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Language and Perception in Plotinus

John Shannon Hendrix

I will argue that in the thought of Plotinus, how we perceive the world around us is determined by how we use language. In the *Enneads* IV.7.6, Plotinus distinguished between perception and what might be called apperception, perceiving the sensible world as a totality. Actual perceptual experience is multiple and diversified; perceived objects have no necessary connections in size or position, and can be perceived in a variety of ways by the different senses. But in human perception all objects and acts of perception are unified to form a coherent whole which structures the world around us. When the fragmented and variable objects of perception “reach the ruling principle they will become like partless thoughts...”;¹ they are organized in a conceptual process through the mechanisms of language. The perception of forms in matter is determined by reason made conscious. In *Enneads* I.1.7, “the faculty of perception in the Soul [lower intellect] cannot act by the immediate grasping of sensible objects, but only by the discerning of impressions printed upon the animate [intellect] by sensation: these perceptions are already intelligibles....”

The discerning of impressions printed upon the intellect by sensation is the function of discursive reason in language, not immediate sense perception; perception is a function of language. Since the sensual impressions, or mnemonic residues, in perception are copies and derivatives of intelligible forms, perception itself is a copy and derivative of reason. Intelligible forms are forms which are understood but not perceived. Thought in Plotinus is composed of mnemonic residues of perceived objects, what Plotinus calls “imprints” in “recollections” in *Enneads* V.3.2. Our thoughts are propelled by the desire created by the multiple and fragmented images of perception reconstructed in language. “The reasoning power in soul makes its judgment, derived from the mental images present to it which come from sense-perception, but combining and dividing them....”

Thinking for Plotinus is a dialectical process which is facilitated by imagination, which is suspended between intellect, the source of thinking, and sense perception, the object of thinking. The dialectical process involves the imprint of the sense object or sensible form in perception, the imprint of the idea of the object or intelligible form in the imagination or image-making

power, the memory or recollection of past thoughts and perceptions in relation to the present thought, the “recollections” of the soul, the transformation of the image, both sensible and intelligible, into the word in language, both the spoken word (*logos prophorikos*) and the word prior to speech in the intellectual (*logos endiathetos*), and the fitting together of sensible image, intelligible image, recollected sensible image, recollected intelligible image, sensible word, and intelligible word, in a process which requires the anticipation of the perception of the image or word in relation to the recollection of the intelligible image or word in intellect, as it is perceived as a reflection or imprint in mind.

In *Enneads* IV.7.6, sense perceptions merge together in the subject like “lines coming together from the circumference of the circle,” from multiplicity to unity, subject to the ruling principle, that is, reason. In reality, sense objects are variable and differentiated in terms of size and location; they are multiple and fragmented, and it is only the reason of the subject which allows them to be apprehended as whole and congruent. This brings to mind the theory of perception of George Berkeley, who similarly argues that sense objects themselves cannot be immediately perceived as a congruent whole. Plotinus remarks that once the diverse and multiple sense objects have been transformed into a whole by apprehension in sense perception, they cannot return to their original state. Apprehension permanently transforms sensual reality in conformance with the principles of reason. Reason therefore necessarily precedes sensual reality in the human experience of the world.

This corresponds to the idealist a priori categories of Immanuel Kant, the constructs of space and time which are applied to sensual reality, and which mold sensual reality into a reality which conforms to human reason, and which is imprisoned by human reason with no escape. This in fact is the definition of sanity, that sensual reality conforms to the dictates and ordering principles of reason; all rational thought is contained within this premise. The ordering principles of reason are represented to the consciousness of the subject by language, as consciousness is defined as reason presenting itself to itself in the thought of Fichte and Hegel; all sensual reality must necessarily conform to the ordering principles of language. There is no experience or perception of sensual reality that cannot be articulated by language; that which exceeds such articulation is defined by God, or negative or apophatic theology, or mysticism, or the romantic ideal of the sublime, or the Lacanian concept of the real. All such ideals and concepts constitute mythologies, rational explanations for what cannot be explained. The history of philosophy

is the history of human thought attempting to overcome its own limits and restrictions given by the mechanisms of language and perception. This struggle on the part of human reason is what constitutes desire in the subject, in the renunciation of the instinctual by reason.

Perception, according to Plotinus, divides, multiples, and otherwise organizes sensual reality; in other words, perception is a cognitive process, the most basic exercises of which are mathematics and geometry. According to Descartes, human reason has immediate perception of a geometric structure of reality, as perhaps given by Kant's a priori concepts of time and space in intuition, where temporal subdivisions in mathematics are applied to the concepts of extension and duration in space, but Berkeley argues that this is impossible, that no geometrical structure can be immediately perceived in space, that it can only be constructed by reason following sense perception. Perceived objects, for Plotinus, are divided and organized into parts which correspond directly to the organizational capacities of reason. The relation of parts and subdivisions to the whole and to infinity is the same in the sense object as it is in reasoning capacity. Geometry and mathematics are the mechanisms by which sensual reality is represented by reason to itself, though sense objects do not inherently contain geometrical and mathematical properties.

Plotinus will describe perception as being a representation by reason to itself of a representation of reality, not reality itself, but a representation constructed through mathematics and geometry. As for Plato, representation in perception is twice removed from reality. The representation of the representation of reality by reason to itself in Hegelian self-consciousness is the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* of Sigmund Freud in psychoanalysis. The sensual object perceived for Plotinus is a two-dimensional impression representing a three-dimensional body: "perception could not occur in any other way than that in which seal-impressions are imprinted in wax from seal-rings...." As in the thought of George Berkeley, it would appear that for Plotinus three-dimensionality in sensual reality cannot be an immediate perception, but must be reconstructed from experience and the mnemonic residues in thought.

As with the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* of Freud, the impression of the object which is processed in perception is divorced from the object itself; in fact, perception of an object requires the absence of the object as sensual reality rather than its presence. In *Enneads* IV.3.29, "Now nothing will prevent a perception from being a mental image for that which is going to remember it, and the memory and the retention of the object from belonging to the im-

age-making power, which is something different....” The perceived object is always already a mnemonic residue, to use Freud’s term, as it is processed in the image-making power, or the imagination, or the conceptual process of perception. For Freud these mnemonic residues include hallucinations and dreams as well as perceived objects, and it is the reproduction of the mnemonic residues by the image-making power in the unconscious which constitutes unconscious thought process, for example dream construction, in psychoanalysis.

Plotinus continues, “...for it is in this that the perception arrives at its conclusion, and what was seen is present in this when the perception is no longer there. If then the image of what is absent is already present in this, it is always remembering, even if the presence is only for a short time.” The conceptual processes of perception can only function with the sensual object as already a mnemonic residue, a seal impression, in the image-making power. There is no immediate, unmediated, phenomenological experience of sensual reality in Plotinus’ thought, but nevertheless Plotinus does not deny the separate existence of sensual reality as George Berkeley does. Plotinus poses a dialectical process in perception in the relation between the subject and the sensual world, along the lines of the Hegelian dialectic between the subjective and objective, the necessary development of the a priori categories of Fichtean and Kantian idealism, falling short of the complete Berkelean disjunction between thought and the sensual world.

In Plotinus’ theory, “an image accompanies every intellectual act,” as described in *Enneads* IV.3.30. Such would be a basis of the picture-thinking of Hegel, the *Vorstellung*; as Kant described it, it is impossible to think a line without drawing it in the imagination, the image-making power of Plotinus. The image as mnemonic residue is a “picture of thought” in Plotinus’ words; the mechanism by which the mnemonic residue or picture of thought is incorporated into the conceptual process, the image-making power, must be, according to Plotinus, language: “the reception into the image-making power would be of the verbal expression which accompanies the act of intelligence.” There can be no image without its representation in a word, as in the logos of Christianity.

The word belongs to discursive thought, revealing what lies hidden within, beneath the conceptual processes which can be apprehended by thought itself, that is, exactly what would become the concept of the unconscious in psychoanalysis. “The intellectual act is without parts and has not, so to speak, come out into the open, but remains unobserved within....” The intel-

lectual act, *nous poietikos*, is without parts just as exterior reality is without parts once it has been processed in the imagination. The progression from the multiple and fragmented to the whole and continuous in exterior reality corresponds to the progression from the multi[le and fragmented to the whole and continuous in thought. This progression would be facilitated by the Kantian a priori categories of space and time in intuition. But like Kantian intuition, the intellectual act of Plotinus is not available to conscious reason, or discursive reason. It is unconscious thought.

Following that, "...the verbal expression unfolds its content and brings it out of the intellectual act into the image-making power, and so shows the intellectual act as if in a mirror, and this is how there is apprehension and persistence and memory of it." The partless monads, to borrow Leibniz' conceptualization, of the intellectual are unfolded into the ideas of discursive reason, just as intelligibles are unfolded into mathematics and geometry in the *explicatum* of Nicolas Cusanus. The partless monad of thought in the intellectual act is the internalization of the Platonic idea or intelligible on the part of Plotinus; in Plotinus' view human thought becomes a microcosm or working model of Platonic divine intelligence. The idea in the intellectual is unfolded in the verbal expression in discursive reason, in language.

Language mimics the partless intellectual; it attempts to realize the wholeness of the intellectual through a fragmented and diversified structure, but it cannot. Such is the cause of human desire, the perpetual state of incompleteness in relation to the inaccessible ideal of completion, which Plotinus characterizes as the intellectual. Language "shows the intellectual act as if in a mirror," in bringing the intellectual act into the image-making power. The intellectual act is not present to consciousness, and yet conscious reason mimics it or reflects it in every way, but only through the mechanical means available to discursive reason, which limit it in relation to the intellectual. Discursive reason is to the intellectual as sensual forms are to the idea in the *Republic* of Plato; they are shadows or puppets, dancing in front of a screen, being manipulated by an inaccessible source, the divine idea become the intellectual. The self-consciousness of reason becomes a cause for self-alienation for Hegel, an irreconcilable disjunction.

