himself modifies Saussure's concepts and includes the entire linguistic system in the concept of the signifier, this separation is also less clear in his work.

[79] Harth, Dietrich: Einleitung: Gedächtnisbilder und Erinnerungsspuren. In: Id. (ed.): Die Erfindung des Gedächtnisses. Frankfurt: Keip 1991, p. 39 (transl. and add. H.W.). Warning points to a passage in Hegel: "Abstraction, which occurs in the ideational activity by which general ideas are produced (and ideas *quâ* ideas virtually have the form of generality), is frequently explained as the incidence of many similar images one upon another and is supposed to be thus made intelligible. If this super-imposing is to be no mere accident and without principle, a force of attraction in like images must be assumed, or something of the sort, which at the same time would have the negative power of rubbing off the dissimilar elements against each other. This force is really intelligence itself, - the self-identical ego which by its internalizing recollection gives the images *ipso facto* generality, and subsumes the single intuition under the already internalized image" (Hegel's Philosophy of Mind. Being part three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences [1830]. NY: Oxford University Press 2003, p. 207); see also: Warning, Rainer: Claude Simons Gedächtnisräume: La Route des Flandres. In: Haverkamp, Anselm; Lachmann, Renate (ed.): Gedächtniskunst. Raum – Bild – Schrift. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1991, p. 365).

[80] Bühler, Theory of Language, op. cit., p. 208.

Only a very general description of the sign process seems capable of making the idea of condensation actually fruitful for a theory of language; and a satisfactory formulation is certainly still pending. That /it plays a decisive role in the connection between language and speech and that the condensing memory cannot be excluded from the functioning of language can hardly be denied.

[…]