The origin of origins: a play in five acts, with a prologue *im Himmel* and an epilogue *auf der Erde*

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Prologue

The very origin of the question of origin is lost. It was already a problem for the Ancients, as evidenced by Herodotus's famous anecdote about King Psammetichus of Egypt, who isolated two children to find out what language they would naturally speak.

Following Hebrew, Sanskrit (when it was discovered) played the happy role of Origin, that is, of the primeval unity of all European languages – except Finnish and Basque. Which underscores the link between the question of origin and the question of unity. The origin question becomes a conflict between the unique and the manifold, where there remains at least the unity in the essence itself of language, which shifts, in turn, into the notion of a general or universal grammar. Theo-linguistics.

Act I. Unity versus Diversity, Nature versus History

The play pits biology against history. The fascination with the question of language origin can be inverted into the question of the history and meaning of this fascination, the history of a displacement that enacts the very functioning of language, the vicious circle between nature and history.

Just as thinking about the origin of poetry amounts to thinking about poetry. About the origin of Man. And so on. The origin is a displacement and a superlative: the sublime state of the question of Being.

The problem with biology is that we are entirely biology. But we are also entirely history, entirely subjects, entirely art (and sense of art), entirely ethics, entirely politics. And so far there have been *no* concepts for thinking about the relationship between biology and history and the rest.

Certainly cognitivism does not provide such concepts. For it tends to biologise and Darwinise the problem – thereby creating the illusion of solving it. Cognitivism is to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries what organicism was to the scientistic nineteenth century. If one day the gene for language is discovered, it will not change a thing about the problem of what

language is, how it works, what it implies what it does, and what it points to within the limits of various linguistic doctrines.

The fascination with the question is continually renewed – despite the Paris Society of Linguistics' 1866 ban (see Trabant 1996). It even shows a return of what has been forced back into the unconscious – therefore the pleasure – and is thus interesting for an analysis of knowledge for two reasons. First, as evidence that neither nineteenth-century historicism (which relegated onomatopoeia to the "poultry-yard of language", according to the nineteenth-century *Grand Dictionnaire Universel* of Pierre Larousse) nor Saussure's theoretical linguistics was able to repress the question. But second, the fascination also demonstrates both the question's archaism and its novelty. Tzara said: "La pensée se fait dans la bouche" (see Tzara 1975). Are you looking for its origin? You have it in your mouth. Spit it out.

What is at question in the origin question is the very idea of a theory of language. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century enquiries into language's past or its varieties around the world were more a search for unity and identity than a study of diversity. In the early seventeenth century Claude Duret maintains that in the beginning Hebrew was the world's first and only language. Duret quotes Book 19 of St. Augustine's *City of God*: "linguarum diversitas hominem alienat ab homine... ita ut libentius homo sit cum cane suo quam cum homine alieno [the diversity of languages makes man a stranger for man... to the point that man has more joy being with his dog than with a stranger] (Duret 1972 [1613]: 8, my translation).

For Court de Gébelin in his *Monde Primitif* things were simple: "Cette Origine est Divine". He rejects any gradual elaboration: "La Parole naquit avec l'Homme" (Court de Gébelin 1775: 3: 66). "La Parole n'étant qu'une peinture, elle ne sauroit dépendre de la convention" (Court de Gébelin 1775: 3: 69-70), and Hebrew was not the primordial language. There are three kinds of life in man, a vegetative one, an animal one, and the life of intelligence – "trois *Ames*" (Court de Gébelin 1775: 3: 97-98). For him, speech has its origin in intellectual life, which he would not separate from the "énergie du geste" (Court de Gébelin 1775: 3: 103). The primordial tongue was language itself.

By doing so he of course only suppressed the question, only to fall back immediately into another fiction: that of primitive Man. Monosyllables were the "berceau de la parole" (Court de Gébelin 1775: 3: 270). His analysis of the origin of speech rested on two bases: the organs of speech that are the same today as at the origin, and the idea that words had been formed analogously by choosing sounds similar to the objects and ideas they repre-

sent. Which results in a generalised mimetics. Before laughing at it, one should remember that it is precisely the same notion that still informs the work of Roman Jakobson and Ivan Fonagy, whose theories are perhaps not so distant from that of President de Brosses, who uses the same examples: *papa* and *mama* (quoted in Court de Gébelin 1775: 3: 336). The origin? Nature!