In the twentieth century, Jacques Lacan defined the unconscious as being structured like a language. For Lacan, the fact that the unconscious can only be imagined through language proves that it does not exist. Our concept of the unconscious corresponds to the Plotinian intellectual, that element of thought which is inaccessible to us, but which controls discursive reason in a

process of unfolding and reflection, and image-making in perception, through language. But according to Lacan, such an element of thought can only be constructed in thought itself; rather than being an idealized form of thought, the unconscious becomes nothing other than the matrix of language which facilitates perceptual and conceptual processes. For Plotinus, the soul, or discursive reason, only becomes self-conscious when it represents itself to itself in the imagination, through the mechanisms of language. He says, “even though the soul is always moved to intelligent activity, it is when it comes to be in the image-making power that we apprehend it.” Self-consciousness and Hegelian self-alienation are only possible through language; language is what defines human experience, and what separates the human being from nature and instinct. In the thought of Lacan, consciousness is the product of the mirror stage, when the infant first identifies itself in the mirror, which can only occur following the beginning of the acquisition of language.

Plotinus continues, “The intellectual act is one thing and the apprehension of it another, and we are always intellectually active but do not always apprehend our activity; and this is because that which receives it does not only receive acts of the intelligence, but also, on its other side, perceptions.” The word and the percept are two sides of the same coin; they occur simultaneously in the conceptual/perceptual process, from the interior and exterior of the subject, from the subjective and objective in Hegelian terms. All perception, and thinking, for Plotinus, entail the intersection of the human mind and exterior sensual reality, and language is the shared mechanism of both. Perception operates according to the unconscious linguistic structure of which we are not aware in the intellect; this concept of Plotinus is a basic tenet of structuralist philosophies in the twentieth century, in particular the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss. There is as much of a basis in the thought of Plotinus for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century idealism as there is for twentieth-century structuralism.

Jacques Lacan calls this unconscious linguistic matrix according to which we are manipulated to think and talk the symbolic order, and the Other, with a big O, in terms of social identity. In our lives, in the way we think and talk, we are all playing out pre-inscribed conceptual and linguistic structures given by the collective consciousness of society. What we desire, who we desire, what we think, what we perceive, is all predetermined by the matrix of the language which we use, which is, in Lacanian terms, the unconscious. All

of this is suggested in the thought of Plotinus. Plotinus is a figure who must necessarily be constantly re-examined in relation to philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the present day. Plotinus defines perception as “apprehension” in *Enneads* IV.4.23, on the part of the soul, or discursive reason. The soul “understands the quality attaching to bodies and takes the impression of their forms.” Perception is not possible without the linguistic concepts of apprehension, quality, and impression. It is the impression of the form of the thing, the *eidos*, and not the body as three-dimensional entity in space, which is perceived.

In hallucinations and dreams, as described by Freud, objects appear as two-dimensional, as floating forms against a background. The qualities which we associate with exterior space are not present in dreams, such as a horizon line or a vanishing point in perspective construction, conceptual geometrical and mathematical qualities which we project onto real space but which are not present in real space. Kant established that space is a concept, an a priori construct, prior to perception, but not present in exterior reality. Space does not seem to be present in Plotinus’ picture of exterior reality. Space necessitates a continuum, a quality that can only be associated with the partless reality of the intellectual, not sensual reality. In order for an object to be perceived for Plotinus, its quality must be understood; an object must be understood as a part in a whole in a totalizing conception. Otherwise objects in space would have no relation to each other. The totalizing conception of space is necessary as an a priori for Plotinus as much as for Kant. Then the objects in space cannot be interrelated in an actual space, but only in a conceptualized space, space as a conceptual continuum which thus allows for the interrelation of objects.

In the *Enneads*, Plotinus described the universe as a transparent globe or sphere of light upon which all material things are exhibited. A mental picture of the universe consists of the representation of a sphere, a picture with all the things in the universe...” (V.8.9). The transparent sphere is composed of and then transcends the material parts which make up its whole, in a hypostatic model. Plotinus urges the reader to keep the image of the sphere in the imagination, and then imagine another sphere, one stripped of magnitude and spatial differences, or any sense of matter. According to Plato in *Timaeus* 36, the soul, invisible within the body of heaven, is “interfused everywhere from the center to the circumference of heaven,” and “partakes of reason and harmony.”² The soul occupies the centerpoint of the sphere. In *Enneads* VI.4.7, the soul is described as a luminous center in a transparent sphere.³ According

to Plato, in *Timaeus* 34, “And in the center he [the demiurge] put the soul, which he diffused throughout the body, making it also to be the exterior environment of it...”

The sphere of Plotinus is illuminated by the center by a ubiquitous undivided light made up of multiple material entities (radii) while the center, or source, is transcendent and has no material presence. If the light remained without the body, would the light be in one place, or diffused throughout the sphere, Plotinus asked. The rays of light as radii from the center are transformed from an incorporeal transcendent source, the spiritual light or light as first corporeal, to particular multiple entities, in the multiplication and rarefaction of the light, then into an all-pervading totality. In the *Timaeus* of Plato, “when the Creator had framed the soul according to his will, he formed within her the corporeal universe, and brought the two together, and united them center to center. The soul, interfused everywhere from the center to the circumference of heaven, of which also she is the external development, herself turning in herself, began a divine beginning of never-ceasing and rational life enduring throughout all time” (36). The soul is described in the *Timaeus* as the originary light, as the origin of the universe, autodiffusing from a point and forming a sphere, providing the motions, patterns and geometries which constitute the physical world.

The point at the center of a sphere may also correspond to the classical model of vision. There is evidence that in the classical world, vision was understood to correspond to a model of geometrical perspective construction where the vanishing point is at the center of a sphere or circle and is connected to visual reality by rays emanating from the center, like equal radii connecting a point to the surface of a sphere. Vitruvius, for example, in first century Rome, observed in his treatise *De architectura* (I.2.2), “Scenography [*scenographia*, perspectival drawing] also is...the correspondence of all lines to the vanishing point, which is the center of a circle [*omnium linearum ad circini centrum responsus*].”⁴

Scenographia has been defined in part as the application of optical laws to the visual arts and architecture.⁵ *Circini centrum* can be translated as “center of a circle” and also “compass point”; the *centrum* is either a vanishing point within a picture, in perspectival construction, or the eye of the viewer at the center of a circle of projection of visual rays from the center.⁶ The eye at the center point of a sphere, being the mirror or lens of the soul, would represent the soul at the center of a sphere. The sphere or circle of projection of radii or lines of light from the eye, in extramission, or lines in perspective

construction, corresponds to the shape of the retina and the pupil; the visual rays converging on the compass point or center, in intromission, correspond to the lines of vision from the retina to the sphere of the physical universe in extramission. Lines in space are actually received as convex curves by the eye, as they are projected onto the convex sphere of the retina, and must be adjusted in order to be perceived as straight.

Plotinus held that bodies in the heavens never have straight lines as natural paths. Plotinus described the cosmos as constantly moving toward the soul, or the center, in curved rather than straight lines (*Enneads* II.2.1), as in the movement of the Same and Other of Plato in the *Timaeus*. Some scholars believe that classical perspective, *perspectiva naturalis*, based on the point and sphere, is derived from attempts to understand the laws of visual optics in the human eye, in contradiction to the *perspectiva artificialis* or *costruzione legittima* of the Renaissance, which imposes a geometrical and mathematical abstraction onto physical space.

Byzantine images also attest to the endurance of the classical model of perspective. In Byzantine mosaics, especially in Ravenna, there is no horizon line or vanishing point in the picture, and figures are not organized in space on any visible projected lines or planes. The figures in the mosaics seem to float in a space which has no dimensions or geometrical description. It is possible, as has been suggested by some scholars, that the figures are organized along lines of light projected from the eye of the viewer toward the picture plane in extramission, corresponding to the rays of light projected onto the retina in intromission, so that the images in the mosaic can be seen as projections of the soul or intellect of the viewer, as hieratic images. The beauty of the images is an intellectual beauty, in Plotinian terms, rather than a physical beauty.

In the *Enneads*, viewers of works of art do not just see physical representations, they see the idea behind the representation, which leads them to an experience of love (II.9.16). For Plotinus, when the soul becomes free of the body it becomes completely intellective, open to the participation of the divine idea which is the source of beauty; the idea of beauty is communicated to the soul through the intellectual or *nous*. The divine idea, the “authentic-existence,” is beauty itself (*Enneads* I.6.6), or the One, from which is derived the intellectual. The intellectual is the manifestation of beauty, and through the intellectual the soul becomes beautiful, as active intellect enlightens material intellect in Aristotelian terms. The soul participates in both the sensible world and the eternal world; thus the beauty of sensible things in the world

of appearance is a product of the eternal beauty in the soul from the absolute, through the intellectual, manifest in vision in the extramission of rays of light to form the visual image of eternal beauty, as in the Byzantine mosaic.

It is as if the Byzantine mosaic is a transparency projected from the illuminated lens of the eye of the mind, the *oculus mentis*, the translation in color, light and transparency of the incorporeal intelligible beauty of the intellectual, illuminated in the eye of the mind by the spiritual or originary light. For Plotinus in the *Enneads*, perception cannot operate by an immediate apprehension of sensible objects, but rather by an apprehension of the representations of the objects in the impressions which sensation imprints on the soul, or discursive reason. The sensation of the sensual form is a copy or shadow of the apprehension of the intelligible form in intellect, which is closer to the “authentic existence” (I.1.7). The phantom of the outer sensation is the transparency projected by the extramission of light from the eye of the impressions printed upon the animate, the sensible form which has been formed by the intelligible form, and which appears to discursive reason to be an immediate perception of the sensible world.

When the image is formed in the soul of Plotinus, and the thinking subject understands the intelligible form as the source of the sensible form, the subject is able to see intellect as self-generated, and the subject is able to see its own intellect as the idea of beauty, and itself as beauty itself. The subject sees itself as the beauty which the subject perceives in the intelligible, which it projects onto the sensible world in the extramission of light in vision. As in the *Symposium* of Plato, the seer becomes the seen as the subject sees itself as the beauty of the sensible world, and the subject becomes vision itself (I.6.9). The world exists as it is, and contains the beauty that it does, because the cognition and perception of the human subject construct and define it as such; the world is what the individual human subject creates.

