

Then it spoke to me without voice : “You know it, Zarathustra ?”
And I cried with fright at this whispering, and the blood left my face ;
but I remained silent.

Then it spoke to me again : “You know it, Zarathustra, but you
do not say it !”

Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

1. The Egological Perspective¹

Egology is a philosophical analysis, conception or theory of a specific being : a person. This notion was introduced by Edmund Husserl, but retrospectively the problematics of egology is manifest throughout the history of Western philosophy. It turns especially important in the modern era, as the subject – the *ego* – becomes the point of departure, the core, and the ground of philosophical thought. In this context, the egology of Algirdas Julius Greimas designates an understanding, more or less clearly articulated or implicitly assumed, of what and *how* a person is, what constitutes the contents, limits, and conditions of this being. Greimas was not only a semiotician but also an essayist and journalist, who frequently discussed or at least touched upon the problematics of a person and personhood in his writings.

Greimas's egology may also be discussed in another sense : as his understanding, perception, and image of his own *I*. Such things are expressed in special texts nowadays termed “egodocuments”. The theoretical status of this “second” egology is neither entirely clear nor unequivocal. Perhaps, it should rather be called “egography,” even if some remarks that Greimas makes in his writings seem to resist it. In a letter to his close friend Aleksandra Kašubienė (who fled Lithuania at the same time as he did, before becoming, in America, a well-known architect, designer, and painter), for example, he writes : “I would like you to understand that I am not trying to make any portraits, neither yours nor mine, but that [by writing about myself] I am looking for ‘a man’”². What interested Greimas was to grasp through his own *I* the eidetics of personhood, at a level not psychological but transcendental, or

¹ Translated from the Lithuanian by Jūratė Levina. “Greimo egologija”, in A. Sverdiolas and E. Landowski (eds.), *Algirdas Julius Greimas. Asmuo ir idėjos*, vol. 2 (hereafter cited as *AJG2*), Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2019. — Translator's note : In this article, all English translations of Greimas's articles or letters written by him in Lithuanian, whenever not accompanied with a reference to a previously published English translation, are ours.

² A.J. Greimas to Aleksandra Kašubienė, 4 September 1990, in A. Sverdiolas (ed.), *Algirdas Julius Greimas. Asmuo ir idėjos*, vol. 1 (hereafter cited as *AJG1*), Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2017, p. 412.

existential (we shall see further which term fits best). He drew this distinction clearly, even if concisely, in a letter to the Lithuanian writer and playwright Antanas Škėma, characterising the theatre of his time in these terms : it “does not give a damn about psychological truths ; it is an illustration of some essential, existential attitudes”³. Greimas found the sphere of the psychic repulsive, but he nonetheless acknowledged its importance and tried to figure out its inherent logic.

Lastly, these two egologies cannot be separated from one another. Greimas admitted more than once that, for him, semiotics is a personal matter.

The distinction between the psychological and the existential or, in phenomenological terms, the eidetic is not easily grasped. Somewhat enigmatically, Edmund Husserl states that pure egology finds its “parallel” in psychological examination of one’s own experience. In whatever ways this parallelism may be manifest in Greimas’s egology, within Husserl’s field of reflections we find “a science of concrete transcendental subjectivity, as given in actual and possible transcendental experience”⁴. According to Husserl, the development of phenomenology must begin with an examination of “the *realm accessible to transcendental self-experience*”⁵. Discussing phenomenology as a special science, Husserl states that “my (the philosopher’s) transcendental ego is, and must be, not only its initial but its sole theme”⁶. The phenomenological description can be performed only from the position of an *I*, in the first person. In turn, “the *ego cogito* of the transcendental ego, in the universality of his life, indicates an openly infinite multiplicity of particular concrete subjective processes”⁷.