Act II. Identity versus Purity

There is a desire for origin. The point here is to show that it is necessarily linked to a quest for identity and purity.

The search for the unknown of lost earlier times, for Paradise Lost, takes the form of a quest for identity as a multiple knot: it is a semiotic knot, since it is a question about the modes of making sense. Mallarmé wrote: "toute âme est un noeud rythmique". It is a semantic knot, a knot of intelligibility. It is an ethical knot, for what is at stake is the question of the plurality of subjects. It is a political knot because it also includes the whole history of human cultures, conquests, and exterminations.

The question of origin is thus the knot between the questions of identity, unity, and purity. From the origin, naturally. Strangers are naturally excluded. Nothing is more sensitive to dirt than purity.

Naturally the desire is also a nostalgia. In the nineteenth century Arthur de Gobineau demonstrates how it is the question of lost purity and a sense of decline. Bopp and Schleicher share this idea (see Gobineau 1867: 9).

In his 1867 *Mémoire sur diverses manifestations de la vie individuelle* Gobineau writes: "Tant que les langages primitifs et typiques restèrent isolés, l'organisation phonétique de chacun d'eux se conserva dans un état d'originalité absolue. Aujourd'hui qu'il n'existe plus que des langues métissées, parce qu'il n'y a plus que des races mêlées, le désordre s'est mis dans tout le domaine ... l'on aperçoit les marques les plus convaincantes des mésalliances et de la corruption" (Gobineau 1867: 122). Even in Sanskrit and Greek, "la pureté n'y est que relative" (Gobineau 1867: 122). "L'anglais, le français, l'allemand, l'arabe vulgaire montrent les traces évidentes de la décadence" (Gobineau 1867: 102). And: "Entre les langues pures, puis à demi-pures, puis tout à fait métissées qu'on observe actuellement, il y a bien des transitions d'où l'affaiblissement a graduellement résulté" (Gobineau 1867: 136).

If the origin of origin is a myth of unity and purity, everything in language that tends to recreate unity reinforces the illusion of originism.

So, to my mind, does *communicationism*: the reduction of language to communication and of words to tools. This sort of toolism is quite common. And the monolinguistic communicationism of English, of which we are now the products, reenacts the fable of unity-identity. It goes on denying plurality-diversity-historicity. It thus still performs the theatralisation of the fiction of origin, the myth of Babel. It simultaneously abolishes the dispersion of Babel and repeatedly re-enacts Babel. The Gate of God (which is what *bab-el* means) as the Gate of Language.

The origin question can therefore be compared with religion. It unites – or is supposed to unite – but in fact separates. Lactantius defined the word *religio* by means of the verb *religare* ("to link"): that which links men to God and, via this link, links men together.

It becomes evident that the question of origin, of the origin of language, is essentially a religious question, perhaps the quintessential religious question. It exterminates alterity and historicity.

It is then at the very opposite of the question (and search) for historicity, which is the question of Saussure, when he says that whenever one looks for origin one finds the way language works: "Le problème de l'origine du langage n'est pas un autre problème que celui de ses transformations" (Godel 1969: 38). And: "Il n'y a aucun moment où la genèse diffère caractéristiquement de la vie du langage, et l'essentiel est d'avoir compris la vie. Inanité de la question" (Godel 1969: 38). Or: "l'origine de la langue est sans importance en regard de ce qui se passe continuellement" (Godel 1969: 67).

By inverting origin into function, one may also show that the classical relationship between mother-language and the invention of thought gets reversed: *natural languages* are no longer *mother-languages*, it is the works of thought that are *mother-works*.

It is not Hebrew that made the Bible, it is the Bible that made Hebrew, that is, that made it what it has become. And so on. Just as every poetics of thought transformed the natural language in which it intervened.

The inversion of origin is crucial for thinking about the radical historicity of language, of languages, of speech, of works, of subjects, of societies, and of values, that is, in order to think *atheologically*, to think the *atheologico-political*, to think the specificity of ethics vis-à-vis the religious.

For before being the question of the *religious* (in the meaning of Lactantius), the question of origin is the question of the *sacred* and in a sense specific to language theory: the primitive union of words and things, of men and nature, the age of fables and tales (when beasts could talk), the

mythical continuity that is the foundation for totemism and for analogous thought (on talking beasts see Rilke 1987).

