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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Tower of Babel: transcendental linguistics in Friedrich von Hardenberg's (Novalis) *Fichte Studies*

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Abstract

This article provides a new interpretation of the linguistic aspects of Friedrich von Hardenberg's *Fichte Studies*. It argues that Hardenberg was searching, among other things, for a transcendental language for philosophy. The possibility of such a language was discussed intensely among his contemporaries, such as Maimon, Niethammer, Reinhold, Weißhuhn, and Fichte. Its necessity, however, had become apparent with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Readers had noticed a disturbing discrepancy between the objective knowledge of transcendental philosophy—which, according to Kant, was supposed to be generally communicable—and Kant's actual failure to communicate it. Hardenberg's original insight into the inseparable unity of sign and signified, anticipating modern linguistic theories, led him to the assumption of a lawful relationship between both. From his unsuccessful attempt to disclose these laws, he went on to discover language as an independent realm fundamentally opposed to nature. Precisely because language is a necessary illusion, only the 'presenting I' (*das darstellende Ich*) achieves its end, namely absolute freedom. Philosophy, therefore, is pure as long as it remains within the boundaries of language alone, that is a language which does not refer to anything outside itself.

Keywords

Novalis, Fichte Studies, language, transcendental philosophy, Romanticism, Idealism

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Introduction

The difficulties in giving an unambiguous meaning to arbitrary signs have accompanied philosophy ever since language was recognised as a problem. With the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this problem became pressing again. Kant had claimed that the system of transcendental knowledge could be set out in a system of pure concepts of understanding, containing the totality of rules and functions according to which the mind is able to process the sensuously given manifold. As such, Kant's system of concepts is not only the precondition for any possible experience (*KrV* A 92-93/B 125-126), but also indifferent to its designation. The categories as well as the concepts derived from them are prior to any sign. In fact, they are organising the use of our language (Simon, 1971).

Although all transcendental knowledge was supposed to be necessary and universally true, by which Kant hoped to lay out the foundations for an eternal peace within the discipline of philosophy (*KrV* A 751/B 779), the scientific community fell quickly apart as a result of their different interpretations of the first *Critique*. As Karl Leonhard Reinhold observed, the system of transcendental knowledge is communicated through concepts and expressions which themselves do not belong to this system. Several basic propositions or basic concepts such as experience, intuition, object, representation, necessity, relation, or even the concept of concept were only supposed by Kant and not defined or sufficiently determined (Reinhold, 1790/94a, 278–294). Since their meaning depends entirely on the context, every reader was free to understand the *Critique* according to his or her own philosophical principles (Reinhold, 1789, 61–63; Reinhold, 1789/92, II, 21).

Provided that the criterion for all objective knowledge is universal communicability, as Kant himself maintained (Schlösser, 2015), then transcendental philosophy had to find an appropriate language in order to make universally valid propositions. According to Salomon Maimon, philosophy should be a science of general linguistics aiming towards an ideal language in which the signs or words are fully adequate to the things they designate (Maimon, 1790, 296). In the *Philosophisches Journal*, Friedrich August Weißhuhn presented the first ideas for a science of synonymistics to prepare the ground for a systematic dictionary, that is to say, a system of continuously interrelated and completely determined concepts (Weißhuhn, 1795, 49–56). Niethammer, chief editor of the journal, also acknowledged the necessity of designating each concept with exactly one verbal expression (Niethammer, 1795, 321–324 and 350). Even Fichte declared the existence of a system of philosophical terminology, which, with respect to all of its derived elements, should be necessary and must be provable to be so by proceeding in a regular fashion and in accordance with the laws governing the metaphorical designation of transcendental concepts (*FGA* I/2[a], 118, fn.=Fichte, 1988a, 106, fn.). No further evidence of such a system is given. Hence, the claim stands in sharp contrast to Fichte's earlier statements that the spirit of the *Science of Knowledge*, as of Kant's *Critique*, will never be grasped through the letter (Piché, 2014).

Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) was 23 years old when he stumbled onto the problem of the communicability of knowledge. In his *Fichte Studies* (1795/96) – early Romanticism's most significant contribution to philosophy (Frank, 1997, 781) – he observes that Fichte's first and foundational principle A = A does not express the identity it is supposed to express according to the *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (1794). Rather, Hardenberg says, we have to abandon the identical in order to present (*darstellen*) it. We present the identical through its 'not-being' (*Nichtseyn*), through a 'not-identical' which Hardenberg calls 'sign'[1]. A appears to us exclusively under the 'determinate form': a (*NS* 104:1=*FS* 3:1)[2]. For us, every 'being' (*Seyn*) is existent only "*in a certain respect*" (*NS* 106:2=*FS* 5:2). To the "requirements of a universally valid philosophy" belongs, therefore, a "theory of the sign" – or a response to the question: "what can be *true* through the medium of language" (*NS* 108:9; 108:11=*FS* 7:9; 7:11) in the very first place.

Following these remarks, I will argue that it was one of Hardenberg's principal aims in the *Fichte Studies* to develop a transcendental language, that is, a universally valid language applicable to transcendental philosophy. His conception of language, however, cannot be simply added to the three 'basic arguments' (*Grundargumente*) which, according to Manfred Frank, were fragmentarily unfolded in the text: 1) the mediation between an unconscious 'original being' (*Ursein*) and a conscious subject; 2) the accordance between the transreflexive unity of being and the expressive forms of the absolute; and 3) the connection between the unconsciousness of being and philosophy as an infinite approximation (Frank 1997, 800). Rather, all of these arguments are embraced by the problem of language. As all our knowledge is mediated, we have to understand the process of mediation first. From this perspective, Hardenberg's critical attention to the linguistic properties of single concepts, permanently accompanying his own formulations, appears in a new light, much like the many attempts with which he is testing the applicability of different combinations of concepts for the same or similar issues[3]. Both methods would serve the very specific

[1] Hardenberg writes 'represent' (*vorstellen*) here instead of 'present' (*darstellen*), although he is referring to the latter. The difference between 'presentation' and 'representation', which seems to be not yet clear to him at this point in his argument, will be one of the main concerns in the *Fichte Studies*. For the sake of congruency, I follow Jane Kneller's translation despite the fact that she opposes the tradition, which commonly takes *vorstellen* as 'present' and *darstellen* as 'represent'. See Kneller (*FS* 3, fn. 2) for some introductory remarks on the issue and some suggestions for further reading, to which Carl Knüfer's *Grundzüge der Geschichte des Begriffs "Vorstellung" von Wolff bis Kant* (1911) should be added. For the same reason, I adopt Kneller's translation of *Nicht-Ich* as 'Not-I' instead of 'not-self' (Heath/Lachs) or 'non-ego' (von Mólnar).

[2] When quoting from the *Fichte Studies* (*NS* = *Fichte-Studien*; *FS* = *Fichte Studies*), the bibliographical reference includes the numbers of page and note.

[3] Such substitutive combinations are, for instance, synthesis – analysis, object (*Gegenstand*) – opposite (*Gegensatz*), object (*Gegenstand*) – state (*Zustand*), essence (*Wesen*) – property (*Eigenschaft*). For their semantic implications see Kneller's comments in *FS* 92, fn. 14 and 105, fn. 1.

purposes of clearing the philosophical terminology from ambiguity and arbitrariness, on the one side, and to separate the transcendental sign, determined by its necessary relation to the signified, from conventional and ordinary words on the other[4]. Thus, in the *Fichte Studies*, the material side of language (its condition of being: a stock of signs) becomes a matter of transcendental philosophy from which it has been excluded by Kant, Fichte, and Reinhold[5].

But there is another reason why Hardenberg's idea of a transcendental language cannot be easily regarded as one of the 'basic arguments'. The *Fichte Studies* do not contain a consistent linguistic theory. Instead, the text shows us how the full dimension of the problem reveals itself gradually to Hardenberg, thus repeatedly forcing him to modify his ideas about it. This is also the reason why the seemingly fundamental notion of the 'schema', introduced at the very beginning of the text in order to establish a necessary relationship between the sign and signified (*NS* 108:11–111:11=*FS* 7:11–11:11), is dropped and never mentioned again. Hardenberg's thinking on language is in constant movement, proceeding tentatively and correcting itself whenever it turns out to be unavoidable. In this essay, therefore, I try to reconstruct the intricate development of this thinking[6]. As a first step, it seems worthwhile to reconsider Hans-Joachim Mähl's arrangement of the manuscripts in the prevailing critical edition. I do not intend to reorganise the established order, an endeavour which, in any case, would require such meticulous studies of the original papers as Mähl had carried out himself. I will only present some observations that make it very unlikely that the *Fichte Studies* commence as they do according to Mähl's edition. In a second step, I will analyse Hardenberg's theory of the sign and its role in the *Fichte Studies*. This theory requires further scrutiny in spite of all the research that has been done in recent years. In my opinion, none of its elements have been interpreted to an extent corresponding to its complexity[7]. Finally, I will show how, in the course of his considerations, Hardenberg's idea of language changed entirely. After his unsuccessful attempts to find a necessary relationship between sign and signified, he began to conceive language as opposed to nature, constituting an ideal realm in which the "end of the I [...] namely, total freedom" (*NS* 267:556=*FS* 165:556) was supposed to be fulfilled. In this conception, words are no longer signs – merely carrying the meaning with which they have been encumbered – but now determine and direct, as agents themselves, every single thought. It is language, consequently, which provides the elements for any transcendental or pure philosophy.

The *Fichte Studies* have been interpreted as a "pointed rejection of philosophy in favour of fiction", as the decisive "move from a critique of philosophy to a theory of literature" (O'Brian, 1995, 89 and 107)[8]. This suggestion misses the crucial point of Hardenberg's endeavours. Instead of rejecting philosophy altogether, he is searching for the laws of a philosophy whose truth does not appear otherwise than by means of signs. It is not enough to state, for instance, that for Hardenberg "*all* language is metaphorical and figurative–including the language of philosophy" (O'Brian, 1995, 105). The question is rather if the 'transfer' (*metaphorá*) is necessary or contingent. In this context, the idea of a mediating 'schema' must be understood as an attempt to establish an unalterable nexus between language and thought. For only when those laws are found does philosophy become poetic and poetry philosophical. All the promises and all the risks connected with, in particular, the idea of a transcendental language – and, as history has shown, with Romanticism in general – converge in a picture that appears isolated and suggestive amidst the masses of notes: the tower of Babel. As a symbol for the *Fichte Studies*, it reveals both Hardenberg's ambitions and his failure.

"Remarks"

Although Hardenberg discussed a possible participation in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*,

[4] In the context of extensive lists of words or concepts (*NS* 224:325–231:371=*FS* 121:325–129:371), he does not only mention Carl Christian Erhard Schmid's *Wörterbuch zum leichtern Gebrauch der Kantischen Schriften* (1786) – a dictionary facilitating the use of Kant's writings – but, moreover, considers the conception of a philosophical science of language or synonymistics (*NS* 191:269=*FS* 89:269).