For the seer to become the seen and the subject to become vision the eye must become like the sun, as it projects light, both in the form of physical rays of light and the transparency of the illumination of the intelligible. In the *Republic*, Socrates describes the sun as being the source of the power of sight. The sun is the cause of sight and is at the same time seen by the sight it causes, as the intelligible form causes the sensible form in the eye of the mind and is able to be seen by the eye of the mind in the intellectual. The relation of the sun to sight is the same as the relation of the good to intelligence for Plato. In the same way that objects are clearly perceived when they are illuminated by the sun, and only dimly perceived in the dark or at night, so

intelligible objects are clearly perceived by intelligence when they are illuminated by truth and reality, and dimly perceived when they are within “the twilight world of change and decay” (*Republic* 508), limited to sensible reality. The initiate in the *Symposium* learns to see the objects of intelligence as illuminated by the good, differentiating them from the sensible world of physical beauty and shadows and reflections, as the lens of the eye of the mind is unclouded in the ascent of intellection to the intellectual. In the *Republic*, the good in the intelligible idea gives to intelligence the power of knowing as the sun gives to sight the power of seeing. Since the good is understood by the intelligence that it causes, the knower becomes the known in the same way that the seer becomes the seen.

As in the *Symposium*, where the initiate moves from the beauty of the body to the beauty of all bodies, to the idea of beauty and to beauty itself, in the *Enneads* the soul moves from discursive reason, *nous pathetikos*, to the intellectual, *nous poietikos*, and to the understanding of the One. The intelligible idea of beauty is visible to the soul in the intellectual of Plotinus, and it becomes clear that all sensible beauty is a product of intelligible beauty. The source of beauty lies beyond the intellectual in the good, or the One, where beauty is primal and absolute. In the allegory of the cave in the *Republic*, the good is the source of light in the visible region and the source of intelligence in the intelligible region. The good is perceptible to the mind in the intelligible region, to which it ascends from the visible region, represented by the prison in the cave, as the light coming into the prison represents the visible good, as the illumination of the intelligible. The intelligible form, the form on the puppet screen across the road, is projected onto the wall of the cave in the form of a shadow, which corresponds to what is perceived in the sensible world. The light of the sun is the source of light in the visible realm, as the good is the source of intelligence, to which the mind ascends from the sensible world, as in the *Symposium* the soul is released from the prison of the cave, from the corporeal confines of sensible perception.

In *Enneads* IV.6.1, Plotinus suggests that perception functions as the application or enactment of an a priori language of intelligible forms already assembled in the intellectual, which is then projected onto sensible reality as sensuous forms, through the linking of the intelligible form and the sensible form. The object which is being perceived is already apprehended by the perceiving subject in relation to the perceiving mechanism through the use of geometry, as the organization of the sensible world as a conceptual space is based in geometry and mathematics, dimensions given to it in the autodiffu-

sion of light, the same spirit or medium which affects the reception of the sensible form. In other words, the object is constructed by the rational soul as the intelligible form even before the sensible form of the object is imprinted in the imagination and transformed by noetic thought from form to concept, sensible form to intelligible form.

The act of perception thus only doubles or reflects the already conceptualized existence of the sensible object. Perception involves the enactment of a vocabulary of forms gained through experience, and that each act of perception only reinforces the presence of the thinking subject in the sensible world. In *Enneads* IV.6.1, Plotinus seems to be saying that all measurements of distance in perception are projections of measurements of distance in thought, that it is impossible to immediately perceive measurements of distance, or to distinguish between foreground and background. Distances and relationships between objects cannot be immediately perceived, but can only be understood as a priori concepts. What we perceive are images and shadows of intelligible forms. It is impossible to perceive sensible reality directly, and once the material object has been transformed into the sensible form, as informed by the intelligible form, it is impossible to know the sensible object.

According to Plotinus in *Enneads* I.6.3, shape is not something which is inherent to objects in sensible reality, but is rather something which is imposed upon objects by human thought, in the nature of the dimensions given to matter by light, in the *eidos*, the imprint of the form. The shape of the *eidos* is something conceived and imposed upon the sensible object before it is received as a *tupos* or imprint; the shape of the object is part of the a priori vocabulary by which the intellectual orders the sensible world, reflecting the ordering of the cosmic intellect. Sense perception gives form and order to the otherwise inchoate, fragmented and chaotic sensible reality of the material substrate.

Sense perception transfers the form of the body, as conceptualized, according to Plotinus, to the soul, as a form which corresponds to the soul (I.6.3); the perceived form must correspond to the preconception of it, as the harmony in proportions of the body must conform to the harmony in proportions of the rational soul. As Plotinus suggests, these mechanisms of perception form the basis of desire as well as love. The reasoning power in soul in *Enneads* V.3.2 makes judgments about the sensible form given to it, which is already the product of judgments of the intellectual, in the intelligible form, and organizes it in combinations and divisions, corresponding to geometry

and mathematics, the dimensions given by light. As the *eidos* comes to the eye of the mind in the soul from the intellectual, the soul acquires understanding by recognizing new impressions and fitting them with mnemonic residues in *memoria*. Perception is the product of experience in the interaction of thought and the sensible world. The dialectical process, according to Plotinus, consists of recollections of the soul, the mnemonic residues of the *tupos*; perception becomes a function of memory, as the recollections are facilitated by the transformation of the sensible form into the intelligible form, the form into the intelligible, or the image into language, as the form has already been given by the intelligible.

In *Enneads* V.3.3, the soul processes the sensible form which it has already defined itself as the intelligible form, in the relation between noetic thought and sense perception. The spiritual light, which illuminates the intelligible form in the intellectual, *nous poietikos*, is inaccessible to the mechanisms of sense perception, though sense perception depends on the illumination of the intelligible form in the mind's eye. According to Plotinus, discursive or conscious reason is caught somewhere between sense perception and *nous*, the inaccessible intellectual processes, as in the intellectual, between the sensible and intelligible. We are caught in a play of mirrors, reflections coming from both sides, as sensible form and intelligible form, neither accessible to us. Human identity is given by this condition, which creates in us the insatiable desire for that which is inaccessible to us, an understanding of the sensible world around us, and an understanding of ourselves, which we are caught between.

In the *Enneads*, the internal illumination of the intelligible form results in a synthesis of the subjective and objective, as in the absolute spirit of Hegel (V.8.11). When the subject of Plotinus is able to see the intelligible form, that which is beyond appearance, beyond the sensible form, then the subject is able to see itself as vision itself (I.6.9); what is seen is defined by the mechanisms of seeing. The consciousness of the subject seeing itself seeing is transcended in the synthesis of the subjective and objective, in the illumination of the good. The light of the good for Plotinus is the pure interiority of the illumination of the intelligible form. For Plotinus, when the *eidos* is formed in the imagination, and the subject in perception and intellection understands the intelligible form as the source of the sensible form, the subject is able to be self-gathered in the purity of being. For the seer to become the seen the eye must become sunlike, literally and metaphorically; it must be a source of illumination as well as a passive receptor of light. Thus vision must

be a combination of the extramission and intromission of light, and the mind's eye must be able to illuminate the intelligible form in the same way that the divine light illuminates the intellectual.

Plotinus called the reflections of the images of the intellectual "imprints" or "impressions," so they are seen as the *eidōs* or form which is not connected to a material form or *morphe*, in the same way that the images of sense perception themselves are the *eidōs* and not the *morphe*, imprints or impressions of forms that are received in connection to the material objects, as if there are two lights, or a double light, shining on the material object: the light of the intelligible which illuminates the *eidōs*, and the light of the sensible (the sun) which illuminates matter. In the same way, Robert Grosseteste would distinguish between *lumen* and *lux*, physical and spiritual light. The physical light of the sun illuminates sense objects, while reflected spiritual light illuminates intelligible forms in the *oculus mentis*, mind's eye. Judgment in discursive reason for Plotinus is based on the perception of the *eidōs* of the sensible object, as it is subjected to the mechanisms of combination and division in apperception, which are the same mechanisms which Sigmund Freud attributed to the image-making power of unconscious thought in the formation of dream images from dream thoughts, what he called condensation and displacement. The judgment in discursive reason is also based on the perception of the image connected to thoughts from the intellectual, as the objects of sense perception are processed through the unconscious mechanisms of imagination and memory which make the sense perception possible in the first place, then translate the objects of sense perception into a totality (what Immanuel Kant would call the "manifold"), even through the combinations and divisions, which makes being possible, and which makes thinking equivalent to being.

Thinking for Plotinus is a dialectical process which is facilitated by imagination, which is suspended between the intellectual, the source of thinking, and sense perception, the object of thinking. The dialectical process involves the imprint of the sense object or sensible form in perception, the imprint of the idea of the object or intelligible form in the imagination or image-making power, the memory or recollection of past thoughts and perceptions in relation to the present thought, the "recollections" of the soul, the transformation of the image, both sensible and intelligible, into the word in language, both the spoken word and the word prior to speech in the intellectual, and the fitting together of sensible image, intelligible image, recollected sensible image, recollected intelligible image, sensible word, and intelligible word, in a

process which requires the anticipation of the perception of the image or word in relation to the recollection of the intelligible image or word in the intellectual, as it is perceived as a reflection or imprint in mind. When the soul is “in the intelligible world it has itself too the characteristic of unchangeability” (IV.4.2), but “if it comes out of the intelligible world, and cannot endure unity, but embraces its own individuality and wants to be different” (IV.4.3) it then acquires memory, in discursive reason and temporal succession. Memory helps keep the soul partly in the intelligible world, the rational soul, but it also brings soul down to the sensible world, the irrational soul, engaging in *nous pathetikos*.

As Jacques Lacan would say, meaning and communication are only possible in the anticipation of a signifier in language and perception, in relation to both the recollection of the signifier from prior perception, and the intelligible or signified (the idea) in relation to the signifier (the word). Lacan called this the *point de capiton*, the “button hole” which connects the floating kingdoms of signifiers or words in language and the signifieds or intelligible ideas with which they are connected, as described by Ferdinand de Saussure. Clearly the concepts of the signifier and signified in modern linguistics are derivations of the concepts of the sensible and intelligible, and the functions of perception and intellection.