Which shows up again and again in any unitarian epistemology of social sciences and natural sciences: organicism in the nineteenth and so-called "stupid" century, and today in cognitivism, the new organicism.

Act III. Becoming versus Origin

In his 1859 preface to Jacob Grimm's essay "On the Origin of Language", Ernest Renan writes that Grimm "est arrivé par la philologie à la mythologie. Les fables et les mots ont été pour lui inséparables, et il a cherché leur commune origine dans l'esprit même de la race qui les a créés, dans sa manière d'imaginer et de sentir, dans ses instincts les plus antiques et les plus profonds" (Renan 1859: 1-2). He associated the "vivacité de ses [Grimm's] intuitions et le merveilleux sentiment qu'il a des choses populaires, à l'entente des questions d'origines" with his insight "dans l'intelligence du monde primitif" (Renan 1859: 2).

But he opposed "le problème essentiel de la philologie, qui est tout historique" to "l'attention du public vers les questions d'origines" (Renan 1859: 2). On the historical side, the most positive and surest research; on the side of origin, the general questions that touched "une solution vraiment philosophique des problèmes de l'histoire de l'humanité" (Renan 1859: 3).

Grimm starts his essay by recalling that language origin was the subject of a Berlin Academy prize question in 1770. Schelling proposed the question again and subsequently withdrew it. Grimm refers to Schelling's disappointment at Herder's winning essay from 1770.

Grimm opposes the question of language origin to the progress in language studies generally, which had become a "science", by which he means comparativism: "the relationship of the languages to one another", the progress in "their simple morphology" (Grimm 1984: 1-2). Right from the start he compares linguistics with "natural history" (Grimm 1984: 2). And praises "the established dominion of the British in all parts of the world chiefly in India" (Grimm 1984: 3), since it had allowed the discovery of Sanskrit. For Grimm, Sanskrit is a "magnetic instrument" on the "linguistic ocean" (Grimm 1984: 3). It is the source of the interest in the "little suspected law of our own German language". Its study helps explain the "common movement and course of human language" and generates "perhaps to the most productive conclusions about its origin" (Grimm 1984: 3).

But the objection comes immediately: "Does not the whole question fall in the realm of the impossible?" (Grimm 1984: 3). Language study, it seems, suffers by comparison to naturalists' study of the "secrets of natural life" (Grimm 1984: 3). This makes the difference "between creation and generation" a "power prevailing outside of the created being" (Grimm 1984: 4).

The comparison seems to end with the double hypothesis of whether language was "created or uncreated" (Grimm 1984: 4). If it was created, "its first origin remains to our glances just as impenetrable as that of the first created animal or tree" (Grimm 1984: 4). A divine origin. If it was uncreated – formed, that is, "by the freedom of man himself" – "then it can be measured according to that law which indeed its history up to the oldest stem yields us. It may be stalked back over that empty abyss of millennia and in thought even cornered on the beach of its origin" (Grimm 1984: 4).

Grimm attempts first to show that language could neither be "created" nor "revealed". In favour of divine creation, he evokes the diversity of "the species of languages": "do not the species of languages resemble the species of the plants, of animals, indeed of men themselves in almost endless varieties of their changing form?" (Grimm 1984: 4).

But he opposes animals to man, animal cries to human language, and instinct to what keeps changing and "must be constantly learned" (Grimm 1984: 6). Surroundings and epoch. After arguing against the hypothesis of innateness as divine creation, Grimm gainsays the "idea of a revealed language", which presupposes "a state of paradisiacal innocence" followed by a "fall" (Grimm 1984: 9). Instead, Grimm invokes "our Holy Scripture": "only a long time after the fall of man does the confounding of tongues occur" (Grimm 1984: 9). And he rejects the Biblical narrative and its interpretation as "confusing"; he views the "endless multiplicity" of languages "as salutary and necessary" (Grimm 1984: 9).

At this point, his inquiry addresses "a theological position" (Grimm 1984: 9). He asserts that the "miracle of the continuation of the world is fully equal to that of its creation" and that "the nature of man at the time of creation was not different from what it is today" (Grimm 1984: 9-11). He observes that, unlike the Bible's story of Babel, "neither Greek nor Indian antiquity has tried to ask and to answer the question about the origin and diversity of human tongues" (Grimm 1984: 12).