[5] Before 1800, the term 'language' referred exclusively to signs and sounds, that is, in Saussurian terminology, to the level of the signifier. The signified was assumed to be an extralinguistic substratum of the signifier, the concept or representation (*Vorstellung*) to which it was bound. It was only around 1799/1800 when Wilhelm von Humboldt described the modern conception of the sign for the first time (Mueller-Vollmer, 2018, 47; Trabant, 2012, 157–176).

[6] A similar attempt has been made by Augustin Dumont in the second chapter of his excellent study *L'opacité du sensible chez Fichte et Novalis* (2012). Although the author is also concerned with the problem of language in Hardenberg's *Fichte Studies*, he arrives at very different results. For Hardenberg, he argues, transcendentality consists of the fictitious images rendered by the faculty of imagination. Consequently, language is transcendental when it is invented by the philosopher in order to translate the work of the imagination and articulate its fictitious character. The 'hovering' of the imagination, without ever coming to an end, is expressed in an incessant play with combinations of signs. The 'lack of being', constituting this language as a product, is compensated by the 'gesture' of permanent production (see pp. 178, 185, 199, 201, 206, 220). I will refer to Dumont's work when it seems appropriate to me. A detailed discussion of his arguments, however, would go beyond the limits of this essay.

[7] See Frank, 1997, 800–857; Haering, 1954; O'Brian 1995, 81–118; von Molnár, 1970; Waibel, 2007. Violetta Waibel's yet unpublished study, "System der Systemlosigkeit", is indispensable for anyone occupied with the *Fichte Studies*. Apart from a thorough investigation of Hardenberg's basic concepts, such as subjectivity, freedom, or system – which are not only analysed but also traced back to their origins in Enlightenment philosophy or Idealism and related to Hardenberg's contemporaries – she also provides a detailed philosophical-systematic commentary on the text. In terms of Hardenberg's linguistic approach, Waibel is mainly concerned with the semiotic fragment at the beginning of the *Fichte Studies* (Waibel, 2007, 663–676). However, considerations on Hardenberg's theory of the sign are dispersed throughout the entire work. I am most grateful to Violetta Waibel for sharing her work with me.

[8] Von Molnár points in the same direction when he writes: "[t]he ideas which were generated in the 'Fichte Studies' culminate in a novel [*Heinrich von Afterdingen*] where the hero's path to his true self concurrently leads to his becoming a true artist" (1970, 104).

with its chief editor Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, the *Fichte Studies* have never been published. Their critical edition was further complicated by the desolate state of Hardenberg's written remains. Hans-Joachim Mähl took the enormous effort to decipher, analyse, and arrange the philosophical papers[9]. The scholarly community accepted his edition of the *Fichte Studies*[10]. I am neither willing nor able to question the constituted text in general. Nevertheless, there are clear indications that the bundle of papers entitled "Remarks" (*NS* 104:1–112:14=*FS* 3:1–12:14), which contain Hardenberg's theory of the sign, could not have been written earlier than all the others. Mähl noticed certain features in Hardenberg's handwriting pointing to a later origin, but dismissed his own observations and put the manuscript at the very beginning; for, as he says, it deals with Fichte's fundamental concepts and develops a set of definitions which may be considered the basis for the subsequent arguments[11].

The sharp immediacy of the *Fichte Studies'* opening sentences has prompted several scholars to assume that Hardenberg had a clear concept already before starting to write[12]. It is very likely, given the author's education in Jena and Leipzig as well as his family's personal bonds with Fichte, that he was already engaged with the *Science of Knowledge* in 1794. However, the initial impression is considerably attenuated when the second bundle of papers, entitled "Undetermined Propositions" (*NS* 113:15–166:210=*FS* 12:15–64:210), is taken as the first in order. It starts with the question of what philosophy is and what it is able to discern (*NS* 113:15=*FS* 12:15). Moreover, the considerations on the 'original act' (*Urhandlung*), the intellectual intuition, and the categories that Hardenberg is dealing with in this part do not reveal any awareness of the fact that, for the 'I', every being only exists as mediated through a sign. In the interplay between 'feeling' and 'reflection', outlined in the first quarter of this bundle, the 'I' is never leaving its own sphere (*NS* 113:15–125:31=*FS* 13:15–24:31). Hardenberg explores a pure consciousness in which the 'I' maintains a relationship exclusively with itself. In other words, there is no reason for the 'I' to designate objects in order to communicate them to other human beings simply because there are no objects and no other human beings at this stage of the inquiry.

The 'Not-I' is considered for the first time in the empirical consciousness (*NS* 125:31=*FS* 24:31). Feeling and reflection stop being objects for each other and both refer to a common object. But even then, the knowledge of it consists only in what the 'I', very similar to Fichte's 'I' in the *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (*FGA* I/2[b], 440=Fichte, 1982, 275), transfers from itself to the object (*NS* 131:41=*FS* 30:41). This could be the reason why Hardenberg distinguishes an object as 'medium' from an 'actual object': "There is nothing to be done" with the former; the latter is, again, "the image of the analytic I" (*NS* 142:64=*FS* 40:64). The 'thing' (*Ding*), as something opposed to the 'I', enters its sphere only in the last third of the "Undetermined Propositions" (*NS* 150:97=*FS* 48:97). The question of what a sensory organ might be already points to the problem of mediating 'I' and nature (*NS* 163:184=*FS* 60:184). As a result of this shift of perspective, Hardenberg claims on the last page of this bundle that "[e]verything is nature insofar as it can become an object" (*NS* 166:210=*FS* 64:205).

The brief note, "theory of the sign – of the image" (*NS* 155:131=*FS* 52:131), appears shortly after having introduced the concept of the thing. Even though there is still no recipient in sight for whom the sign might be destined, the idea of such a theory is certainly in the line of the argument, since every sign requires something that it can refer to. The "Remarks", where an interlocutor indeed does show up, have probably been written either after having finished the "Undetermined Propositions" or at the same time. This assumption is confirmed by the fact that at the end of his theory of the sign Hardenberg announces that the representation, "the medium to the outer world" (*NS* 111:11=*FS* 10:11), would be treated later. In the "Undetermined Propositions", this notion is mentioned for the first time with regard to the thing (*NS* 150:97=*FS* 48:97). But the untitled bundle of manuscripts (*NS* 167:211–184:238=*FS* 65:211–82:238), which in Mähl's order succeeds the "Undetermined Propositions", starts right away with an investigation of this concept.

Other details point in the same direction. The unexplained remark, "Presentation of thought in space" (*NS* 163:185=*FS* 60:185)[13], obviously relates to some notes from the context of the theory of the sign where Hardenberg defines thought as a "[f]ree successive isolation outside of space" and speech and writing as a "determinate presentation of thought in space" (*NS* 108:11=*FS* 7:11). Moreover, at the very beginning of the third bundle Hardenberg reflects upon the unity of time and space and associates the latter with intuitions (*Anschauungen*) and the former with representations (*NS* 168:218=*FS* 66:218). If intuitions are identified with presentations and representations with thought, then here again thought is temporal and signs are spatial.

These observations make it plausible that the problem of language was not the point wherefrom the *Fichte Studies* departed. Rather, it captured Hardenberg's attention in the course of his inquiry. As soon as the thinking subject is regarded not only in relation to itself, but also to other subjects and objects, the question of designation and communication comes up. It is worth noting that in Fichte's first three publications on the *Science of Knowledge*, the subject is strictly considered an

[9] For an extensive introduction to the problems that arise with an edition of the *Fichte Studies* see Mähl, 1965.

[10] See Frank, 1997, 786-787, fn. 7. In her English edition of the text, Jane Kneller also agrees with Mähl's arrangement (*FS* xvii).

[11] See Mähl, 1965, 43 and 45, fn. 6.

[12] See Dumont, 2012, 134-137, 201; Frank, 1997, 796-797; Mähl, 1965, 94; von Molnár, 1970, 62; O'Brian, 1995, 83.

[13] Kneller translates: "Presentation in space of that which is thought". This translation, however, is ambiguous. 'That which is thought' may be understood as both *das, was gedacht wird* or *das, was Gedanke ist*. I am indebted to Pascal Zambito for drawing my attention to this problem.

asocial entity[14]. It is speechless because there is no need to speak. For any social relationship, however, Fichte regards communication as one of the fundamental prerequisites (*FGA* I/3[a], 54–59=Fichte, 1988b, 172–177; *FGA* I/3[b], 99–103=Fichte, 1996, 121–124; *FGA* I/3[d], 344-351=Fichte, 2000, 33–42).

The problem of communication is always two-sided: *what* is communicated and *how* it is communicated. The first refers to representation, the second to presentation. When the thing enters the empirical consciousness in the last part of the "Undetermined Propositions", and the question arises of how the subject relates to it, Hardenberg finds himself compelled to turn towards the concept of representation. This term not only designates the entire content of the empirical consciousness, but (according to his own theory) it is the representation that gives the sign a meaning. The pure 'I', in contrast, knows neither representations nor signs.

Theory of the sign

Given that the *Fichte Studies* does not begin with the manuscript entitled "Remarks", then the first reflection concerned with the problem of language shows up amidst the description of the emergence of self-consciousness: "No transcendental language for applied philosophy / It contradicts itself because it is grounded by a contradiction – a necessary deception. Transcendental philosophy is sophistic – but in what sense?" (*NS* 138:49=*FS* 36:49)[15]. These sentences raise a series of difficult questions, such as (1) what is a transcendental language, (2) what kind of language would be suitable for applied philosophy, (3) what contradiction is grounding the transcendental language, or (4) is the necessary deception caused by this language reversible? But apart from that it seems as if Hardenberg believes that this problem could be avoided by dividing language into a transcendental language for transcendental philosophy and another unspecified language for applied philosophy[16].

All transcendental philosophy faces the severe problem that, dealing with purely intellectual concepts only, it is not able to demonstrate their meaning empirically. If such a demonstration or real definition (*Realdefinition*, as it was called) is not possible, the only remaining alternative is a nominal definition (*Nominaldefinition*); that is, explaining words by means of other words (*KrV* A 241-242, fn.). As Reinhold noticed, the risk of misunderstanding is thus perpetuated rather than reduced. The attempt to define a word with words leads to the infinite regress that each of these words requires further definition (Reinhold, 1789, 49–50; Reinhold, 1790/94b, 351). Fichte and Schelling tried to solve this problem by rejecting the criterion of universal communicability for all absolute knowledge, as gained through intellectual intuition (*FGA* I/2[b], 253=Fichte, 1982, 91; *FGA* I/4, 258–259=Fichte, 1982, 75–76; Schelling, 1795, 141=Schelling, 1980, 109–110). Each subject has to perform this kind of intuition itself. If the philosopher is not capable of doing so, the word 'original fact-act' (*Tathandlung*), with which the 'I' posits itself, will have no meaning for him or her. The same goes for Jacobi, who claims that each provable knowledge relies on the immediate certainty of a feeling. This specific knowledge – he calls it 'belief' – is non- or pre-reflexive and therefore beyond all possible verbal expression (Jacobi, 1787, 23 and 44–48; Jacobi, 1789, 215–217)[17].