As the perception of a sensible object entails both the *eidos* of the object and the *eidos* of the intelligible idea of the object in unconscious thought, “actual seeing is double” (*Enneads* V.5.7). The eye “has one object of sight which is the form of the object perceived by the sense, and one which is the medium through which the form of its object is perceived....” The medium, the intelligible idea of the object which comes from intellect and is connected to the imprint that is reflected in the mirror of the mind’s eye, precedes the perception of the sensible form, and is the cause of the perception of the sensible form. In normal conscious thought and perception, the form and the medium cannot be separated, and the form of the sensible object is unknowingly perceived as a sensible object, without its sensible or intelligible form. While vision in sense perception is distracted in the act of perception of an object, it is not capable of self-reflection in its outer act.

Mind must be made aware of the medium without the object in order to understand how the object is perceived. Plotinus gave as an example the light of the sun, which is perceived without the body of the sun which is the source of its light. The light of the sun, although only the light is perceived, is not possible without the mass of the body which lies beneath it. Saying

that the sun is all light is the equivalent of saying that sensible objects are only the forms that they are perceived as. The seeing of the intellect sees objects by another light than the light which illuminates the perceptible form; the seeing of the intellect can detach itself from the illuminated perceptible form and see the source of the light as well as the light itself. In that way mind can perceive the source of its perception or thought, and not just the object perceived or the act of perception.

The eye then, through the knowledge of intellect, is able to perceive not just the external light which illumines the form of the sensible object, but an internal light as well, which illuminates the intelligible idea of the form as an intelligible light, or a priori intuitive light, or unconscious light. Evidence of the internal light can be seen when the eyelids are closed, or in the dark, when light appears in the eyes. Plotinus was following Plato in suggesting that vision itself depends on the external light entering the eye (intromission) as well as internal light from the eye illuminating the object (extramission). If the eye abandons the external light and external form, it can concentrate on the internal light and internal form, just like mind can concentrate on the intelligible idea, and “then in not seeing it sees, and sees then most of all....”

The external world of sense objects is necessary to be renounced in order to understand its existence in relation to the perception of it, in the equivalence of thinking and being, and conscious thought and perception have to be renounced in order to understand their existence in relation to human thought and identity, which can be found suspended somewhere between intellect and sense perception. The renunciation of conscious thought is necessary in order to access unconscious thought, the prior ground of all thought and perception. In not seeing, the eye “sees light; but the other things which it saw had the form of light but were not the light,” not the original light. The intelligible light which Intellect sees when “veiling itself from other things and drawing itself inward,” is a light “alone by itself in independent purity,” its source inaccessible and unknown even to intellect, being that of the One, which is not being or thought. The intelligible light can be reflected, through the medium of unconscious thought, and known to conscious thought.

In V.3.8, Plotinus explained that intelligibles exist prior to bodies, and cannot be thought of in terms of color or form (until they are connected to such in imagination). Intelligibles themselves are “naturally invisible,” invisible even to the soul which possesses them. In the physical world, something is seen when it is illuminated by enough light. In the intelligible world, something can only be seen by itself, because seeing is only through itself,

and not through a medium. Seeing something through itself in the intelligible is like light seeing itself, seeing itself as the source of itself, which is inaccessible even to Intellect. Once the intelligible light is seen, sensible light in perception is no longer necessary for understanding. Soul is an image, a reflection or likeness of Intellect; conscious thought is an image, a reflection or likeness of unconscious thought. The illumination of a sensible object by light is a reflection or likeness of the illumination of Intellect by intelligible light. Knowledge of Intellect depends on the separation of the soul from the body, as in the *Phaedo* of Plato and the *De anima* of Aristotle.

In the *Phaedo* of Plato, the philosopher “separates the soul from communion with the body” (64e3–10).⁷ Mind thinks best when it is untroubled by sense perceptions and affections, and “avoiding, so far as it can, all association or contact with the body, reaches out toward the reality” (65c3–8), the archetypal reality or intelligible reality of intellect for Aristotle and Plotinus. Mind is only deceived when it “tries to consider anything in company with the body” (65b9–12), in relation to sense perception and imagination. According to Aristotle in the *De anima*, it is necessary that mind, “since it thinks all things, should be uncontaminated,” (429a10–30) because “the intrusion of anything foreign hinders and obstructs it.” Mind cannot be seen to be mixed with body, because then it would be qualitative; mind can only be receptive—it can have “no actual existence until it thinks.”

In *Enneads* V.8.9, Plotinus asked us to apprehend in our thought, or form a mental picture of, the visible universe, with all of its parts, including the sun, heavenly bodies, earth and its creatures, organized in a sphere. In the soul then is a “shining imagination of a sphere” informed by an image connected to the intelligible understanding of the universe as reflected as if in a mirror into the image-making power. Then Plotinus asked us to subtract the mass, spatial relations and matter, and apprehend the universe without the “petty power of body.” In that way the universe can be apprehended more clearly, in its conceptual organization not dependent upon its physical appearance to the senses. The same exercise might be applied to the apprehension of a house, for example. If one forms a mental picture of the house in the imagination, derived from the picture of the house as given by perception, and then subtracts the physical properties of the house, one would have a true understanding of the house, as an entity given in the beginning by the intelligible idea, or concept, of “house,” prior to the sensible perception of the house. The house would be understood as a set of spatial relationships

and preconceptions about form and function, all of which are present in unconscious thought during the act of conscious perception.

In VI.4.7, Plotinus asked us to perform the same exercise with a hand holding a piece of wood. Imagine the “corporeal bulk of the hand to be taken away,” so that only the power to hold the wood would remain, in the same way that light, or the power of light, would remain if the bulk of a material body were removed, for example the bulk of a body at the center of a sphere and illuminating the sphere from the inside. Physical light itself is illuminated by intelligible light, which is a reflection of the originary inaccessible source of light itself. The visible universe is illuminated by conscious thought and perception; conscious thought and perception are illuminated by intelligible or unconscious thought and imagination; and unconscious thought is illuminated by a mystical light from an unknowable source beyond being. In modern psychoanalysis there is no mystical unknowable source beyond being, although there was in modern philosophical concepts of the unconscious. There is also no ultimate explanation for the source of unconscious thought in modern psychoanalysis.

As has been seen, according to Plotinus, the discerning of the sensible form is the function of discursive reason in language, not immediate sense perception, thus perception is a function of language. Since the sensible form is a simulacrum, a copy and derivative of the intelligible form, perception itself is a copy and derivative of reason in language. In *Enneads* IV.7.6, sensible perceptions are unified in the subject like lines coming to the center from the circumference of the circle, from fragmentation and multiplicity to unity, subject to the ruling principle, that is, reason in language. According to Plotinus, language mimics the partless intellectual, as in the simulacrum of the sensible form; it attempts to realize the wholeness of the intellectual through a fragmented and diversified structure, but it falls short, resulting in the gap between the intelligible form and the sensible form; the lack in the subject which is the cause of desire in language. Language displays the intellectual act as if in a mirror (IV.3.30), in creating the sensible form from the intelligible form. The intellectual act is not present to consciousness for Plotinus, which is why Plotinus is called the first philosopher of the unconscious. Yet conscious reason in language mimics the intellectual act, but only through the mechanical means available to discursive reason or material intellect, *nous pathetikos*, which limit it in relation to the intellectual.

It is the perceiving soul which assigns color and shape to the sensual object. Science has shown that color is not an inherent quality of an object, but

rather of the way in which light reflects off and is absorbed by the object. Science has shown that what we perceive in terms of color and shape is not actually there, but rather is a product of an interactive construction between what is actually there and the mechanisms of seeing as given by thought and language. This is exactly what Plotinus is suggesting about perception. “There cannot, then,” he says, “be nothing but these two things, the external object and the soul: since then the soul would not be affected; but there must be a third thing which will be affected, and this is that which will receive the form” (IV.4.23). This is the mechanism of perception itself in the eye, as receptor of light, which transforms the sensual object into the form or impression or mnemonic residue which is then processed by the soul or discursive thought and made part of the image-making power in imagination and memory.

The mechanism of the perceiving subject mediates between sensual reality and the inaccessible intellectual, or the matrix of language which is the unconscious, in a dialectical process between the subject and the world. There must be an “affection which lies between the sensible and the intelligible” as Plotinus puts it, “a proportional mean somehow linking the two extremes to each other.” In IV.6.1, Plotinus suggests that perception functions as the application or enactment of an a priori language of forms already assembled in reason or soul, which is then projected onto sensual reality. He says, “It is clear presumably in every case that when we have a perception of anything through the sense of sight, we look there where it is and direct our gaze where the visible object is situated in a straight line from us....” The object which is being perceived is already apprehended by the perceiving subject in relation to the perceiving mechanisms through the use of geometry, as the organization of the world as a conceptual space is based in geometry and mathematics; “...obviously it is there that the apprehension takes place and the soul looks outwards, since, I think, no impression has been or is being imprinted on it, nor has it yet received a seal-stamp, like the mark of a sealing on wax.” In other words, the object is constructed by reason even before the impression of the object is imprinted in the image-making power and transformed by language from *eidos* to concept or thought.

The act of perception only doubles or reflects the already conceptualized existence of the sensual object. This suggests the theory of perception of George Berkeley, in that perception involves the enactment of a vocabulary of forms gained through experience, and that each act of perception only reinforces the presence of the thinking subject in the sensual world. If every act

of perception presented something different, which according to reason it would if sensual objects are multiple, fragmented and variable, then the perceiving subject would have no bearing, continuity, or self-identification in relation to the sensual world surrounding it. The continuity of perception is given by the totality of experience as subsumed in language, as is the wholeness of the subject. According to Lacan, language itself only functions to reinforce the wholeness and continuity of the subject, because language is always used to reaffirm what is already known. This is the function of Lacan's *point de capiton*: communication only occurs retroactively when I can anticipate what you are going to say, and the sliding of signifiers gets caught in a loop. As I write these words, I am only reaffirming what you are already thinking or have already thought; in fact, my existence as a speaking subject is given to me only in that I reaffirm your expectations. Otherwise I would not be able to communicate anything. If I did not continually reaffirm your expectations, I would not exist as a subject; thus I must use language like this in order to exist, and I only exist as a subject in language.