The link between language origin and language diversity is clear. Grimm jettisons theology: "An innate language would have made men animals; a revealed one would have presumed gods of them" (Grimm 1984: 12). There remains only a single hypothesis: "it must be a human language acquired by

us with complete freedom regarding origin and progress. It can be nothing else; it is our history, our inheritance" (Grimm 1984: 12).

Grimm establishes an etymological link – via Sanskrit – between *Mensch* (human being) and the Indian King Manas, whose root is "*man* i.e. to *think*" (Grimm 1984: 12). From this Grimm deduces: "Man [*Mensch*] is not only called thus because he thinks, but is also man because he thinks, and he speaks because he thinks. This very close relationship between his ability to think and to speak, designates and guarantees to us the reason and origin of his language" (Grimm 1984: 12).

He recalls that *logos* "means speech and reason" and adds that "men with the deepest thoughts – philosophers, poets, speakers – have also the greatest command of language"(Grimm 1984: 12). This has two consequences. First: "The power of language forms nations and holds them together" (Grimm 1984: 12). Second (and more significantly): "Without such a bond they would be scattered. The riches of thought in each nation are chiefly what solidifies its world empire" (Grimm 1984: 13). The power of thought. Not economic and political power. Contrary to appearances.

What is striking, from my point of view, is that Grimm sees language as "a work" and diversity as a "precious acquisition" (Grimm 1984: 13). This rejects the notion of the inequality of languages: "This speaking, this thinking does not stand there separately for individual men, but, all languages are one common property come into history, and bind the world together" (Grimm 1984: 13).

Grimm's sense of the radical historicity of language and languages even impels him to say that "the inventions of writing and printing ... confirm and complete the proof of its human origin" (Grimm 1984: 13). Here, he confounds two types of origin: an anthropological origin and a cultural origin. But when Grimm declares that he intends to turn to the main part of the question, the first notion he mentions – even if it is in order to brush it aside – is that of languages' "first formation, or to several formations only" (Grimm 1984: 14).

At the origin of the question of origin, there are two conditions. The first is the opposition between unity and plurality. The second is the relationship between "great antiquity" and the anteriority that remains out of reach because it did not leave behind any traces (Grimm 1984: 15).

Nineteenth-century historical linguistics was thus genealogical. It was a story of decline, which presupposes "a prior high point of greater form perfection" (Grimm 1984: 15). This high point consisted of case endings modelled on Sanskrit, a phase preceded by an invisible one, "a combination

of analogous parts of words" (Grimm 1984: 15). This was based on the natural model of "leaf, blossom and ripening fruit" (Grimm 1984: 16). Grimm notes here that Chinese, which lacks case endings, remains stuck at that first period of formation. The ages of man provide the underlying model for Grimm's observations.

Grimm turns his attention to historical phonetics, but not without granting symbolic values to the sounds of language: "Of the consonants *l* will designate the soft, *r* the rough" (Grimm 1984: 17). He combines this with an ideology of gender: "Obviously a feminine base must be ascribed to the vowels altogether; to the consonants a masculine one" (Grimm 1984: 17).

He then inverts the idea of decadence into continual progress: "The conclusion is that human language, although considered only apparently and in an individual way in retrogression, has to be regarded when understood from a total viewpoint, as always in a state of progress and growth from its inner power" (Grimm 1984: 20). He adds immediately: "Our language is also our history" (Grimm 1984: 20). Childhood consists of "short, monosyllabic" words (Grimm 1984: 20). In the second period, "words have become longer and polysyllabic. Now masses of compounds are formed from the loose order... At this time we see language most highly suited to meter and poetry. For these beauty, harmony and exchange of form are essential, indispensable. The Indian and Greek poetry designate for us a peak reached at the right moment in immortal works later unattainable" (Grimm 1984: 21). But still, for Grimm, an "eternal, irresistible ascent" depends on "a still greater freedom of thought" (Grimm 1984: 21).

While discussing the formation of modern European languages, Grimm notes that English, through its "plenitude of free mediants", has a power of expression "as it perhaps never yet was at the command of a human tongue", which has "resulted from a surprising marriage of the two noblest languages of later Europe, the Germanic and Roman" (Grimm 1984: 22). There is, it seems, an aesthetics of origin – a linguistic aesthetics – that passed from grammatical beauty (case endings) to a generalised aesthetics of language.