Hardenberg, instead, is convinced that every being appears under the determinate form of a sign, which is, in relation to the being, a not-being, a mere substitute. Without the sign we would have no being. Consequently, only by elucidating the relationship between sign and signified can we know what can be true through the medium of language. Hardenberg's theory of the sign is oriented towards Fichte's *On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language* (1795), but soon modifies it. In terms of obtaining clarification of the problem of communicability, Fichte's essay must have been disappointing. It reactivates the outdated idea that the originary signs were invented by imitating nature, and, throughout history, became more and more abstract – a notion already criticised by Herder. In this view, thought is independent of any language. For Fichte, ideas and concepts already existed when men decided to designate them (*FGA* I/3[b], 97–98 and 112=Fichte, 1996, 120 – 121 and 131-132)[18].

Scholarship holds that Fichte's essay is relevant insofar as it contains the beginning of a theory of interpersonality, which is fully developed in the *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796)[19]. This is certainly true. However, neither the essay on language nor the *Foundations of Natural Right* provide an answer to the question of how Fichte's theory of language relates to his theory

[14] See *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre in Rüksicht auf das theoretische Vermögen* (1795).

[15] Jane Kneller translates: "It contradicts itself because it grounds a contradiction". But in this case an accusative would be required for the object: "Sie widerspricht sich selbst, weil sie einen Widerspruch begründet", instead of, as originally, "Sie widerspricht sich selbst, weil sie ein Widerspruch begründet". Kneller does not give any reason for assuming that Hardenberg made a mistake.

[16] O'Brian (1995, 105) thinks that, in the quoted passage, Hardenberg "explicitly denies philosophy's claims to a transcendental language". I do not see where he is saying anything like that. Here, as on other occasions, the author runs the risk of simplifying those reflections which are not written from a linguistic perspective alone, by asserting that Hardenberg subsumes all philosophy "under the more general topics of semiotics and language" (87).

[17] In one of his few polemic writings, entitled *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie* (1796), Kant was attacking exactly this rejection of communicability. See the volume edited by Peter Fenves (1993).

[18] For an interpretation of Fichte's essay see Surber, 1996. For Fichte's philosophy of language see the special issue "Fichte et le langage" of *Archives de Philosophie* 83/1 (2020).

[19] For this theory of interpersonality see Düsing, 1986; Neuhouser, 1990; Stolzenberg, 1995, Waibel, 2007, 149–157, and, on the *Foundations of Natural Right* from a broader perspective, Rockmore & Breazale, 2006.

of cognition, as described in the *Science of Knowledge*. In fact, Fichte seems to neglect this question entirely. In his system, language regulates the relationship between two subjects (I and You). The subject's linguistic reference to the objective world ('Not-I') is of minor or no importance. The transcendental character of language is revealed merely in the fact *that* subjects are communicating, not *what* they communicate; for every relation of this kind requires the mutual supposition of dealing with a free and therefore reasonable counterpart. The 'I' may find a like-minded 'You' only through language, but such a 'You' is never mentioned in the *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*. According to the *Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation* (1794), every unreasonable object standing in a relation of mutual determination with the 'I' is called 'Not-I'. Every reasonable being, on the other hand, is an 'I' for itself and a 'You' for any other 'I' (*FGA* I/3[a], 28–35=Fichte, 1988b, 147–155). Now, language comes into play when a subject decides to reveal its intentions to another subject. On the other hand, positing, determining, and reflecting – that is to say all the cognitive operations carried out by the 'I' in relation to itself or to the objective world – are performed in complete speechlessness.

Hardenberg will have read with astonishment that the 'I''s freedom, which is supposed to be absolute in terms of its self-activity, does not even allow for generating the signs needed for communication (*FGA* I/3[b], 103–104=Fichte, 1996, 125). Already the first remarks of his theory of the sign declare the opposite: "The signified is a free effect [,] likewise the sign" (*NS* 108:11=*FS* 8:11). The "absolute thetic faculty" (*NS* 104:1=*FS* 4:1) of the 'I' comprises both representation and presentation. The 'I' cannot generate any thought without co-producing its presentation at the same time. Unlike in Fichte's theory, which claims that the subject recognises the necessity of designating its thoughts only when it intends to establish a relation to another subject, for Hardenberg signs are a priori linked to thoughts.

The assumption that the signifying agent (*der Bezeichnende*)[20] is principally free causes several difficulties. Firstly, it is not clear what is actually signified. So far it is only said that the signified is supposed to be a free effect of the 'I''s activity. Secondly, the relationship between the sign and the signified remains obscure. Hardenberg writes: "They (i.e. the signified and the sign) are thus the same in the one who is doing the signifying – otherwise completely different – but this also only for the one signifying – both are related to each other only in the one who is signifying" (*NS* 108:11=*FS* 8:11). But if this is so, why should the signified be prioritised as Hardenberg suggests when he says that the "signified precedes the sign" (*NS* 110:11=*FS* 10:11). Does this priority of the signified not contradict the idea that everything within the 'I''s sphere appears under the determinate form of a sign? Last, and closely related to the second problem, if the relation between sign and signified is established by a signifying agent and valid only for him, or, inversely, if both "are completely separate" (*NS* 108:11=*FS* 8:11) for a second signifying agent, how can the sign become a medium of a message? In order to address these questions, Hardenberg draws on Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*, but turns it against its author's own intentions. I will pursue Hardenberg's approach by separately considering each element of the trinary constellation of sign, signified, and signifying agent, starting with the last.

a) The signifying agent

For any communicative process, signs have to be "[o]bjectively and subjectively necessary"; otherwise, its successful outcome could "only be an accident or a miracle" (*NS* 109:11=*FS* 8:11). That is to say, the signified and the sign do not only necessarily maintain a relationship, but this relationship itself is necessary. This idea is not new. It underlies, for instance, the Adamic act of name-giving and the concept of a natural language. All these postulates, however, lacked any verification. Although being very original, the same goes for Hardenberg's theory. According to this theory, the sign is necessary because the signifying agent observes intersubjectively identical laws regulating the formation process of signs. As Hardenberg believes, each community of communication must be based on the 'homogeneity' of its members, which results from these laws. The first signifying agent is principally free to 'choose' a sign. This freedom, in turn, is limited by the purpose of making him- or herself comprehensible to an 'alien being' (*NS* 109:11=*FS* 8:11). The relationship of sign and signified is free only "with respect to this signifying agent". With respect "to the *signifying agent in general* or to other signifying agents" (*NS* 109:11=*FS* 9:11) it has to be necessary. The "characteristic of the *signifying agent in general*", concludes Hardenberg, would be "[f]ree necessity" or, to put it another way, "self-determination", which consists of:

> [A] synthesis – absolute positing of a sphere – thesis – determinate positing of a sphere – antithesis indeterminate positing of a sphere. Every one of these three is all three and this is the proof of their belonging together. The synthesis is, or can be, thesis and antithesis. The same with the thesis, and the antithesis. Original schema (*NS* 109:11=*FS* 9:11).

The necessity to which the signifying agent finds himself bound results, subjectively, from the intersubjective relationship mediated by signs, and, objectively, from the relationship between the sign and the signified. In every communicative relationship there must be a common 'ground of relation' (*Beziehungsgrund*), which enables the first signifying agent to choose a generally comprehensible sign and allows the second signifying agent to find the signified designated by the sign. This ground of relation is called 'schema': "Every *comprehensible* sign must therefore stand in a *schematic* relationship to the signified" (*NS* 109:11=*FS* 9:11).

The freedom of the signifying agents, in turn, comprises two different moments. The first moment is the freedom of choice, of which the signifying agent disposes in the act of designation. In Hardenberg's argument, this freedom is only limited by the subjective necessity to make him- or herself comprehensible. The objective necessity (that which makes the sign comprehensible)

[20] For this translation of the term '*der Bezeichnende*' see *FS* 8, fn. 4.

is not mentioned. But if the sign must stand in a necessary relationship to the signified, then the first signifying agent cannot be free – even without taking into consideration the second signifying agent. The necessity of the schema contradicts the freedom of choice. And without a necessary schema there would be no homogeneity in the community of communication.

The other moment of freedom seems to be drawn from Fichte's theory of interpersonality: "The first agent orients himself to the second in the sign, the second to the first in the signified – a *quasi*-free contract. They must both freely want it in order for the effect to succeed" (*NS* 110:11=*FS* 10:11)[21]. Both are free in their will to communicate with each other. Once they have taken this decision, they are bound by the schema. Hardenberg modifies Fichte's idea of a mutual supposition of reason, insofar as the precondition of communication is the will of both agents to make each other comprehensible to one another. While for Fichte, understanding is not problematic as long as two reasonable beings communicate with each other, for Hardenberg it requires the will of the first to adapt his or her message to the capacities of the second; and it requires the will of the second to accept the invitation to understand, which all speech necessarily implies.

b) The sign

Hardenberg does not apply the concept of self-determination to the objective necessity, that is, the schematic relationship between sign and signified. In Fichte's use, however, it refers exactly to such a relationship – though not between sign and signified, but rather between representation and thing. For Fichte, self-determination is the character of the 'I' in general. As in the *Fichte Studies*, it is described as a correlation of freedom and necessity. The faculty to determine oneself without any external coercion is even declared to be the "ultimate explanatory ground" (*höchster Erklärungsgrund*) of all "necessary actions" (*FGA* I/2[a], 134=Fichte, 1988a, 120). Necessary actions, in turn, are caused by the 'I''s dependence on a being outside itself, of which nothing else can be said other than: it must be the complete opposite of the 'I' (*FGA* I/2[b], 411=Fichte, 1982, 247). While only the encounter with the thing turns the 'I' into an intelligence capable of experiencing a reality, its capacity of determination is now limited by the thing's real properties (*FGA* I/2[b], 436=Fichte, 1982, 271). Here again, the question arises as to what extent the 'I' can be called 'free' when its acting depends on another existence. On the occasion of analysing the faculty of intuition, Fichte finds himself compelled to reveal the 'I''s dependence. This analysis is mainly carried out in Fichte's *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre* (1795). It destroys several of Fichte's fundamental claims.

For Fichte, the representation of a thing is freely generated by the productive imagination. This freedom, however, cannot be unlimited unless each subject is supposed to be enclosed in an *ídios kósmos*. There must be a correspondence between the thing and its representation, if the latter is to be taken as an 'image' of the former. Fichte, therefore, tries to combine two incompatible claims. The 'Not-I' does not cause the intuition in the 'I' just as the 'I' does not cause the condition of the 'Not-I'. Both thing and intuition are meant to be completely independent of – and yet in most intimate 'harmony' with – each other (*FGA* I/3[c], 154=Fichte, 1988c, 254). It is not by mere chance that Fichte's wording evokes Leibnitz. The harmony between thing and intuition is indeed pre-established, for Fichte supposes the existence of a 'mediating intuition' (*Mittelanschauung*) as a common 'basis of relation' between thing and image. This medium intuition is defined as an intuition immediately directed towards the thing in which all of its properties are completely determined (*FGA* I/3[c], 180=Fichte, 1988c, 279).