For Plotinus, perception functions in the same way. If, when I go outside, the sky is not blue and the grass is not green, then my existence as a perceiving subject would be negated, and my wholeness as an individual would be shattered. Perception functions to reaffirm our existence as subjects in language, and the act of perception is nothing other than the projection of language onto the sensual world, in words such as "blue" or "round," by which perception reaffirms to us that the same thing is always going to be blue or round. Perception reaffirms the conceptual construct of space which we apply to the world around us, in constant geometrical relations between objects, which we learn by experience, as Berkeley would say, and in temporal multiplications of the objects as given by our conceptual construct of time. If I see two round and blue objects, my existence as perceiving subject is reaffirmed in my self-consciousness. If one of the round and blue objects became a square and red object the next time I saw it, which is entirely possible given the continual flux of reality, as described by Chaos Theory for example, then the self-consciousness of my existence as a perceiving subject would be threatened. The world around me must conform to my use of language in order for me to exist. The definition of psychosis in psychoanalysis is the inability on the part of the subject to connect language with the perceived world.

All visual forms in perception constitute the vocabulary of a language which is needed by the perceiving subject in order to function, in order to be reaffirmed as whole and healthy. Those visual forms include sensuous ob-

jects, which are designed to reinforce my wholeness as a subject, as are words in language, tones in music, etc. As the soul of Plotinus looks toward the object before having received an impression of the object, “there would have been no need for it to look outwards, if it already had in it the form of the visible object it saw by this entrance into it of the impression” (IV.6.1). Nevertheless, the soul must necessarily already have the mnemonic residue of the form of the object before it sees it, a visual memory of the impression, which has been transformed into conceptual activity through language. Perception also reinforces the continuity and wholeness of my thought; it would be difficult for me or anyone else to be reaffirmed by what I am saying if the next time I looked up the walls of the room were black, which is entirely possible given the continual flux of light in its reflections and refractions.

But that is not given to my conscious thought or activity of perception; it remains hidden in the underlying matrix of forms in language which would constitute the intellectual for Plotinus, and might constitute the unconscious of reality in modern terms. Then Plotinus asks, “when the soul adds the distance to what it sees and says how far it is looking at it from, could it in this way be seeing as distance what was in it and not separated from it by any interval?” Here Plotinus seems to be saying that all measurements of distance in perception are projections of measurements of distance in thought, that it is impossible to immediately perceive measurements of distance, what is in the foreground or background, how far behind one object is from another, etc. Without the mechanisms of perception, the subject is joined to its surroundings, at one with them, as it were. Perception separates the subject from its surroundings, creates geometrical and mathematical boundaries and divisions, alienates the subject from the world that it occupies by nature.

This is exactly what Berkeley says, that distances and relationships between objects cannot be immediately perceived, but can only be understood a priori concepts absorbed into intuition, acting in an unconscious way in relation to conscious thought, in the terms of psychoanalysis. Distance and relationships between objects are learned through experience, according to Berkeley; for a newborn baby, the visual experience of the world must only be one of floating, nebulous objects and colors, as in a hallucination or dream. Given all this, for Plotinus, “if we received impressions of what we see, there will be no possibility of looking at the actual things we see, but we shall look at images and shadows of the objects of sight, so that the objects themselves will be different from the things we see.” Just like the prisoners in the cave in the *Republic*, who can only see images reflected on the walls

as shadows, the reality of the sensual world is not accessible to us through the matrix of mechanisms in language and perception which govern our processes of thought and perception.

We exist in what Fredric Jameson likes to call the prison-house of language, and, following that, the prison-house of perception. It stands to reason that what we perceive and think is limited by the faculties of our perception, what we can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. If there were more faculties of perception, then more of the realities of the sensual world would be available to us. It is obvious that as we learn different languages, our scope of reality expands dramatically, as different sets of reality are given by different languages. According to Plotinus in *Enneads* I.6.3, shape is not something which is inherent to objects in sensual reality, but is rather something which is imposed upon objects by human thought, in the nature of geometry and ordering principles.

The shape of the impression of the form of the object is something conceived by thought in language, and imposed upon the object before it is received as an impression; the shape of the object is part of the a priori vocabulary by which reason orders the sensual world through language, and reaffirms the existence of the perceiving subject in the world. "When sense-perception, then, sees the form in bodies binding and mastering the nature opposed to it, which is shapeless, and shape riding gloriously upon other shapes, it gathers into one that which appears dispersed and brings it back and takes it in..." The form and shape which thought imposes on bodies are opposed to nature, as are geometry and mathematics, and language, and all mechanisms of thought. The superimposition of shape is an instrument of the necessity of totalizing a fragmented reality for the purpose of conforming the environment to the subject.

An important element in the projection of shape onto objects is in relation to the body of the perceiving subject, for the purposes of accommodating the environment to the subject. So for example the qualities of symmetry, proportion, interior versus exterior, etc., qualities of the body of the perceiving subject, are projected onto bodies in sensual reality as perceived. The totalizing process of the projection of preconceived shapes onto sensuous objects is also an instrument of the conceptual process of abstraction, which like language in perception is a necessary element in human thought and language. Abstraction involves the movement from particular to universal, and is a linguistic equivalent of the totalizing of fragmented and varied objects into an understandable conceptual whole. According to Wilhelm Worringer

in the early twentieth century, abstraction is a necessary biological mechanism in that it is a manifestation of the death drive, the desire of the individual organism for death to necessitate its reproduction.

Sense perception transfers the form of the body, as conceptualized, according to Plotinus, “now without parts, to the soul’s interior and presents it to that which is within as something in tune with it and fitting it and dear to it...”; the perceived form must correspond to the preconception of it, to reaffirm the subject in mind as well as body. It is that which constitutes the ego of the subject, in psychoanalytic terms, the gestalt projection of the body of the subject (the imaginary order of Lacan), and its mental wholeness, onto the environment. As Plotinus suggests, these mechanisms of perception, based in language, form the basis of desire as well as love. We love that which reinforces us as perceiving subjects. As Lacan puts it, love is the mutual reaffirmation of the flaws and shortcomings of two people. We love that which reaffirms our limitations in our thought, as well as in our physical experience.

Human logic, or discursive reason, described as “the reasoning power in soul” in *Enneads* V.3.2, makes judgments about the imprints of forms given to it, which are already the product of judgments of the intellect, or the intellectual, in unconscious intuition, and organizes them in combinations and divisions, corresponding to geometry and mathematics. As the imprints come to reasoning power from intellect, the soul “continues to acquire understanding as if by recognizing the new and recently arrived impressions and fitting them to those which have long been within it.” As with Berkeley, perception is the product of experience in the interaction of thought and the sensible world. The dialectical process consists of “recollections of the soul,” the mnemonic residues of the received imprint, what would be the *imago* or *percipi* in psychoanalysis; perception becomes a function of memory, that is, language, as the recollections are facilitated by the transformation of the image into the word, as the image has already been given by the word.

In *Enneads* V.3.3, if sense perception “makes the details of...form explicit, it is taking to pieces what the image-making power gave it,” and if it makes a judgment on the form, “its remark originates in what it knows through sense-perception, but what it says about this it has already from itself...” Discursive reason does nothing other than process images of forms which it has already defined itself, through the relation between intellect and reason, or unconscious and conscious thought. As Lacan would say, consciousness is an illusion. We think we are aware of, and have an understand-

ing of, our thought processes as given by logic and reason, and that through logic we can approach the working of the intellect, as Plotinus would say, or the mechanisms of the unconscious, as the psychoanalysis would say, but in fact we are deluded in such consciousness, given the limitations of reason. If perception is determined by language, as Plotinus is suggesting, then we are unaware of the mechanisms of our own thinking.

Language, the *explicatum* of intellect, denies access to the workings of the intellect, because of its limitations. It isn't that the intellect is infinite, for Plotinus or Lacan, but that the mechanisms of intellect, in the interaction of language, perception, and memory, exceed the capacity of each individually to grasp the whole operation. When Lacan ultimately denies the existence of the unconscious, and describes the unconscious as structured like a language, he reveals the inability of discursive reason to grasp the mechanisms of intellect, particularly in perception. In order to understand itself, reason must know itself through language, but it is precisely the limitations of that form of self-knowledge which is available to it which prevents reason from knowing itself altogether.

As Plotinus says, "But why is this not intellect, and the rest, beginning from the power of sense-perception, soul? Because it must be soul that is engaged in reasoning..." and "we gave this part the task of observing what is outside it and busying itself with it, but we think that it is proper to Intellect to observe what belongs to itself and what is within itself," which is impossible through language and perception, the mechanisms of reason. Reason cannot access intellect, and therefore cannot know itself, thus any self-consciousness of reason can only be an illusion. It is said that the difference between philosophy and psychoanalysis is that in philosophy reason can know itself and in psychoanalysis it cannot, but this is clearly not the case in the philosophy of Plotinus. As Plotinus says, "For we perceive through perception, even if it is not we ourselves who are the perceivers." As perceivers, and thinkers, we cannot know ourselves as perceivers, because it is the operation of intellect, which is inaccessible to us, through which we perceive and think. We operate according to something which we cannot know, thus cannot possibly be conscious of. According to Plotinus, our reason, or as much as we can be self-conscious of it, is caught somewhere between sense perception and intellect, between the sensible and intelligible, empirical thought and abstraction. We are, as it were, caught between mirrors, reflections coming from both sides, representations of the sensible and intelligible as images of sensible objects and manifestations of intellect in discursive reason. Self-

consciousness is given by and contained within this nebulous region which denies complete access to either our own thought or the sensible world around us.

Many of the tenets of Plotinus' theory of perception are reinforced in the theories of George Berkeley and Immanuel Kant, to the end that perception is function of language. In *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* in 1709, Berkeley asserted that the quality of distance cannot be immediately perceived of itself, that in fact it must be a quality or judgment on the part of thought, as Plotinus would say of the quality of the shape of objects. Judgment, according to Berkeley, is the product of experience rather than sense perception; it is therefore necessarily the product of memory, and thus of language. Berkeley saw perception as the functioning of a language of signs, as given by memory and cognition. As he put it in the Fourth Dialogue of the *Alciphron*, "we perceive distance not immediately but by mediation of a sign, which has no likeness to it or necessary connection with it, but only suggests it from repeated experience, as words do things" (§8).⁸ In the same way that signs in language immediately and unconsciously produce ideas or meanings, signs in the act of perception, such as distance relationships, immediately and unconsciously produce ideas and judgments about the perceived sensible world. The sign, or signifier in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, is intimately intertwined with what it represents, the signified in structural linguistics, and through the constant practice of perception and verbal expression, cannot be immediately separated.