Grimm attributes to English a universality which is incorrect on two counts. First, his lionisation of Shakespeare implies that English produced Shakespeare and ignores the problem of the relationship between a language and a literary work. Second, his definition of English as the union of two other languages presupposes an imaginary genetics of language properties: "Yes, the English language, may by all rights be called an universal language. Not in vain has it produced and brought forth the greatest and most superior poet of modern times in contrast to ancient classical poetry. Here I

can only mean Shakespeare. Like the people themselves the English language seems chosen in the future to hold sway in a still higher degree at all ends of the earth. For in riches, reason and succinct combinations none of the presently living languages can stand beside it" (Grimm 1984: 22).

Grimm considers the German language inferior. It is "torn to pieces as we Germans are fragmented. We would first have to shake off some of its imperfections before it could run boldly along in the race" (Grimm 1984: 22). But he harbours "hope", for "the beauty of human language blossoms not in the beginning but in its midpoint. It will only present its richest fruit one day in the future" (Grimm 1984: 22). It's all a bit confused and contradictory.

A conflict, for which there is no concept, between the "warm hand of human freedom", the "incessant extension and folding of the wings, unceasing exchange", and the genius of language: "The quiet eye of the guardian spirit of language quickly closes up and heals all its wounds overnight. It keeps in order and preserves from confusion all its affairs, except that it has shown individual languages the highest favour and others less" (Grimm 1984: 22-23).

Again the old idea of the inequality of languages, though without the concepts needed to know what Grimm means when he says: "One language is more beautiful and seems more productive than the other" (Grimm 1984: 24). *For the genius of language and of languages* not only is a non-concept, but simultaneously offers the illusion of thinking something and prevents thought – without one even knowing it.

Act IV. The origin every day

That the origin is the way language works, which is the conception of Saussure, is shown by Robert Nicolaï. Under the rubric "origin" he examines the "evolution of languages" and "linguistic change" (Nicolaï 1998: 157). He concludes: "What is at stake is more the understanding of the dynamics and constitution of languages, through the detailed study of their formation and the analysis of the identification of their dimensions useful for their description which all establish themselves on that anthropological ground where sociological, semiotic and cognitive relevances in the broadest meaning get connected" (Nicolaï 1998: 178). A comparatist's work.

By studying "creolisation or pidginisation", starting from what Trubetzkoy analysed as an "alliance of languages", the "phonological *Sprachbund* of

languages" in the Balkans and a "cultural *Sprachbund*" (Nicolaï 1998: 167), Nicolaï sets out to both "resume an old debate" and give it back its relevance (Nicolaï 1998: 177).

And by reappraising "the questioning on the origin of languages", in order to make it again a "full part of the general problem of the sciences of language from the moment when the theoretical tools apt to contribute bringing responses respond to relevances specific of those sciences themselves" (Nicolaï 1998: 177-178), the question of origin is transformed.

It is "no more ideological, nor philosophical" but, as he says himself, "considering to open up again the old questioning on the origin of language does not come back asking the same question!" (Nicolaï 1998: 178).

Act V. The problem is to displace the problem

The question of the origin of natural languages has a goal: to shed light on the question of the origin of language. And, for its part, this double question also has a goal: "to investigate human prehistory", as Merrit Ruhlen puts it (Ruhlen 1994d: 161).

Ruhlen resumes the idea of a single origin for languages. He does this against the prevailing opinion of specialists, which he describes as a "hoax" (Ruhlen 1994d: 66). Though his critique of Indo-Europeanists' self-centeredness is probably correct (Ruhlen 1994d: 78-80).

The preface to the French edition of Ruhlen's *The Origin of Language* (which I read prior to reading the English original) is written by a biologist who seems to draw from the common genetic origin of "present day humans" the "probable" character of a "mother language" (Ruhlen 1997: 6-7, my translation). And the translator observes that the linguistic use of the term "genetic", as in the locution "genetic classification of languages", is "derived by mere analogy of the meaning in biology", without saying that "the particular languages would be inscribed in the genes of their speakers" (Ruhlen 1997: 8, my translation).

The question of origin is double. In any case it very quickly splits into two. In Ruhlen's analysis, it splits into the question of the origin of human language and the question of the origin of languages. Which, in turn, also splits into two: a "*monogenesis*", a "common source" for "*presently extant* languages" (Ruhlen 1994d: 3-4) and independent evolutions. Which amounts to the question of the relationship between languages. Which again splits into two: within a family of languages like Romance languages (where

there is no problem) or between families (where there is a problem). And then the question splits again: where there is a written tradition and where there is none.