Fichte's construction is breathtakingly absurd. The intuition is, again, produced by the 'I'. Otherwise, the 'I' would not be free. But it does not enter the 'I''s consciousness. Otherwise, the imagination would not need to produce another image. Although the intuition is supposed to be unconscious, the 'I' has access to it and now produces an image according to the properties that it finds (*FGA* I/3[c], 180–181=Fichte, 1988c, 279–280). In this context, the schema appears. The imagination arbitrarily produces schemes such as forms, dimensions, or colours which are compared to the real properties of the thing given in the medium intuition. In doing so, the thing can be determined as, for instance, a cube of the size of a fist and of dark green colour. By passing from an indeterminate product of the free imagination to the complete determination in one and the same act, what is found in the consciousness becomes an image, and is posited as an image (*FGA* I/3[c], 179=Fichte, 1988c, 278–279).

Yet, it remains unclear in what sense freedom can be attributed to the 'I' if the image conforms to a thing outside itself (*FGA* I/3[c], 181=Fichte, 1988c, 281). This freedom, as it turns out, consists in nothing more than the contingency of the product. As Fichte writes, the image could also be something else and could be posited as such (*gesetzt als anders sein könnend*) by the 'I' (*FGA* I/3[c], 179=Fichte, 1988c, 278, *FGA* I/2[b], 442=Fichte, 1982, 277). The 'I' is free insofar as it 'hovers' (*schwebt*) between different determinations and finally posits only one of them. In choosing a specific determination, however, the 'I' is not free since the harmony between image and thing depends on its choice. This is the very thin thread by which Fichte's 'I' is hanging. It has to carry the weight of the doubt that in reality the 'I' might not be free at all.

It is evident that Hardenberg adopts Fichte's concept of self-determination. When hovering between different signs to finally choose one of them, according to the necessity of making himself comprehensible, the signifying agent is just as free as the imagination when producing an image of the thing. Hardenberg also uses the concept of schema to explain the necessity, but, unlike Fichte, he applies the schema to the relationship between sign and signified and not to the one between thing and

[21] For a revealing interpretation of this passage see O'Brian, 1995, 101–103. See also Dumont, 2012, 143–144.

representation[22]. In Hardenberg's theory it secures the comprehensibility of the sign, which is produced and perceived according to the laws of the schema. For Fichte, as well as for Kant, such an assumption would be impossible. Designation is an act of arbitrariness or, at most, an act of imitation – as Fichte believes with respect to the originary signs. For Hardenberg, on the contrary, a merely arbitrary relationship between sign and signified leaves no room to understand the possibility of communication.

Hardenberg gave no further indications of how the schema was supposed to work. Unlike in Kant's first *Critique*, the schematism does not remain an unfathomable, but necessary "art in the depths of the human soul" (*KrV* B 136). It rather seems to have been dismissed. Neither in the subsequent parts of the *Fichte Studies* nor in his later writings does Hardenberg return to the issue. Probably, he realised the implausibility of his explanation given the fact that no phonetic or graphic sign offers any rule on how to be referred a priori to a signified (or vice versa) except by similarities. In the case of the phonetic sign, such a similarity would be onomatopoetic; in the case of the graphic sign, a pictorial quality. The subject has the image of an ox in mind, for instance, after which it reproduces the sign Aleph or, respectively, its original form. But a schema is not required where the relationship between sign and signified grounds an act of imitation. Conversely, the subject does not need any "hieroglyphic power" (*NS* 107:6=*FS* 7:6) as long as a schema regulates the process of designation.

According to Hardenberg's definition of the schema, both the sign and the signified are equally primordial. The presentation (sign) is just the other side of the representation (signified). One does not exist without the other. Thesis and antithesis are united in the synthesis. For the subject, all three of them exist only as parts of a triune correlation[23]. Such a conception is undeniably attractive. Although it leaves open how such a complex act of positing can be performed *ex nihilo*, it seems particularly modern in the way of binding *signifiant* and *signifié* together. It already points to the inseparable unity of material sign and intellectual meaning, discovered by Humboldt some years later. It would take another 120 years before Saussure compared this unity to two sides of one sheet of paper (O'Brian, 1995, 103).

c) The signified

Another reason why Hardenberg never returned to the idea of the schema in the *Fichte Studies* might have been the unexplained concept of representation. In his theory of the sign, the term 'the signified' is not specified. In traditional theories of language from the Age of Enlightenment, every sign refers to a representation. Within the "Remarks", Hardenberg mentions this term only once, announcing a further investigation (*NS* 111:11=*FS* 10:11). It is very likely that, in the beginning, the concept of representation did not appear to be very problematic to him – as he takes it simply as an image[24]. On various occasions, the image is closely connected to the sign (*NS* 106:2=*FS* 5:2; *NS* 155:131=*FS* 52:131; *NS* 171:226=*FS* 69:226; *NS* 188:249=*FS* 86:249). Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz famously pointed out that, according to Hardenberg's theory of consciousness, the image is produced *ordine inverso* (Frank & Kurz, 1977; Frank, 1997, 814–824; Bertinetto, 2005, 172–177, Dumont, 2012, 172–176). Hardenberg takes 'reflection' literally as an inversed mirror image of the original object. But, even as such, the image would be – just as a Kantian intuition – a pre-established mental entity ready to be designated.

This theory, however, neglects the conceptual side of representations. As Kant had argued, there are two kinds of representations: intuitions and concepts. Hardenberg seems to have this distinction in mind when he writes: "Intuition. Representation of intuition. There is no more – to be sure, the last is divided. Everything that corresponds to the object in the subject, or the object in general, is intuition. The subject is representation. The felt, thought intuition, the reception of it, is representation" (*NS* 165:199=*FS* 63:199). Obviously, this comes close to Kant's dualisms of phenomenon and thing-in-itself, on one hand, and of intuition and concept on the other. Yet, it is not identical with Kant. Hardenberg takes up the dichotomy of sensuousness and understanding as the two sources of all possible cognition. All representations are pre-formed by feeling and thought, and belong, as such, to the subject. But the object is no noumenon. The concept of intuition always implies one who is 'intuiting' (*anschauend*) and that which is 'intuited' (*angeschaut*). The object intrudes into the sphere of the subject. It defines a sphere of its own upon which the subject has no influence. The subject is free only in the realm of representations; "[t]he intuitions", in contrast, "are not free" (*NS* 165:199=*FS* 63:199). Here again, as in Fichte's theory of self-determination, the question arises as to how the subject can have knowledge of something other than a representation if, with respect to the subject, nothing else exists other than representations.

It is here that the imagination comes into play. Intuition and representation are no longer two separate spheres interfering with each other, but rather two sides of one and the same imagination: "There is only imagination – feeling and understanding. Intuition and representation are just the names given

[22] As far as I know, only Violetta Waibel considered the influence of Fichte's *Grundriß* on Hardenberg's concept of the schema (2007, 718), though without further interpretation. Usually, this concept has been associated with Fichte's essay on language and Kant's first *Critique*. See Dumont, 2012, 143; O'Brian, 1995, 95–96 and 103-104, Striedter, 1985, 106.

[23] For this interrelationship of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis see Waibel, 2007, 449–459.

[24] In a very stimulating essay, Alessandro Bertinetto argues that Hardenberg anticipates the theory of the image developed by Fichte in his later works (Bertinetto, 2005). In doing so, however, he does not take into account that Fichte applies the concept 'image' already in his earlier works. He also neglects the fact that Hardenberg's theory of the image changes significantly throughout the *Fichte Studies*. In the last third of the text, the term does not appear at all. For Dumont (2012, 182), "l'image est l'expérience d'une *opacité* radicale".

to feeling and imagination [together,] and concept and imagination together" (*NS* 167:215=*FS* 66:215). The object seems to have vanished from this interrelationship. Again, the 'I' is enclosed in itself. Into this sphere of the 'I', characterised by a specific lack of being, Hardenberg now introduces the concept of the sign: "An image is a represented intuition. A sign is an intuited representation" (*NS* 171:226=*FS* 69:226). The chiastic figure employed in this context preserves and destroys the dualism of intuition and representation at the same time. On one hand, it seems quite clear that Hardenberg treats the image as a representation and the sign as an intuition, but, on the other, the specific difference between both gets blurred. The image would be a representation because it lacks, as a purely mental entity, all materiality. The sign, in turn, would be an intuition because it is sensuously perceivable. The difference between representation and intuition apparently reflects the one between matter and mind[25]. But this difference is not identical with the one between sensuousness and understanding. According to this last dichotomy, the image-representation is no concept but an intuition itself. According to the dualism of intuition and concept, both image and sign belong to the realm of intuitions. Moreover, the intuition that Hardenberg refers to is substituted while passing from one proposition to the other although this is not made explicit. The term 'image' refers to an intuited object. So does the term 'sign' but now the object is the sign itself. And the sign is produced, not given. Otherwise, the subject would have a representation of the sign, too. According to the dualism of mind and matter, hence, the sign would be representation (mind) and intuition (matter) at once. Here, the difference suddenly appears as one between freedom and necessity or, in Kantian terms, as spontaneity and receptivity[26]. The image is a given representation, the sign a produced intuition. It turns out that in Hardenberg's seemingly simple chiasm at least three different layers are inextricably intertwined.

The following brief remark is of a very different character: "Sign – image. The concept prevails in the sign – intuition prevails in the image – linguistic or conceptual image" (*NS* 188:249=*FS* 86:249)[27]. The transition from the former dichotomy of sign and image to the latter unity of the conceptual image must be understood as a leap, a breakthrough. Here, for the very first time, the sign is interpreted as the irreducible fulfilment of the mediation of image and concept, or, respectively, of intuition and representation. With this definition the perspective is turned upside down. The sign is no longer that which is necessarily related to a signified, but rather the given entity in which image and concept are necessarily united. At this point, however, Hardenberg is not yet able to cope with the consequences of his discovery. Already in the next remark, he returns to the conventional perspective and regards language as a "[c]onnection of the particular sensuous material of thought with sensuous signs" (*NS* 189:250=*FS* 86:250).

Language as necessary illusion

As a mediator between intuition and representation, the imagination operates with necessity. The faculty of representation, by contrast, is identified with the realm of possibility and the faculty of intuition with the realm of existence (*Wirklichkeit*). Although all possible modes of being are thereby exhausted, existence is itself supposed to be a product of imagination. Representation, says Hardenberg, is thesis; intuition, a mere relational concept, is antithesis: "necessary is grounded in imagination and is the synthesis – possible is a twofold relation in the third – it is nothing but a hovering (*Schweben*) between necessary and existent" (*NS* 178:234=*FS* 76:234)[28]. The laws determining the actions of imagination are provided by reason (*NS* 167:212=*FS* 65:212). But what are the laws according to which the imagination fixates the possible as something existent? In Fichte's *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, the imagination oscillates between the two poles 'I' and 'Not-I' uniting both in a single conscious intuition. This intuition is identified as real by the 'I'. In fact, there is no other reality for the 'I' than the one produced by the imagination. This reality is, as Fichte puts it, no illusion but truth, and the only possible truth (*FGA* I/2[b], 368–369=Fichte, 1988, 202).