Ferdinand de Saussure demonstrated more elaborately in the twentieth century this relation between the signifier and signified, or sign and meaning, suggested by Berkeley, that they are in fact two separate things contained within the word, with indeed no apparent relation. Such a model had already been put forward by René Descartes in the essay called *The World, or a Treatise on Light and the Other Principal Objects of the Senses*, published in 1664. As Saussure would establish, for Descartes "words do not in any way resemble the things they signify";⁹ the relationship between the word and the thing is completely arbitrary, and reveals no relation between thought, or discursive reason unfolded in language, and the world around us, with which both Plotinus and Kant would agree. Nevertheless, for Descartes "that does not prevent them from causing us to think about those things, often without us even noticing the sound of the words or their syllables...."

The distinction between the signifier and the signified in language can be compared to the distinction between sensible form and intelligible form in

perception. The distinction between the signifier and the signified, between the object and the intelligible in language or perception, can be found in classical philosophy. In the first century, Vitruvius, in the first chapter of the first book of *De architectura*, his treatise on architecture, explained that “both in general and especially in architecture are these two things found; that which signifies and that which is signified. That which is signified is the thing proposed about which we speak; that which signifies is the demonstration unfolded in systems of precepts.”¹⁰

According to Berkeley, the same is true of perception, which functions as a language of signs. This was also put forward by Descartes, who asks, “Now if words—which have meaning only as a result of a human convention—are enough to make us think about things that do not resemble them in any way, why is it not possible that nature may also have established a particular sign which would make us have the sensation of light, even though such a sign contains nothing in itself that resembles the sensation?”¹¹ The sign would correspond to the imprint of Plotinus, which is constructed by reason in intellect, and which has no necessary relation to the sense perception of the object. The relation of words in language to the objects that they represent, as developed by Descartes, Berkeley, Kant, and Saussure, reaffirms the disjunction between the thinking subject and the world around it as established by Plotinus.

Nevertheless, as Berkeley explained in the *New Theory of Vision*, we are “exceedingly prone to imagine those things which are perceived only by the mediation of others to be themselves the immediate objects of sight,”¹² just as in language we experience the immediate recognition of an idea, and not the mechanism by which the word conveys the idea. The disjunction between the signifier and signified goes unnoticed in both language and perception in the flow of the experience. In the *Alciphron*, Berkeley asked, “may we not suppose that men, not resting in but overlooking the immediate and proper objects of sight as in their own nature of small moment, carry their attention onward to the very thing signified...?” (§12). In Plotinian terms, it is the idea of the object as given by intellect which is immediately grasped, rather than the image itself of the object which is imprinted on memory as a seal or sign. The objects themselves, according to Berkeley, “are not seen, but only suggested and apprehended by means of the proper objects of sight, which alone are seen.” The proper objects of sight are the seals or signs, the imprints or mnemonic residues, which are constructed by language through word and memory, as for Plotinus.

Ideas can only be communicated by language through experience; if I listen to a foreign language with which I am not familiar, no idea is communicated. The language of perception is more difficult to see through, because it is a universal language, with only minor differences between cultures. All human beings use some form of mathematics and geometry, and have some concept of space and time. Mathematics, geometry, space, and time, are the principal signifiers in the language of perception. As Berkeley put it in the *Alciphron*, the language of perception “is the same throughout the whole world, and not, like other languages, differing in different places,” thus “it will not seem unaccountable that men should mistake the connection between the proper objects of sight and the things signified by them to be founded in necessary relation or likeness...” (§11). It is thus “easy to conceive why men who do not think should confound in this language of vision the signs with the things signified.” Berkeley’s philosophy is a kind of proto-structuralism, the earliest philosophy based in linguistics.

Kant described space and time as a priori intuitions; Berkeley described them as judgments learned through experience. Unlike Kant or Plotinus, Berkeley denied the existence of the actual sensual object in perception, because it is impossible to know that it is there apart from the sign of it which is the language of perception. If Berkeley were to apply that concept to language, he would have to deny the separate existence of the idea represented by language, which is a crucial quality of the intellect of Plotinus. Berkeley would then have to deny Plotinus’ intellect, as distinct from reason, and the Platonic idea, and Kantian intuition. Berkeley stands as a predecessor to the Deconstruction of Jacques Derrida in the twentieth century, for whom there is nothing outside of language, nothing represented outside the representation, no signified outside the signifier. The position of Derrida would then align with the position of Berkeley in terms of perception; Derrida would have to deny that any sensual object exists outside of its representation in perception, which in fact he does not do, in somewhat self-contradictory fashion. Derrida denied the existence of the unconscious, and the premises of idealist metaphysics. Berkeley, on the other hand, was an idealist through and through, so not a complete deconstructionist. For Kant, Berkeley’s idealism was a “dogmatic idealism,” incomplete in relation to the “transcendental idealism” which Kant establishes.

In a revised edition of the *New Theory of Vision*, called *The Theory of Vision or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained*, published in 1733, Berkeley attempted to present a more scientific explanation for the disjunc-

tion between the object and the sign of it, the signified and the signifier. This explanation is based on the phenomenon of the inversion of the projected image of the object onto the retina of the eye, which does not correspond to the object itself. The image is created by “pencils of rays issuing from any luminous object,” which “after their passage through the pupil and their refraction by the crystalline, delineate inverted pictures in the retina...” (§49). These pictures, which are “supposed the immediate proper objects of sight,” do not correspond in orientation to the object itself.

Berkeley’s explanation was that the picture, and the mechanisms of inversion and refraction, cannot be taken as a true picture of an object, but must be taken as a tangible image existing independently of the sensible object; it is manufactured in relation to the object, but is itself an object, with obvious differences from the object itself. This is along the lines of the imprint of Plotinus, which requires the mediation of intellect in order to form, and consists of qualities such as “shape” which are not inherent to the object itself. For Berkeley, “the retina, crystalline, pupil, rays crossing, refracted, and reunited in different images, correspondent and similar to the outward objects, are things altogether of a tangible nature,” like words in a language which have no necessary relation to the ideas which they represent, as a kind of picture. The pictures on the retina are tangible objects themselves which are “so far from being the proper objects of sight that they are not at all perceived thereby” (§50), but “apprehended by the imagination alone,” as in the image-making power of Plotinus, and the *Vortellungsrepräsentanzen* of Freud in psychoanalysis.

The sensible object does not exist in space then, but in the eye of the mind, as it were. The object as it is perceived is a “thought” or a “sensation” with no tangible spatial qualities or relations. Such relations can only be applied to objects metaphorically; perception is not just a language, but a figural or tropic language, relying on its own mechanisms to construct a reality. As in tropic language, the sign is “knotted” and “twisted” into the thing signified; it is not differentiated, although it has no relation to the object signified, like the phrase “the foot of the hill.” Perception itself can then be seen as a poetic act, a fundamental element and instrument in the subjective expression of the individual sharing in a universal language.

As for Plotinus, perception is a matter of apprehension, of cognizing the world in a particular way. Immediate visual experience, the phenomenological *imago*, the primordially perceived image, is unknown and inaccessible. Perception is learned, like language is learned; the visual field is mute to

someone who has not learned a language of interpretation, in terms of signs in geometrical and spatial relationships, shapes, sizes, colors, light, temporal relations, multiplications, divisions, etc. Once the language is learned, though, it goes unnoticed and is taken for granted. The self-consciousness of thought, as for Lacan, must be an illusion, as thought in reality is not able to grasp what it is doing. The self-consciousness of thought reaffirms the unperceived collusion between image and object, *eidos* and *morphe*, signifier and signified. When thought becomes aware of the disjunction at the base of its reason, the metaphysic becomes more difficult to imagine. Thought becomes aware that self-consciousness depends on the collusion between signifier and signified, and that it can only be defined by its own mechanisms.

In line with Berkeley, Immanuel Kant announced, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, "I apply the term *transcendental* to all knowledge which is not so much occupied with objects as with the mode of our cognition of these objects, so far as this mode of cognition is possible *a priori*."¹³ Thus the transcendental is the *nous poietikos* of the Divided Line of the *Republic* of Plato, thought not connected to sense perception. Clearly both Plotinus and Berkeley concerned themselves with the Kantian transcendental. The Kantian "a priori" in intuition can be seen in relation to the intellectual of Plotinus; it is a kind of epistemological metaphysic which does not exist for Berkeley or structuralist thought in general, including psychoanalysis and Deconstruction. In direct opposition to Berkeley, "space" for Kant, "is not a conception which has been derived from outward experiences" (p. 23). Space is not learned, like a language; it is purely conceptual. Berkeley denied the separate existence of the object in space, but accepted the existence of space. Kant denied the existence of space, but accepts the existence of the separate object, dividing it into the phenomenal and the noumenal, that which can be known of the object through perception, and that quality of the object that is inaccessible to perception or knowledge of it. Any experience of space, Kant explained, is only possible through the conceptual representation of space, as Berkeley would say that any experience of an object is only possible through its conceptual representation.

Kant finds proof of his assertion in the fact that it is impossible to conceive or imagine the non-existence of space, while it is easy to imagine the non-existence of an object. If space cannot not exist, its existence is entirely dependent on the presence of the thinking subject. Space must therefore necessarily be seen as "the condition of the possibility of phenomena, and by no means as a determination dependent on them..." (p. 24). It is thus a priori to

experience, and a priori to reason itself, if the sensible object is conceived by reason. Space is “no discursive or, as we say, general conception of the relations of things....” Space is not a construct of discursive reason, as the object would not be for Berkeley, but rather “pure intuition,” the intellectual of Plotinus. The a priori intuition of space is also prior to perception; there is thus no construction of space for Kant by human reason; it is not defined by geometrical or mathematical relations, as it might be for Berkeley or Plotinus. Geometry and mathematics are applied to space, but cannot be qualities of space. In that the existence of space depends on the presence of the intuiting subject, Kant’s theory is a kind of solipsism, in which all reality is relative to the individual, but intuition is necessarily a universal element of thought.