And it is either a genealogy or a focus on *resemblances*. It is interesting to recall that it's primarily the *differences* that would have interested Humboldt. So the question will split again depending on the weight attached to resemblances or differences. Resemblances are possibly due to accidental convergence, borrowing, or a common origin.

It becomes a question of method. That of the relationship between the notion of (genealogical) classification and the notion of a system. It is noteworthy that the comparisons largely remain on the level of "words" (Ruhlen 1994d: 34), "on the basis of a few words" (Ruhlen 1994d: 62), with a partial exception for "the pronominal pattern" (Ruhlen 1994d: 78) or the "sound symbolic" cases *mama*, *papa*, *kaka* ('older brother') (Ruhlen 1994d: 122-123).

Another problem is the relationship between the motion of words and "the dispersal of modern humans" (Ruhlen 1994d: 19).

In fact, the analysis shifts to the study of language families and families of families.

Starting with William Jones's identification of the Indo-European family in 1786, the fundamental paradox of language typologies is that in order to historicise languages by separating them from mythology and from religion – that is, in order to make studying them into a science, a historical science, and historical phonetics – one locates them within natural history: one biologises them. Ruhlen refers to an analogy with "biological taxonomy" (Ruhlen 1994d: 129).

Even if biology has itself had a paradoxically historical result, namely establishing that there are no "primitive *peoples* on earth" which parallels the linguistic assertion that there are "no primitive languages anywhere" and no "*intrinsic* connection between language and ethnicity" (Ruhlen 1994d: 148-149).

Another epistemological problem is the one of proof. Ruhlen declares that linguistics escapes the notion of proof, "for 'proof' is a mathematical concept not applicable to empirical sciences like linguistics" (Ruhlen 1994d: 136).

For him, the whole point is "that the modicum of data presented ... nonetheless strongly suggests that a common origin for all extant languages is the simplest, and most likely, explanation of the linguistic similarities observed" (Ruhlen 1994d: 136). And this *likelihood* transmogrifies into the ambiguous state of *knowing*: "One can see that all the world's families are

related"(Ruhlen 1994d: 146). A knowledge mixed with hope: "But unfortunately there is as yet no understanding of the order in which these various groups branched off from the original linguistic trunk. Though one may hope that linguistic evidence may one day shed light on this difficult, but crucial, question, for the moment we must rely on evidence from other fields" (Ruhlen 1994d: 146).

But there is at least one strong point – apart from the relevance of Greenberg's work on African and American Indian languages. It is Ruhlen's criticism of the general state of linguists, their "compartmentalized view of knowledge" and "collective myopia"(Ruhlen 1994d: 138).

It is a criticism that is worth amplifying if one considers Humboldt's *Sprachsinn* and the necessity of thinking together the meaning of language, the theory of language, the theory of the art of language as well as ethics and politics in their interaction: their *Wechselwirkung*. And this very interaction can itself be seen as the origin of language as it works.

Epilogue

What we did at the Berlin conference was in one sense a mimicry of origin. By all speaking the same language – English – we mimicked a unity that repeats the story of the tower of Babel. We enacted the nostalgia for a non-language which might as well be mentalese.

In the same way that French Spinoza specialists read Spinoza in French, in Italian when they are Italian, in English when they are native speakers of English, and so on. By doing so, they demonstrate that they have no problem with language or translation. One or two might consider isolated words in Latin and think that solves the problem. Only one has the courage to utter that because Spinoza wrote in Latin he had "no language at all". That is Yeshayahu Yovel in his *Spinoza and other heretics*.

From this remark I am obliged to draw the conclusion that those lucky philosophers are the last speakers of the pre-Babelian, Adamic language that is the same for everyone and that grants direct access to thought – without having to pass through what one calls language.

That is, logically, no language at all. My amazement is increased when I see that they go on writing, believing that they think. They are probably dreaming.

If they're awake, they should remain silent. But they couldn't even do that, for silence is also part of language.

I must seem the opposite of serious. On the contrary, I would call this kind of humour a superlative form of the serious, as is demonstrated by comedy which plays with serious matters. So does the comedy of thought. This is what we performed at the Berlin conference by enacting the question of the origin of language.