Hardenberg agrees with Fichte that all reality emerges from imagination (*NS* 266:555=*FS* 164:555). However, imagination produces both truth and illusion. Moreover, both are necessary. Even illusion is understood as "a *necessary* fiction" (*NS* 179:234=*FS* 77:234)[29]. Illusion is defined as a determination that contradicts the being of the thing; truth, consequently, is a determination that does not contradict the being of the thing (*NS* 180:234=*FS* 78:234). Hardenberg does not say how the 'I' acquires the knowledge on the basis of which it recognises the thing and its determinations. For the 'I', nothing else exists than intuitions and representations, and both are products of the imagination (so are truth and illusion, which makes it, again, incomprehensible how they can be distinguished at all). Is there a point beyond imagination from where the 'I' could make judgments about that?

"All thought", writes Hardenberg, "is thus an art of illusion" (*NS* 181:234=*FS* 79:234). This proposition refers to mere

[25] See *NS* 170:225=*FS* 68:225; *NS* 170:226=*FS* 69:226; *NS* 174:232=*FS* 73:232.

[26] See *NS* 176:233=*FS* 74:233.

[27] Kneller translates "language or conceptual image", but the original "Sprach[-] oder Begriffbild" has to be read as "Sprachbild" or "Begriffbild".

[28] Kneller translates Kant's second category of modality as 'actuality'. I use the common term 'existence'. The important concept 'Schweben' is translated as 'oscillating'. Though the imagination does 'oscillate' as well, in this particular context 'schweben zwischen' refers to a state of indetermination in between, neither necessary nor existent. I have therefore chosen here and elsewhere 'hovering'. For a more extensive interpretation of this passage and the concept of imagination in the *Fichte Studies* see Waibel, 2007, 219–223.

[29] The term 'illusion' employed by Hardenberg here points rather to Kant's or Maimon's idea of a transcendental illusion than, as von Molnár suggests, to Schiller's aesthetic illusion (von Molnár, 1970, 111).

thoughts, such as representations without corresponding intuitions, form without material (*Stoff*), mind without matter. Without any empirical substratum, the imagination produces empty concepts, such as the concept 'pure' (*NS* 179:234=*FS* 77:234). Now, all transcendental concepts are pure by definition. Consequently, transcendental philosophy must be an illusion. But if even these illusions are generated according to the laws of reason, if they are necessary fictions, how can they be distinguished from truths? Hardenberg, in fact, does not oppose them as strictly as one might assume. He compares them with two halves composing a wholeness: "Illusion and truth together constitute only one proper reality"[30]. This is the reality which the 'I' is capable of experiencing. The unknown reality, in contrast, is improper: "Reality knows reality only through relation, form, illusion – negation". Hence, the real illusion is a prerequisite for the true reality: "Illusion is the only ground of all form and all material" (*NS* 181:234=*FS* 79:234)[31].

In this context, language is defined as "material and formal illusion" (*NS* 188:249=*FS* 86:249)[32]. In doing so, the former specification of the relationship between sign and image is modified again. The sign is still regarded as matter or intuition, respectively, just as the image is regarded as form or representation. But just as both (according to the dualism of intuition and concept) belong to the realm of intuition, they now belong, according to the dualism of truth and illusion, to the realm of representation. Accordingly, the question "what kind of mental image (*Gedankenbild*) can language give of *nature*", is indirectly answered by the following question: "Should all philosophy therefore have to be necessarily one-sided[?]" (*NS* 189:251=*FS* 86:251)[33]. Philosophy must be indeed one-sided; that is to say it must remain in the realm of mere thought, because language cannot give any appropriate representation of nature. This reflection vaguely recalls Kant's verdict that philosophy is doomed to fiddle around in nature (*KrV* A 725/B 753). Yet, there must be an affinity between language and thought which makes philosophy, albeit one-sided, possible. As both language and thought belong to the realm of illusion, they are finally cut off from reality:

> "Representation – genus – *concepts in general* are nothing real – they have only an ideal use. Hence also I, etc. is a regulative idea.
>
> The whole philosophy is only a science of reason – only of regulative use – exclusively ideal – without the slightest reality in the proper sense" (*NS* 256:479=*FS* 154:479).

The 'transitus' upon which everything rests

With the following remark, the *Fichte Studies* takes a new direction. I quote the passage in the original and in Kneller's translation:

> "Der Satz sezt sich, kann man nicht sagen. Der Gegenstand sezt sich, mittelbar, durch Gegensetzen. Setzen und Gegensetzen ist aber eins.
>
> Die Freyheit des Geistes verwickelt ihn hier in scheinbare Widersprüche. Der Begriff der Thätigkeit enthält lediglich schon die Data der Begriff[e] – Setzen, Gegensetzen, entstehn. Alle Bewegungsbegriffe, alle Verba /im eigentlichsten Verstand: *Worte*/ enthalten den Transitus, auf welchem alles beruht" (*NS* 200:282).
>
> "One cannot say, the proposition posits itself. The object posits itself mediately through positing in opposition. But positing and positing in opposition are one.
>
> Here the freedom of spirit entangles it in apparent contradictions. The concept of activity already contains merely the data of the concepts – positing, positing in opposition, emerging. All concepts of movement, all verbs /in the most authentic sense: *Words*/ embody the passage upon which everything rests" (*FS* 97:282).

Hardenberg uses the term 'transitus' to denote the movement or passage between two opposites, such as from being to not-being or, as in this quote, from object (*Gegenstand*) to opposite (*Gegensatz*). But now, this transitus is no longer related to the "efficacy of the imagination" (*NS* 188:249=*FS* 86:249). Rather, it is contained in the words themselves. For Hardenberg, the concept 'object' (*Gegenstand*) emerges from the verb 'emerge' (*entstehen*)[34] just as the concept 'opposite' (*Gegensatz*) emerges from the verbs 'posit' (*setzen*) and 'posit in opposition' (*gegensetzen*): "With respect to the opposite it can be said, it is posited – [with respect to] the object – it emerges [...] *To emerge* expresses self-emergence, a causality which is causality for itself, a passivity through its own activity" (*NS* 200:282=*FS* 97:282)[35]. These considerations point to the insight

[30] Kneller translates 'one actual reality'.

[31] See O'Brian, 1995, 105-106. O'Brian relates 'illusion' to language. Due to its metaphorical and figurative character, all use of language inescapably produces illusion. But O'Brian does not consider that this kind of illusion cannot be opposed to truth. If there "is a *necessary* deception in *all* language" (105), the distinction between both gets lost. If "[i]llusion is everywhere" (106), as Hardenberg is quoted, it is at the same time nowhere. Illusion, thus, would be similar to phenomenality in Kant's transcendental philosophy: it would designate the only possible mode of all our experience. But Hardenberg does not stop here. He rather concludes that, if every being is intelligible only by means of signs, it is the order of signs itself which provides the criteria to distinguish between 'truth' and 'illusion'. Hardenberg, in other words, recognises language as the place where the difference between both must be located.

[32] I do not understand why Kneller suddenly translates 'Schein' as 'appearance' although these considerations clearly refer to the distinction of 'truth' and 'illusion'.

[33] Kneller translates, erroneously in my opinion, 'Gedankenbild' as 'image of thought'.

[34] The noun 'Stand' is a substantivation of the verb 'stehen'.

[35] Kneller translates: "From [the side of] the opposite it means, it is posited. From [the side of] the object [it means] it arises out of it. [...] *To emerge* expresses a self-bringing forth, a causality that is self-causality [...]". The original text says: "Vom Gegensatze heißt es, er wird gesezt – vom Gegenstande – er entsteht [...] *Entstehn* drückt eine Selbsthervorbringung, eine Caussalitaet, die sich selbst Caussalitaet ist, eine Passivität durch eigne Activität aus".

that the transitus is not merely a passing from one side to the other but, additionally, a carrying over, a transfer (*metaphorá*), and that, therefore, even in transcendental philosophy the mind is not allowed to set itself in contradiction to the truth of the language. Consequently, "[v]erb, subject and predicate or noun and adjective" are put in place of representation, consciousness, subject, or object as actual "materials of the *Elementarphilosophie*" (*NS* 200:282=*FS* 97:282).

From now on, all notes rest more or less strictly upon two preconditions: Firstly, there is nothing for the 'I' outside its own consciousness. The 'I' must 'have' (*haben*) what it wants to discern (*NS* 248:461=*FS* 146:461). The essence of a thing is no longer concealed behind, but revealed through the appearance (*NS* 237:426=*FS* 136:436). The law of the object and the law of the concept must be one and the same, since we "only know what is, and there is only what we know" (*NS* 248:461=*FS* 146:461, see also *NS* 266:555=*FS* 164:555)[36]. Even we ourselves "only *are* insofar as we know ourselves" (*NS* 247:454=*FS* 145:454). The 'I' "is fundamentally nothing – everything must be *given* to it – But something can be given to it and the given becomes something only through the I. The I is not an encyclopedia, but rather a universal principle" (*NS* 273:568=*FS* 171:568).

The second precondition is closely connected to the first one. In the relationship between representation and presentation, priority is now given to the latter. Representing something is no longer conceived as an act. As a neutral verb, "the word 'to represent' does not qualify as a generic word for the product of thought". A representation is "either a reproduction of a form – or an arbitrarily posited being for an other thing" (*NS* 256:478=*FS* 153:478)[37]. Presentability (*Darstellbarkeit)*, in turn, advances to be "the criterion of possibility of all philosophy" (*NS* 217:305=*FS* 114:305). There is no room for doubt that presentability now refers to the production of signs, in particular, of spoken and written language (*NS* 282:630=*FS* 181:630; *NS* 282:633–283:633=*FS* 182:633). At the end of the *Fichte Studies*, presentation is related to intuition. An intuition is produced when the "outer object changes in and through the I with the concept". As an 'inner object', the intuition then changes, again in and through the I, "with *a body appropriate to it* and the sign arises" (*NS* 283:637–284:637=*FS* 182:637). The supposed division into intuition and representation from the beginning of the *Fichte Studies* is withdrawn here. Hardenberg does no longer conceive the intuition as a freely produced image, but rather as the outer object itself. Instead, freedom is shifted to the realm of presentation. The given object "may only be the germ, the type, the fixed point" in and through which the 'formative power' (*bildende Kraft*) or 'power of presenting' (*darstellende Kraft*) develops. It should determine the 'I' not "as mere object", but rather "as product of the I" emerging from an act of "*free* presenting". If the 'I' posits itself "as a perpetually presenting I – it thus posits itself as free, as a determinate presenting I" (*NS* 282:633=*FS* 181:633).