While Kant did not deny the existence of objects in space, he followed Plotinus in arguing for the necessity of the form of the objects existing prior to the perception of them. Objects are determined in intuition, as the shape of objects is given by intellect for Plotinus, and, given the solipsistic necessity of the presence of the subject, “because the receptivity or capacity of the subject to be affected by objects necessarily antecedes all intuitions of these objects, it is easily understood how the form of all phenomena can be given in the mind previous to all actual perceptions, therefore *a priori*...” (p. 26). The intuition of Kant suggests the unconscious, as does the intellect of Plotinus; the Berkelean process of learning a language of signs through experience occurs somewhere outside of conscious or discursive reason for Kant. As in Plotinus, the shape of an object as perceived corresponds to a predetermined form as its imprint, which makes the object possible to exist in relation to human thought.

As Berkeley showed that there is no necessary relation between the object and the form, what would be the Kantian a priori intuition of the object, the sign in the language, for both Berkeley and Kant, as well as for Plotinus, the sensible world is perceived only in a way in which it is forced or limited to conform to the conceptualizing of it in human thought. The purest representation of this reality of human perception is perspective construction, that invention of the Renaissance which imposes a mathematical and geometrical system onto the perceived world, with a vocabulary of signs in a language which includes a horizon line, vanishing point, and diagonal receding lines, for the purpose of reproducing the perceived world in painting to the highest degree of reality, while in fact, as we can see, perspective construction does nothing but reinforce the non-natural and unreal phenomenon of human perception. Paintings with mathematical and geometrical perspective construc-

tion look more realistic because the reality which they represent, the world as we perceive it, is already constructed by us with mathematics and geometry, in a priori intuition or the intellectual of Plotinus.

Erwin Panofsky suggested an alternative to perspective construction in representation which he called “psychophysiological space,” which he described as a haptic or tactile space, closer to what Berkeley would have in mind, and a space which consists of only overlapping forms and colors, with no superimposed mathematical or geometrical definitions. Such a space can be found in dreams and hallucinations, as described by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and has none of the vocabulary of perspective construction. It can be argued that it still might have the vocabulary of signs of shapes in imprints as described by Plotinus and Kant, and it can also be argued that psychophysiological space really has no relation to the world as it is perceived by conscious discursive reason in perception. Psychophysiological space appeals to the possibility of an unconscious, though the forms and shapes in hallucinations and dreams might well be nothing but mnemonic residues of conscious perception which are left unorganized by conscious thought, as suggested by Freud.

Kant’s intuition not only understands space and the forms of things in it prior to perception, it also understands the “principles of the relations of these objects prior to all experience” (p. 26). In conscious perception it is assumed that these principles are mathematics and geometry, those principles which determine perception, according to Descartes, and which are applied to perception through experience, according to Berkeley. In Plotinus, mathematics and geometry are the operations by which the intellectual, the archetypal idea or intelligible, is unfolded, as in the *explicatum* of Cusanus, into discursive reason. Mathematics and geometry therefore stand as a kind of intuition for Plotinus and Cusanus as well, an instrument of divine intelligence or the Aristotelian active intelligence for the revelation of the order of things in human understanding. They are both noetic and dianoetic. There is no divine intellect in the thought of Kant, in which human intellect shares, but the intuition of Kant plays the same role; it is a bridge from the divine intellect of the classical world to the unconscious of twentieth-century psychoanalysis. Mathematics and geometry would be excluded from the Freudian unconscious, because they are elements of conscious, discursive thought, and not primal or instinctual in Freud’s mythology. Mathematics and geometry do on the other hand certainly play a role in the Lacanian unconscious, as for Lacan the unconscious is structured like a language, and is in fact nothing but a

shared universal form of discursive reason, composed only of signifiers, in what Lacan calls the Other, with a big O.

Given that sensible objects are only known as forms in an a priori intuition, like the intelligible imprints of Plotinus, the sensible objects cannot be known in themselves at all, according to Kant. They can only be known as “representations of our sensibility” (p. 28), as extensions of the presence of the subject in the world. The representations of the objects in the imagination do not allow for knowledge of the objects themselves, their noumenal quality. Time, like space, has no existence of itself and is only an intuitive conception, as it is based in mathematics, and as it is impossible to conceive of the absence of time, like it is impossible to conceive of the absence of space. Time may or may not be a product of abstraction from experience, but it must be the precondition for experience, like space. Nothing exists outside of time, as nothing exists outside of space, and nothing exists outside of language. The concepts of time and space function like a language, as they are instruments in the unfolding of the intellectual, as in the revelation of the logos. In relation to Kant it can be said that language itself is an a priori intuition.

In structural linguistics, the signified, that element of language which is called *la langue*, exists prior to the signifier, called *la parole*, in the speech act. The function of the signifier in the speech act depends on the anticipation of the signified, which necessarily pre-exists the signifier, in order for language to function. The intelligible idea in the intellectual pre-exists the words which represent it in discursive reason. The sliding of the signified under the signifier, as Lacan would put it, is a function of the unconscious which pre-exists conscious thought in language, as time and space pre-exist conscious perception in Kant. For Plotinus, the signified would be formed in relation to discursive reason, as a translation of the imprint, the mnemonic residue of Freud, but this is an impossibility in Kant. The thought of Plotinus is closer to the transcendental idealism of Hegel than that of Kant, because for Hegel the transcendental requires the dialectic between subjective and objective, intellect and discursive reason as it were, while for Kant there is no possibility for such a dialectic.

Kant in fact described time as “the subjective condition under which all our intuitions take place” (p. 30), but the subjective is defined as being prior to the objective, that which determines the relations and representations of discursive reason. As time is the subjective condition of intuition, it is defined by intuition, “and in itself, independently of the mind or subject, is

nothing” (p. 31). If the thinking subject were not present, time would not exist. Time exists objectively as a mechanism to allow the thinking subject to perceive the world, but the world itself does not contain time, nor does the perceiving subject. Time is purely a concept, not a discursive concept but an intuitive concept, but its existence in objective reality is necessary for the world to be perceived by the thinking subject. Therefore the world as perceived by the thinking subject cannot exist outside the cognition of the subject. Time and space are the a priori subjective bases for the relation between subject and world which does not exist outside its representation, and for the subject which does not exist outside its process of representation.

Although Kant did not deny the existence of the subject outside its process of representation, it is certainly necessarily implied in his thought. As the denial of the existence of the subject becomes a key tenet of modernist thinking, as well as postmodern and psychoanalytic thought, Kant is seen as a founder of modern thought. The denial of the subject in modern thought is a product of structuralism, the concept that the unconscious is a universal shared language from which all thought is programmed, but it is clear that Kant is no structuralist, that the impossibility of the existence of the subject in Kant would depend on the metaphysics of the a priori intuition, preceding the dialectic of the Hegelian subject, which paves the way for modern structuralist thinking.

As no object in the world can be known in itself, only relations between objects can be known in time and space, as given by mathematics and geometry in discursive reason. What an object is in itself “remains unanswerable even after the most thorough examination of the phenomenal world” (p. 36). The thing in itself cannot be known by the relations through which it is represented, either the relations between objects or the relations between subject and object, or relations between representations. The imprints or forms of objects can only be taken as a series of relations, and the language which represents them, and represents intuition to discursive thinking, can only be taken as a series of relations. There is no thing-in-itself in a word any more than there is a thing-in-itself in a perceived object.

Language is a series of differences, as Derrida would characterize it in the concept of *différance* in Deconstruction, where in the play of differences, the constant sliding or *glissement* (Lacan’s word) in the relation between the signifier and signified, meaning is continually deferred, and ultimately impossible. Derrida’s neologism *différance* is meant to combine the words “differ” and “defer”; if language is only a play of differences, as for Kant words

and objects are plays of differences, then no metaphysic is possible. The metaphysic is possible for Kant because relations between objects are only possible in space and time, which have no basis or origin in discursive reason.

Discursive reason, in fact, cannot justify the concept of time, as given by Zeno's paradox. If motion is defined as a change from point A to point B, how can an arrow be at point A or B and at motion at the same time? The concept of time, as well as space, though it is the basis for all human experience, ultimately cannot correspond to human logic, and thus must be purely intuitive, given as necessary, as a metaphysic, and a priori to reason. For Derrida there is no necessity for human thought to correspond to the phenomenal world, in a kind of epistemological existentialism, thus no necessity for the metaphysic, or meaning. The disjunction between thought and the phenomenal world can be found in Plotinus, Berkeley and Kant, not to mention Hegel, as well as Derrida, but the desire to negotiate the disjunction in any form of dialectic is not a part of modernist thinking, which has abandoned the classical philosophical tradition.

The phenomenal world, nature, is no longer of any relevance in the definition of human experience, and in the modern romantic fantasy the individual can retreat completely from it, as in Joris-Karl Huysmans' *A Rebours* in 1884. Only human thought can define the human being, as represented by abstraction; Kant suggests that space and time are abstractions. The human subject can only know the relations which constitute its thought, not the phenomenal world which is represented by those relations. Human thought can only know itself as a form of representation to itself; as Lacan would say, the subject can only be a signifier representing itself to another signifier. As Kant says, when intuition "contains nothing but relations, it is the form of the intuition, which, as it presents us with no representation... can be nothing else than the mode in which the mind is affected by its own activity..." (p. 40). Intuition, like the intelligible in the intellectual of Plotinus, is thought without representation; without representation, it must be pure relation, pure abstraction, the particular subsumed in the universal as the signifier subsumed in the signified, and pure thought without any relation to the phenomenal object. There is no longer a dialectical mediation between the postmodern subject and the phenomenal world.

Kant followed Plotinus in defining perception as the combination of the physical reception of a visual representation of an object and the role that that representation plays as the basis for cognition, in a process of picture-

thinking, where the image becomes the word. “Our knowledge springs from two main sources in the mind, the first of which is the faculty or power of receiving representations; the second is the power of cognizing by means of these representations” (p. 44). A concept is spontaneously produced from the representations, as it is dependent on intuition, the Plotinian intellectual, or the psychoanalytic unconscious. As with Plotinus, intellect takes a variety of fragmented and disconnected visual stimuli in perception and combines them into a totalizing, synthesized whole in apperception. “The understanding, therefore, does by no means *find* in the internal sense any such synthesis of the manifold, but *produces* it, in that it affects this sense” (p. 89).

The synthesis or totalization of the fragmented, manifold reality as given by perception is the transcendental idea for Kant, just as it would be the Platonic idea in the intellectual of Plotinus. Transcendental ideas “must be products of pure reason, for they regard all empirical cognition as determined by means of an absolute totality of conditions” (p. 205), the manifold. Transcendental ideas are “natural and necessary products of reason”; they form the basis of reason in the construction of a representation of the world, and they are inaccessible to the sensible world itself, as the intellectual of Plotinus would be inaccessible to the sensible world, and discursive reason. Transcendental ideas “overstep the limits of all experience, in which, consequently, no object can ever be presented that would be perfectly adequate to a transcendental idea.”

In order to experience the world, reason by necessity must make itself inaccessible to the world; such demonstrates the profound disjunction between the human being and nature, between human reason and the world around it, a disjunction in which the human being must by necessity exist in a state of alienation, as in the thought of Hegel. The perfection and wholeness of the manifold of the world, its totality, is necessary for perception, as perception becomes a basis for reason, but such totality is impossible, thus reason exists on an impossible premise. For Kant, “the absolute totality of all phenomena is only an idea, for as we never can present an adequate representation of it, it remains for us a *problem* incapable of solution” (p. 206). Reason is unrepresentable to itself, thus the necessity for the mythologies of a priori intuition, the intellectual of Plotinus, and the unconscious.

As Derrida would say, the natural consequence of the reasoning faculties is aporia, the ultimate incapacity to solve a problem or paradox. The idea of the absolute totality of all phenomena is the Platonic idea, the archetypal principle which is distinguished from conscious reason. The disjunction or

incompatibility between human reason and the world around it is present in the thought of Plato, in contrast to the common interpretation that attributes to Plato a desire to totalize the world on the part of human reason, rather than the necessity of doing so because of the failings of human reason. Given the disjunction between reason and the sensible world, and the limitations of reason, for Kant the “practice or execution of the idea is always limited and defective, but nevertheless within indeterminable boundaries, consequently always under the influence of the conception of an absolute perfection,” which is the illusion of consciousness.

As Lacan would say, reason and consciousness are always prone to *méconnaissance* in self-consciousness, the misknowledge or misunderstanding of the thinking subject of itself. As the fundamental bases of human reason are unrepresentable and inexplicable to it, and flawed in relation to it, reason can only see itself mistakenly, in the illusion of consciousness, and the human being can only know itself mistakenly in self-consciousness. The unconscious for Lacan is the Other, the matrix of relationships and expectations that a person has in relation to other people; a person is a product of those relationships, but cannot be aware of them, given the limitations of reason and perception; thus the subject cannot be aware of its own foundation, and can only grasp itself in *méconnaissance*. I define myself in relation to what other people think of me, but I have no idea what other people think of me. Thus transcendental idealism, the doctrine that the objects of experience have no existence apart from human thought, is grounded in the Platonic idea in classical philosophy, and contains within it the seeds of modern psychoanalysis, in the Lacanian *méconnaissance*.

Just as words have no significance or meaning of themselves, without relations to other words, given the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified, their significance can only be given in their relation to other words, in their syntax. The individual subject has no significance or meaning of itself, but only in relation to other people. And the sensible object, or the representation of that object to cognition, has no significance or meaning of itself, but only in relation to other representations. As Kant said, “they are mere representations, receiving from perceptions alone significance and relation to a real object, under the condition that this or that perception—indicating an object—is in complete connection with all others in accordance with the rules of the unity of experience” (p. 280). The significance of the representation is given by its relation to the sensible object, which is an arbitrary and constructed relation.

The totalizing idea of the synthesis of experience necessitates a syntax in a manifold to which all representations conform, and which gives them their significance. The syntax of language, then, is a mirror reflection of the syntax of perception, in the conversion of the image to the word in the *Vorstellung*, sensible to intelligible, conscious to unconscious. The significance of the word is given by its relation to the sensible object, which is an arbitrary and constructed relation, as signified to signifier, and the syntax in language is also given by the totalizing idea of the synthesis of experience, the transcendental ideal. The word can only function in relation to other words in the syntax, and can only derive a secondary, equally arbitrary, significance from that relation. Linguistic syntax depends on the transcendental ideal, as does the totality of perception; language is a construct of reason which isolates the subject from the world, and defines it in a system of constructed relations, which are based on the inadequacy of reason in perception to know or understand the world of experience. Phenomenology, like religion, is mass delusion. There is always necessarily a disjunction between what is said and what is perceived or experienced.

One of the motivations of abstraction in art in the twentieth century was the utopian idea that human conflict could be eliminated through the communication of a universal language of abstraction, of pure human reason divorced from the world of phenomena. But such a universal language of pure reason also accentuates the disjunction between reason, in the transcendental idea, and the phenomenal world, and accentuates the limitations of reason, and the human incapacity for understanding, thus the necessity for conflict. The incompatibility between reason and phenomena is at the base of human desire, the perpetual void or inaccessible element in the human condition that creates desire for completion, for reconciliation, and in that desire creates conflict, in the impossibility of reconciliation.

At the basis of the *méconnaissance* of reason in consciousness is the problem that, as Kant explained, "in the world of sense, that is, in space and time, every condition which we discover in our investigation of phenomena is itself conditioned..." (p. 287). There is no immediate, unmediated perception of things, in contradistinction to the basic tenets of phenomenology. There is no condition in the sensible world which does not always already conform to human reason. All phenomena have a transcendental object as a foundation, as all perception has a transcendental idea as a foundation. In order for an object to exist in the sensible world, it must first not exist. The sensible world must be negated for it to conform to reason in perception.

While the sensible object must have a transcendental object as a foundation, it is impossible to know the sensible object in itself.

As the totality of perception is given by the totality of language in the *Vorstellung*, it can be concluded that sensible phenomena are given by and ordered by language. Sensible objects must conform to the limitations and ordering systems of language. But the transcendental object cannot be represented in language; it is the metaphysic in language, the source of the inability of language to be aware of its own process, as Berkeley would say. The transcendental object “must ever remain hidden from our mental vision...” (p. 343). But it is only reason which can conceive of that which is inaccessible to it, so the metaphysic, the transcendental idea cannot be outside reason, as the unconscious cannot be outside reason for Lacan. It isn't the metaphysic which reveals the limitations of reason, but the *méconnaissance*, the inability of reason to know itself. Thus the transcendental idea, a priori intuition, comes to be seen as a misrepresentation, a function of reason in its totalizing desire or necessity.

As Kant said, “an ideal of pure reason cannot be termed mysterious or *inscrutable*, because the only credential of its reality is the need for it felt by reason, for the purpose of giving completeness to the world of synthetical unity.” As for Plato, the totalizing of reason is not seen as a desire not born out of necessity, as postmodern thinkers would have it. “An ideal is not even given as a cogitable *object*, and therefore cannot be inscrutable; on the contrary, it must, as a mere idea, be based on the constitution of reason itself...” All reason is necessarily subjective, though its manifestation is objective, and all non-reason must necessarily be contained within reason. Reason itself is a manifold, as are space and time. Reason excludes the possibility of its won otherness, as do its mechanisms of the concepts of space and time. “For the very essence of reason consists in its ability to give an account of all our conceptions, opinions, and assertions—upon objective, or, when they happen to be illusory and fallacious, upon subjective grounds” (p. 344).

Reason can give an account of all our conceptions because it constructed them; reason can give an account of all our perceptions, and all phenomenal experience, because it constructed them. If an element of the sensible world is inexplicable to reason, it is because reason did not construct it; for an element of the sensible world to become explicable to reason, it can only become so insofar as reason has determined how it can conform to the rules of the syntax of a system of comprehension. Such an explanation obviously has no relation to the element of the sensible world itself. Reason can only func-

tion by continually justifying its own illusions to itself. “Reason never has an immediate relation to an object; it relates immediately to the understanding alone” (p. 360). The understanding requires a synthesis, a totality or manifold, and an object can only be understood in relation to a synthesis, the synthesis which is the construct of reason. The transcendental idea, then, is not just an idea of the object, but a “conception of the complete unity of the conceptions of objects...” (p. 361). The idea of an object is not possible outside the totality of the unity of objects. The object is singular while the idea of it is synthetical, thus the idea of the object cannot possibly correspond to the object outside its phenomenal syntax.

The system or syntax which reason constructs in order to know the world around it is called by Kant the architectonic, the architectonic of pure reason. Reason is an architectonic, perception is an architectonic, and language is an architectonic, as they were for Plotinus. Without the architectonic, experience would constitute “merely a blind play of representations, less even than a dream,”¹⁴ according to Kant, and knowledge would be “in an unconnected and rhapsodic state...” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 466), as in a psychosis, where there is no connection between the word and the object. An architectonic requires a synthesis and totality, like reason, no matter how much it attempts to challenge itself, to overcome the illusion of its metaphysic, or its *méconnaissance*. The synthesis and totality can only be given by the transcendental idea, the a priori intuition, the concepts of space and time. The architectonic can reveal a void in its system, an aporia, or a scotoma in perception, as Lacan would call it, but only so far as the void or aporia or scotoma is generated in relation to the syntax of the system; in other words, the architectonic must contain within itself its own other, that which is not architectonic. Kant’s transcendental idea, a priori intuition, at the beginning of modern philosophy, must be seen in relation to the *nous poietikos* of the Divided Line in the *Republic* of Plato and the intellectual of Plotinus, noetic and unconscious thinking.

¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

² Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1965).

³ See Frederic M. Schroeder, "The Vigil of the One and Plotinian Iconoclasm," in Aphrodite Alexandrakis, ed., *Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), p. 64.

⁴ Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, trans. Frank Granger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931).

⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991), n. 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, The Loeb Classical Library, 1982).

⁸ George Berkeley, *Works on Vision*, ed. Colin M. Turbayne (New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1963).

⁹ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Related Writings*, trans. Desmond Clarke (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 85.

¹⁰ Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, trans. Frank Granger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931).

¹¹ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Related Writings*, p. 85.

¹² George Berkeley, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, §66, in *Works on Vision*.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Amherst, NY: Prometheus books, 1990), p. 15.

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, quoted in Philip J. Kain, *Hegel and the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 23.