Conclusion

Hardenberg revokes the initial idea of a necessary relationship between sign and signified mediated through a schema. As presenting, the 'I' is principally free. The formulation that the sign receives "*a body appropriate to*" the object is, however, ambiguous. The criterion of 'appropriateness' seems to refer rather to whole texts or speeches than to single signs. A textual body might suffice this criterion if it is produced according to specific rules of presentations, such as rules of composition, rules of sphere changing, rules of temporal divisions, or rules of the medium (*NS* 282:633–283:633=*FS* 181:633–182:633). Hardenberg thinks his contemporaries stood only at the beginning of the art of writing (*NS* 283:633=*FS* 182:633). The 'I', hence, is free with respect to the object that is to be presented. With respect to the presentation, in contrast, it is bound by laws: "There must be nothing arbitrary, lawless in a particular mode of action of the human spirit – Everywhere art and science. All science is something positive – or better, it must be grounded on something given. It is complete knowledge of an *object* – art – the perfect application of knowledge" (*NS* 277:588=*FS* 176:588).

Philosophy is treated no less strictly. "[F]antasy systems" or mere "aesthetic compositions", though "endlessly possible", are excluded from the "pure philosophy" (*NS* 290:649=*FS* 188:649). The "highest principle must be nothing given, but rather must be freely made, something *invented*, *devised*"[38], for there is no other way to attain the absolute; yet, this "absolute postulate" still serves "to ground a universal metaphysical system" (*NS* 270:566=*FS* 168:566; *NS* 273:568=*FS* 171:568). The question remains how such a philosophy is supposed to be objectified. Provided that presentability is the criterion of the possibility of all philosophy, even a metaphysical system requires a certain mode of language. However, the idea of employing a transcendental language had to be abandoned when it became clear that there was no possible way to establish a necessary relationship between sign and signified. According to the few remarks that can be found in the *Fichte Studies*, Hardenberg conceives transcendental language as a system in itself. The signified has disappeared from this system. The signs relate merely to each other now. "Metaphysical words are, as it were, only letters – like the formulae in algebra" (*NS* 280:612=*FS* 179:612). This idea is taken up later in the famous *Monologue* (1799) where Hardenberg compares language to mathematic formulae. Both constitute a world for themselves and play with themselves alone (Novalis, 1997, 83). Accordingly, transcendental language constitutes a systematic interrelationship of symbols whose

[36] See Waibel, 2010, 317-318.

[37] Kneller translates the original 'ein willkürliches Gesetztsein' as 'an arbitrary [act of] being posited', thereby forgetting that, in the previous sentence, Hardenberg rejects the idea of understanding representation as action.

[38] Kneller translates 'ein *Erdichtetes*' as 'something *composed*'.

meaning results only from the totality of relations they maintain to all other symbols[39]. Such a philosophy, expressed in transcendental language, "contains only laws of orientation and absolutely no content or its form" (*NS* 290:649=*FS* 188:649). With regard to the fact that this system is emerging out of itself and that its development is principally open, it unites "freedom and unendingness" (*NS* 289:648=*FS* 187:648). It is, at the same time, "a system of the manifold unity" and "of endless expansion" (*NS* 290:649=*FS* 188:649). Certainly, the whole philosophy is "only of regulative use – exclusively ideal", but as the "*most rule-governed play* of ideas" it is nevertheless "*true* philosophy" (*NS* 197:278=*FS* 95:278).

It never really becomes clear why, at some point, the stream of reflections is suddenly interrupted by the note "Tower of Babel" (*NS* 189:251=*FS* 86:251) – whether this is meant as a warning, a stimulus, or a mere reference. One might say at least that this edifice, not unlike metaphysical philosophy, was erected with the intention to transcend nature. The consequences, as is well known, were irreversible. But language was shattered by the same ineffable being, which at first had provided the necessary conditions to strive for it. It cannot be excluded, on the other hand, that Hardenberg gives the myth a positive sense. He might consider it a necessary condition to turn away from nature in order to find an appropriate language for philosophy, which would be a language of thought alone, a transcendental language. Such a language would be a new tower uniting the thinking mankind. Reason itself would contain the architectonic laws for this endeavour so that the tower would never face the threat of being smashed from above.

[39] A similar interpretation is suggested by Vater, 2010, 293.

Abbreviations

FS = Novalis: *Fichte Studies*. Ed. by Jane Kneller (Cambridge *et al.*: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

FGA = Johann Gottlieb Fichte: *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. 42 vols. Ed. by Reinhard Lauth, Erich Fuchs, Hans Gliwitzky, and Peter K. Schneider (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Fromann-Holzboog, 1962-2012).

FGA I/2(a) = *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie*, 109–172.

FGA I/2(b) = *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre als Handschrift für seine Zuhörer*, 249–461.

FGA I/3(a) = *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, 23–68.

FGA I/3(b) = "Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache", 97–127.

FGA I/3(c) = *Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre in Rüksicht auf das theoretische Vermögen als Handschrift für seine Zuhörer*, 137–208.

FGA I/3(d) = *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre*, 311–460.

FGA I/4 = "Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre", 245–269.

KrV = Immanuel Kant (1911): *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Akademie-Ausgabe, vol. 3 = B; vol. 4 = A). Ed. by Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Reimer).

NS = Novalis (1965): "Fichte-Studien". *Schriften*. 6 vols. Ed. by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, [2]1960-2006), II, 104–296.

Data availability

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

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As I indicate in the specific responses, Knopf's "Tower of Babel..." (TB) ought to be accepted for indexing in its current form. TB presents a tightly interwoven set of original interpretative theses; it engages critically and not redundantly with the relevant secondary literature; its prose presentation is flawless; and its main line of argument could help provide a baseline for scholarship on Novalis's (hereafter Hardenberg's) early philosophical thought. I do not recommend revisions before indexing.

In what follows, I summarize TB's primary theses and weigh in on several of them. I disagree with Knopf's conclusion, or elements of it, and I will indicate why I disagree in my final remarks. Again, however, Knopf makes his case with scholarly carefulness, textual evidence, and a line of argument that is credible and cogent. I do not take issue with the warrant of this article; on the contrary, the disagreement I will outline indicates the potential for TB to provide a point of reference for any future interpretative disputes over the character of Hardenberg's (embryonic) theory of language.

TB is about the way that the problem of language develops in the *Fichte Studies*, such that Hardenberg discovers the philosophical challenge posed by communication in the course of writing these notes, experiments with responses inspired chiefly by Kant and Fichte, and ultimately comes to rethink his initial depiction of language entirely. By following Hardenberg's inquiry, TB is also a work about the communicability of knowledge, and the open question of what can be *true* in the medium of language. As such, the essay takes up the character of linguistic signs, of the procedural rules by which non-empirical concepts can be associated with sensuous impressions (i.e., it pursues the makeup of Kantian and Fichtean *schema*), and it surveys the nature of *representation* and of *mediation* in Kant, Fichte, and Hardenberg.

The strengths of TB include its account of the way Hardenberg comes to appreciate both the profundity of Fichte's initiative and its flights into nonsense. Likewise, TB presents a good philological case for reconsidering the organization of Hardenberg's notes, even if the reordering would affect the reader's experience more than any arguments Hardenberg makes. Perhaps most

importantly, Knopf convincingly shows why the several principal arguments or conceptual sections of the *Fichte Studies* (as noted in the secondary literature) all meet in and are taken up by Hardenberg's treatment of language, which hereafter became his fundamental philosophical interest. This insight helps to explain the intense affinity that sparked between Hardenberg and the Schlegel brothers and others who briefly composed Jena Romanticism.

Although TB is not directly concerned with the wider movement of Jena Romanticism, it intercedes into our understanding of the philosophical concerns that motivate it. Viewed from a distance, "German Romanticism" tends to symbolize an incomplete but discerning intervention into critical metaphysics' commitment to aprioricity. Where Kant eschews the historical nature of concepts, and thus claims that his system is unreliant on historically developed human languages, philosophical romanticism is celebrated for embracing, instead, the ironies of a critical project surreptitiously steeped in metaphor, analogy, and other linguistic conditions of its own communicative possibility. Panned out at sufficient distance, the bridge not only from Kant to Hegel, but from Kantianism to post-Darwinian theories of language was first laid by the cohort of thinkers to which Hardenberg belongs. Knopf mentions but does not specify the "modern linguistic theories" that Hardenberg purportedly anticipates. Yet, as Knopf's close treatment of sections of the *Fichte Studies* should remind us, the texts of the philosophical romantics were often left incomplete, or are collections of notes basted together by later editors. So perhaps it should not surprise us that focusing in on them tends to reveal more fissures than connections. At a remove, Jena Romanticism is seen as a plausible reaction against the Kantian separation of nature and freedom, and of Fichtean transcendental ideality, and it is is credited with beginning to provide the means of overcoming those systems' dissociation from nature or reality. Up close though, these texts can be jarringly disjointed; they can read as the brilliant but often also confused journaling of very young thinkers, still green in philosophical competence. (Hardenberg was 22-23 when he wrote the *Fichte Studies*, as Knopf recognizes.)

Moreover, if Knopf is right about Hardenberg's evolving position on language, then the most serious fissures aren't in each thinker's notes, but between the thinkers otherwise grouped together as a romantic movement. Knopf's Hardenberg is anti-naturalist (as opposed, e.g., to Herder), unironic in his frustrated quest for the unity of sign and signified (as opposed to Friedrich Schlegel), and remains open to Fichtean transcendentalism (as opposed to Schelling). In fact, Knopf's Hardenberg initially wants a more austere, ahistorical and apriori metaphysic than even Kantian critical philosophy provides, albeit one encompassing the essential grammar that Kant suggests may be hidden in the shared root of sensibility and understanding.

The real differences between these thinkers ought to be a matter of scrutiny, and TB will be beneficial to that examination. At the same time, by the end of his *Fichte Studies*, Knopf's Hardenberg is standing on the edge of a caricatured Platonism, and this is where I believe Knopf's conclusion misjudges the evidence Hardenberg provides.

At the conclusion of TB, Knopf presents a Hardenberg who embraces the retreat of philosophy into "mere thought"; who settles into the claim that language cannot give an appropriate representation of nature; and who holds that language and thought are necessarily "cut off" from reality. The evidence that I believe Knopf is misjudging involves Hardenberg's use of the terms *real* and *ideal*, held in apparent opposition; the reference to regulative ideas, as when Hardenberg comes to conclude that the subjective *I* is regulative; and relatedly, Hardenberg's increasing pursuit of the notion of *transcendental illusion*. As a book, the *Fichte Studies*, Knopf knows, is a

product of posthumous editing. In the course of his life, however, Hardenberg's notes continued, and by 1797, he was attending primarily to Kant. The flow of the 1796 notes helps to explain why Hardenberg would return to Kant, for it is in Kant that one finds the full account of a transcendental illusion which is both fictive and necessary. Likewise, the act of *positing* that proved frustrating in Fichte remains the regulative anchor of the Kantian project, and projection rules, difficult as Kant's prose may seem, are still the clearer account of how any schema or mediating grammar could show up for reflection.

To be "cut off from reality," is not, for Kant (or I would argue for Hardenberg) to give up on actuality, but to accept the (transcendental) fact that thought and experience remain framed by the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding. When Hardenberg writes (as Knopf cites it, at NS 256:479=FS 154:479): "The whole philosophy is only a science of reason–only of regulative use–exclusively ideal–without the slightest reality in the proper sense," the alleged *proper sense* is that of precritical empiricism. Likewise, representations in general, such as the subjective *I*, are not given as empirically real, but discovered as transcendentally ideal, and thereby hold the critical system in place. Were we unable to regulatively posit the *self*, freedom would unravel, because the positing of individual freedom is as ideal and illusive as the *self*, and depends on a self to enact it. To sidestep the full consequence of this regulative force is slide from speculation into deception; to dogmatically assert the empirical or ontological reality of regulative anchors is, per Kant, "only so much trouble and labor lost" (KrV A602/B630).

None of this is to say that Knopf isn't on to something when he reads the *Fichte Studies* as the development of Hardenberg's maturing ideas about language. Clearly too, there *isn't* any demonstrable way of binding natural sign and signified necessarily, and Hardenberg—who trained at least as much for applied sciences and law as he did for philosophy—was not alone in wanting to secure a linguistic form purged of the biases of individuals, the contingencies of experience, and the vagaries of most interpersonal communication. He mentions the promise of algebraic and other mathematical formula in this regard, anachronistically straddling the visions of Plato and Tarski.

In order to judge the direction toward which these early hopes were leaning in 1796, it helps to see their treatment in 1798 (e.g., as *Blüthenstaub* or even more, in the *Allgemeine Brouillon*). For almost immediately after the Fichte notes, we find Hardenberg far from defending an ideal language opposed to nature and suitable for "pure" philosophy. To the contrary, Hardenberg has embraced the Kantian critique of a *pure* anything. But this Hardenberg hasn't forgotten his earlier striving for clarity and unity (for the precritical Tower of Babel), and he incorporates the earlier insights into a position on feeling and affect that sublimates, without reconciling, critical philosophy and perpetually unfinished human longing. This is the Hardenberg who brings *ruins* into his writing—both novels and theories—and who transmutes them into strategic romantic *fragments*.

By the close of TB, Knopf is imagining a Hardenberg who wishes to rebuild a Tower independent of nature, constructed with the unbreakable laws of transcendental architecture, "so that the tower would never face the threat of being smashed from above." Actually Hardenberg chooses, quite openly, life among the ruins. He neither preaches salvation nor promises invulnerability, but celebrates remnants which "give birth to these blooming children" (*Heinrich von Ofterdingen*). The romantic innovation of the fragmentary form, I take it, is an iteration of Hardenberg's realization, in the course of the *Fichte Studies*, that the Fichtean strain between I and not-I is better understood

as a dynamic between language and the imagination. The identities we form in these dynamics are regulative and intersubjectively communicative. As such, their unity (our unity) remains a matter of finitude and play: this is unity in the way that "the magic wand of analogy" (*Europa*) imposes unity, or in the way Hardenberg understands *love* and *health* as temporal-finite and physical-finite unities. This is the kind of unity available to the ideal-real binary and the spatio-temporal form of intuition: in other words, for Hardenberg, this is the unity of poetry and of the poetic fragments which do what schema and lawful linguistic rules were once fancied to do. The poetic fragment mediates otherwise mutually incommunicable poles, holding unrelated things together, in activated imagination.

Again then, my disagreement with Knopf's conclusion about Hardenberg's *Fichte Studies* is based in large part on agreement with his reconstruction of its procedure. But in the end, I find that Knopf doesn't follow his own reading far enough into the kind of illusion that Hardenberg was rediscovering, in Kant, or into Hardenberg's grasp of the *critical* turn, albeit while leaving in place all the longing for the unified world Kant had blocked off. Hardenberg's solution is not a regression into dreams of invulnerability, but a *hovering* between possibilities, in the way that romantic poetry hovers between distancing irony and evocative hope.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?

Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?

Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?

Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?

Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?

Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: 18-19th century German philosophy, German Idealism and Romanticism, the phenomenology of language, critical theory

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

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Following his truly ground-breaking editorial and interpretative work on *Heinrich von Afterdingen* —which has since served as the philological basis for every serious engagement with Friedrich von Hardenberg's (Novalis's) novel—Alexander Knopf endeavours to come to terms with one of the notoriously most difficult texts of German literature and philosophy: Hardenberg's *Fichte Studies*. The article provides an innovative account on the intricate relationship between transcendental thought in the wake of Kant and Fichte and a theory of language, as it is presented in the *Studies*. As with Knopf's two volumes on *Heinrich von Afterdingen*, the merits of his endeavour are philological and philosophical at the same time. Here, his brilliant interpretation of the *Fichte Studies* is thoughtful in the questions it raises; it is careful in its nuanced reading of central passages of the *Studies*; and it is bold and thought-provoking in its conclusions. I therefore strongly recommend the indexing of this article without any delay.

The three basic arguments that Manfred Frank has influentially deducted from Hardenberg's notes in his seminal lecture course *'Unendliche Annäherung'* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997, p. 802) on the beginnings of the philosophical Jena Romanticism are not refuted as such by Knopf (or merely supplemented by a fourth argument); rather they are placed in the context of an encompassing philosophy of language. This philosophy of language and the relationship of presentation (*darstellen*) and representation (*vorstellen*) lie at the very core of Hardenberg's critique of transcendental philosophy which—by looking closely at the problem of language—transforms the very concepts it aims to find universal expressions for. Such a perspective is, philosophically, decidedly more persistent than Paul de Man's studies on the rhetoric of Romanticism. Yet it might be an interesting task to relate Knopf's findings to Paul de Man's—the greatest difference between the two certainly being that while de Man mainly analyses the use of tropes and figural language (most prominently of inversions and chiasms) in the texts of the German and English Romantics, Knopf reconstructs the argument Hardenberg himself provides for a theory of the sign which (so to speak) transcends Fichte's transcendental philosophy but *remains* philosophical and transcendental in its intentions (this is also an important difference to O'Brian's 1995 interpretation). As these problems seem not clear to Hardenberg from the beginning of his notes, but are only developed gradually, the writing process itself can be viewed as a presentation of Hardenberg's thought process. From this perspective, Knopf makes a strong case for a philological philosophy (and a philosophical philology), because an analysis of Hardenberg's line of argument should tackle the order, the conjunctions, and the disjunctions in the *Fichte Studies*; and a scholarly edition of these drafts must grasp, conversely, its philosophical significance in order to fulfil the task of textual criticism.

In his comments on Mähl's at the time certainly ground-breaking critical edition of the text (or

rather, of the series of fragments), which was published in the 1960s, Knopf makes a convincing case for reversing the order of the bundles of papers entitled "Remarks" (which contain a theory of the sign and which, Mähl believes, begin the *Studies*) and the linguistically less sophisticated "Undetermined Propositions." It certainly follows from these comments that—as with the *Heinrich von Afterdingen*—Hardenberg's oeuvre still deserves far more critical-philological attention to its gestalt in the manuscripts. Kluckhohn and Samuel's *Schriften* are, despite their obvious merits, far from being a definitive edition of Hardenberg's works. At his point, the reader of the article would like to be given even more indications as to the precise order and textual structure of the *Fichte Studies*. Yet, Knopf's aim here is primarily interpretative; and he cannot, of course, at the same time provide us with a new edition of the *Studies* (though he certainly should be consulted if such an edition were brought underway).

It is especially worth stressing that Knopf is aware of the tensions and inherent contradictions which—most importantly for the present context—juxtapose a more conventional notion of the dichotomy of sign and image, and of the sign as necessarily related to the signified, with the "breakthrough" Hardenberg achieves through the formula "linguistic or conceptual image" for the sign. The article resists the temptation of simply rejoicing at this breakthrough to identify it with later linguistic theories (Saussure certainly comes to mind, but also French theory in the wake of Heidegger), but painstakingly shows how Hardenberg only gradually comes to terms with his realization.

The philosophical *Sprachvergessenheit* (forgetting of language), which Rainer Nägele analysed in his Hölderlinian assessment of transcendental philosophy (*Kritik der poetischen Vernunft*, Basel, Weil am Rhein, Vienna: Engeler, 2005), is in Hardenberg challenged by the passage (*Transitus*) between opposites—a passage which is, to be sure, elementary to post-Fichtean thought. This *Transitus* is contained, according to Hardenberg—in what may well be the most interesting momentum of the *Fichte Studies*—in language itself. The examples given by Hardenberg may appear at first like a play on words ("Vom Gegensatze heißt es, er wird gesezt—vom Gegenstande—er entsteht"). But these remarks could not be further from mere poetic playfulness. They propose the preconditions for a transcendental philosophy grounded in language no less strict than the use of mathematical symbols. However, this transcendental philosophy of language only relates to itself. Yet if the signs, as Knopf concludes, "relate merely to each other now," one may wonder how this version of transcendental philosophy as a strictly linguistic philosophy of reason relates to Kant's vital epistemological questions. If it is true that Hardenberg's transcendental linguistics in the *Fichte Studies* is ultimately entirely unrelated to the empirical realm—and therefore to a philosophy of the a priori conditions of the possibility of experience—it remains to debate whether this antagonism is the last word (so to speak) of the *Studies*, or if it perhaps should be viewed yet again in conjunction with the other groups of fragments or Hardenberg's later works.

For this debate—and for any future discussions of both the philosophical as well as the philological issues raised by Hardenberg's *Fichte Studies*—Knopf's outstanding article provides a very thoughtful, deeply nuanced, and highly enlightening basis.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?

Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the

topic?
Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Hölderlin, German Romanticism, Manuscript Studies, Rhetoric, Aesthetics, Hermeneutics, Literature and Philosophy/Philosophical Approaches to Literature.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

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It is an understatement to say that Novalis' *Fichte Studies* has not received the attention it deserves since the critical edition of the text in the second volume of the *Historische und Kritische Ausgabe* (1960). This is the case in particular for the few fragments Novalis dedicates to linguistics and to the issues related to the act of expressing *a priori* norms and rules, i.e. to write a transcendental philosophy. Hamann's and, a while later, Herder's "Metacritique", as well as Maimon, Reinhold, Niethammer and Fichte, among others, questioned in several different ways the ability of natural language and sensible signs to communicate pure *a priori* units of meaning. Scholars frequently forget that Friedrich von Hardenberg *alias* Novalis contributed towards this exciting debate of the end of the Enlightenment.

One of the greatest merits of Alexander Knopf's paper is that it takes Novalis' thoughts on

"transcendental linguistics" most seriously, while carefully but splendidly bringing in his own interpretation. The author offers the romantic scholarship one of the most brilliant insights into Novalis' fragments on language not only by differently ordering the latter in the manuscripts of 1795-96, but also by providing an original account of Novalis' theory of the sign in such a post-Kantian context. This is why I strongly recommend – without further delay – the indexing of this article.

To begin with, Alexander Knopf argues that Novalis briefly seeks to develop a universally valid language applicable to transcendental philosophy. According to the author, Novalis explicitly tries to clear the philosophical terminology from any arbitrariness while isolating, so to speak, the "pure" transcendental signs, the latter being only determined by their necessary relation to the signified. However, as the papers demonstrates, Novalis has a change of heart during the course of his investigation of language. Since the attempts to find a necessary relationship between sign and signified are unsuccessful, Novalis separates language from nature, so that language becomes a pure and ideal realm, i.e. the realm of freedom of the I, in such a way that words are no longer subsidiary signs: they become the immediate agents of thoughts. The author does not really want to challenge the common idea that, for Novalis as for the German Romantics in general, language, in all its parts, is "metaphorical", "symbolic" or "figurative". According to the paper, the problem is rather to determine whether the "transfer" during the metaphorical operation is necessary or contingent, in other words, if a pure and indestructible link between the figurative or imaginative sign and the transcendental signified exists or not. Since Novalis drops his first reflections on schematism, he clearly abandons the idea of an unalterable nexus between sensible language and pure thought.

In what follows, I will limit myself to making a few comments (all of which are nothing more than suggestions or even open-ended questions) concerning the general presupposition of Alexander Knopf's account of Novalis and some of its consequences, while leaving aside the way the paper deals with Fichte's account on language and imagination. The latter seems to me perhaps too rapidly discussed (p. 6-7), since the issue of a genetic connection between Fichte's transcendental standpoint and the considerations on natural language has been now revisited by the Fichtean *Forschung.* The same goes for the quick conclusions about the Fichtean *Grundriss* (p.8), but all this does not really matter here.

First of all, one could rightfully object to the author that the attempt to find the most plausible organization of the fragments (in terms of a chronological order) does not necessarily solve the problem of knowing how the latter require or even demand to be read regarding what Novalis calls himself in the same text a "system of the absence of a system". It seems that the author does not want to incorporate into his reflection the traditional issues concerning the very act of writing (and reading) romantic fragments (even though *Fichte Studies* does not belong to the age of the *Athenäum* of course), not to mention the stylistic issues. Yet, it seems to me difficult to evaluate to an accurate extent the influence of Fichte's transcendental imagination, for example, without taking into account the constant role played by the "wavering" (*Schweben*) between opposites in the very formal structure of the fragments, even when the content apparently leaves the Fichtean imagination behind. In any case, nothing is less sure than the idea of a strictly linear progress of Novalis' thinking on language and imagination in these manuscripts, above all because Novalis suggests that fragments and ideas continually have to call out to one another or even to collide in an infinite process of reflection that prevents him of closing off any philosophical "file", so to speak. This is why it could also be that we have to read, in a more "cumulative" process, the

fragments emphasizing the necessity of schematism, for example, *and* the fragments that seem to leave behind schematism *at the same time*, as strange as it sounds.

Besides, and to stay on this important issue, I am not sure that the paper really helps to understand Novalis' recourse to the schematism because it is not able to clarify the exact inheritance of Fichte on this particular subject. Without dwelling on Fichte, it is worth noting that the paper does not try to discriminate between transcendental and empirical imagination, between productive and reproductive imagination, and between the schematism as pure *a priori* power – thus shared by any rational free being – to *a priori* "configure" and "construct" our world through pure reflexive activity, and the empirical rule, which structurally depends on the former, simply allowing the subject to reproduce in the representation the external object. Moreover, the author does not take into account the very specific character of " transcendental fiction" that Novalis puts in place when he considers the schematism: *HKA* II, 109-110 explicitly discusses an "originary schema", which is certainly not empirical but rather reminds the Fichtean's transcendental theory of intersubjectivity in the *Foundations of Natural Right* (see also the fascinating spatial layout of the fragment in II, 110: "*Frage? Wie?*" Etc.).

When it comes about the "freedom" of the imagination, things do not appear easier. Since the "schema" finally appears to the author's eyes only as a rigid rule that has nothing to do with the mutual and free solicitation (*Aufforderung*) of rational agents capable of intellectual intuition (i.e. of the reciprocal sharing of the free activity to *a priori* give themselves rational rules), the only way to preserve an authentically "free" imagination – which is never clearly defined in the paper – is to locate it in a kind of unbounded fantasy, whose contingency however contradicts the so-called rejection of empirical arbitrariness. As far as I see it, the conclusion is a bit hasty when it maintains that the need for an appropriate dialectic, so to speak, between the necessity to be bound by law and the freedom of the I has from now on nothing to do with "schematism" (p. 12). In fact, such a dialectic is exactly the point of Fichtean schematism. Of course, Novalis himself does not help clarifying that point, and it might even be necessary to take into account the interplay between transcendental and empirical levels (see below). Nonetheless, the author shows very well that Novalis briefly asks for a necessary nexus between the agent, the signified and the particular linguistic sign itself. The problem remains to identify which point of view Novalis speaks from and which kind of "freedom" or "autonomy" his account is supposed to reveal.

In the same vein, one could object that the reshaping of the fragments' order does not necessarily overcome the issue of the juxtaposition in the same manuscript, sometimes in the same fragment, of different philosophical levels (gnoseological, practical, anthropological, metaphysical, linguistic, etc.). Hence the difficulty to define a strict "transcendental linguistics" in Novalis' work. Indeed, is it not the "I" itself, that is the self-consciousness and its power of imagination, and not only the linguistic sign alone, that "has a hieroglyphic strength" (*HKA*, II, 107)? That does not make things any easier of course. The problem remains: how far can we go with the idea that there is a moment "A" of Novalis' reflections on language, which would be not only followed but actually "overcome" by a moment "B" ? It seems to me that these manuscripts pertain mostly to a kind of "layered" writing process.

From the historiographical point of view, moreover, it could have been interesting to take into account the "crossed" – not to say the "combined" – inheritance of Reinhold, Fichte, Neoplatonism (in the wake of *The Sophist*), German mysticism (Jakob Böhme will be very likely read after the *Fichte Studies*, but we can notice the indirect presence of Meister Eckhart in the interplay between

thesis, antithesis and synthesis), and the Leibnizian art of combinations (through the teaching of the mathematician Carl Hindenburg), all of which playing a part from the outset, sometimes discreetly, when the discussion comes about the “sign”, the “image”, the “appearance”, the “only-being” etc. The post-Leibnizian “combinatory” aspect, on the one hand, would have helped to both complicate and relativize what appears here to be only hesitations followed by a breakthrough in the relationship between sign and image (p. 10). On the other hand, the crossed inheritance of Fichte and Neoplatonism seems to me already at work in the aforementioned “linguistic” fragments, so that the latter are part of an actual metaphysical gesture. Within such a framework, being the “sign” and/or the “image” and/or the pure “appearance” (or even the “fiction”) of the absolute is a proposition whose consequences transcend and accomplish at the same time the linguistic issue discussed here within the scope of a more “pre-structuralist” perspective, if I may say.

Finally, I would like to say a word of the conclusion. Even if the author makes no reference to the post-Heideggerian reading of the Romantics, that is to the idea of a self-sufficient language that would only speak of itself, the paper claims by way of conclusion that language is an independent realm fundamentally opposed to nature. In doing so, the author reproduces independently the Heideggerian rejection of the profound prosaic – i.e. “mundane” – aspect of Novalis’ thought. I must say that I totally disagree with such an account. This being said, the interpretation advanced in the paper does not exactly come within such a scope. Indeed, the author asserted elsewhere (see A. Knopf, *Novalis, Heinrich von Afterdingen*, Stroemfeld Verlag, 2015, p. 62-72) that Heidegger completely misses Novalis’ point. However, he does think that, at the end of the *Fichte Studies* , Novalis comes to a point where he sees the self-sufficiency of language as the criterion for its “transcendentality”. Yet, in his PhD dissertation, A. Knopf argues that such an idea of self-sufficiency is merely transitory. That idea, he insists however, is briefly legitimate, namely in the *Fichte-Studies*.

In any case, as far as I see it, the extraordinary *Monologue* (which is also invoked by the author to support his view, cf. p. 12) often misleads the romantic scholars in this respect. To be sure, language is preoccupied (*bekümmert*) by itself. However, this is the case not so much because it would split with nature and the rest of the world, but quite the opposite. Henceforth, everything is language, all of nature “gestures”, every single being literally makes (a) “sign(s)” and, in this way, “appeals” (cf. the famous “*Statt Nicht-Ich – Du*”) to other signs, i.e. beings. This is exactly what the *Monologue* tells us when it claims that language, like mathematical formulas, freely constructs a world for itself. Indeed, precisely by doing so the formulas become “members of nature (*Glieder der Natur*)”. Such an assertion is usually left unaddressed by commentators. However, all this, according to Novalis, happens at the level of the mere “things”, since language shapes nothing less than the “plan of things (*Grundriss der Dinge*)”. The “thing” is never pejorative in Novalis’ view. In contrast to what both (post-)structuralist and (post-)Heideggerian traditions usually assert on the subject of German romanticist language, I claim that there is absolutely no depreciation of the prosaic world for the benefit of a so-called “purified”, or even “ethereal” language in Novalis, but quite the reverse, since the whole point is to integrate the very same world in its materiality into language. This is why it is essential not to cut off the linguistic fragments from the rest of the *Schriften* and from the vast interplay between its several influences.

Novalis’ philosophy of nature in its entirety depends, so to speak, on an inspiration that explicitly goes back to the neoplatonic Paracelsian doctrine of signature. As Novalis writes in the *Allgemeine Brouillon*: “The human is not alone to speak – the universe also *speaks* – everything speaks –

infinite words. Etc." (Frgt. 143). Now, the "language" that constitutes our world in its very materiality and that never stops to "speak" is indeed absolutely creative, and is performative all along (cf. also the importance of the "sophistic" references in the *Fichte Studies*, left aside by the paper). Every "letter" is immediately full of "spirit", as Fichte's second philosophy of language will assert (cf. the *Addresses to the German Nation*), except that it goes far beyond human language. According to Alexander Knopf, the free power of language, at least in the *Fichte Studies*, ultimately depends on turning away from nature, just as the "presenting I" seems to stand alone in a kind of autarkic freedom. As for me, I do not see why the language and the infinite multiplicity of signs which *are* the world's texture have to be cut off from the power of imagination. As Novalis often suggests, signs and images (I maintain that ultimately there is no structural differences between these two concepts) indicate themselves symbolically and so reflect themselves: they are fundamentally imaginative self-reflection, in a post-Fichtean sense. Knowing that everything "speaks" by "sign-making" to others, we should consider that the power of imagination, far from being separated from pure language, irrigates immediately or even *is* nothing more than the infinite reflexive activity which innervate signs, i.e., images, i.e. appearances that constitute our world. Of course, I cannot elaborate on this in the limited framework of this review.

Whatever doubts I might have had during my reading of Alexander Knopf's paper, I must say that, in my eyes, the latter constitutes one of the most challenging and certainly the most coherent view on Novalis' linguistic fragments to this day. There is no doubt that, from now on, scholars will have to reckon with this incisive and brilliant paper. None of my remarks, all of which being at the same time indirect questions regarding my own account of Novalis, should be considered as the final word.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?

Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?

Yes

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?

Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?

Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?

Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Kant, German Idealism, German Romanticism, Transcendental Philosophy,

Philosophy of Imagination, Philosophy of Literature, Aesthetics.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.