This core of the transcendental thought, which organises the whole variety of experience, was first clearly marked by Immanuel Kant in his first *Critique* : “I am (...) conscious of the identical self in regard to the manifold of the representations that are given to me in an intuition because I call them all together *my* representations, which constitute *one*”⁸. He thus opened up for the thought of Modernity a whole sphere of the transcendental : in the theoretical thought, according to Kant, “The *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations”⁹. This point of self-reflection, which focuses all variety of experience, is not an individual *I* but, rather, the *I* as the knowing subject, a characteristic set-up of every thinking being. Miguel de Unamuno, whom Greimas read in pre-war years and who was concerned with the problematics of existence rather than theoretical knowledge, said essentially the same in very simple words : “I am one man, and each man is an I”¹⁰. My *I* is the egological core of the own consciousness found by way of reflection. When saying *I*, a particular person coincides with this universal grammatical category, although usually without being aware of it. This is precisely why Kant closes the *Critique of Practical Reason* with the well-known statement about two things that

3 A.J. Greimas to Antanas Škėma, 29 August 1954, *AJG1*, p. 246. The word “attitudes” is used in English in the original.

4 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations : An Introduction to Phenomenology*, translated by Dorion Cairns, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1982 [1960], p. 30.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 29, emphasis original.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009 [1998], p. 248, emphasis in the translation quoted.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 246, emphasis in the translation quoted.

10 Miguel de Unamuno, *The tragic sense of Life in Men and Nations*, transl. Anthony Kerrigan, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 137.

overwhelm him with wonder and admiration : “the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me”¹¹. When I discover “the moral law” at work within me, it surprises me. As a matter of fact, the laws of logic and mathematics, found “within me”, should cause the same kind of wonder. And, clearly, I can be surprised by things within me only if they are something I do not construct or hold in my power but, instead, something I find as extant and effective.

Thus, Husserl begins his fundamental phenomenological inquiry relying on the first person, or essentially egological orientation. According to him,

daily practical life is naïve. It is immersion in the already-given world, whether it be experiencing, or thinking, or valuing, or acting. Meanwhile all those productive intentional functions of experiencing, because of which physical things are simply there, go on anonymously. The experiencer knows nothing about them, and likewise nothing about his productive thinking. The numbers, the predicative complexes of affairs, the goods, the ends, the works, present themselves because of the hidden performances ; they are built up, member by member (...).¹²

Describing the so-called natural attitude of consciousness, which will be significant to Greimas too, Husserl writes :

I am conscious of a world endlessly spread out in space, endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time. I am conscious of it : that signifies, above all, that intuitively I find it immediately, that I experience it. By my seeing, touching, hearing, and so forth, and in the different modes of sensuous perception, corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or other are *simply there for me*, “on hand” in the literal or the figurative sense, whether or not I am particularly heedful of them and busied with them in my considering, thinking, feeling, or willing. Animate beings too – human beings, let us say – are immediately there for me : I look up ; I see them ; I hear their approach ; I grasp their hands ; talking with them I understand immediately what they objectivate and think, what feelings stir within them, what they wish or will.¹³

Greimas, also, was aware of this egological orientation of thought. Asking himself about the possibility of an intellectual autobiography, which is one of the *ego's* profiles, he noted :

Although it is hard, if not impossible, to separate the territory of the intellectual from the history of an individual’s lived experiences, from inevitabilities and incidents regulating his life, I would see it as a certain logical reconstruction of one’s own life, as a selection of

11 I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, transl. and ed. by Mary Gregor, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 129.

12 E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153.

13 E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologischen Philosophie*, I Buch, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3.1, Den Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 56. / *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology, transl. F. Kersen, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1983, p. 51.

mental events, which organises them into a univocal process, into an algorithm that binds the phenomena of thought. This, of course, is significant self-deception, which is — consciously or not — based on a conviction that the history of a human being, of nations, of humanity, has some deeper meaning regardless of its absolute absurdity on the surface, that an individual's behaviour obeys some principle of meta-rationality.¹⁴

To the issue of “significant self-deception”, as Greimas phrases it, we will come in due course. He asks sceptically: “Can an *auto*-biography be anything else than an artificial tissue of lies?”¹⁵ Nonetheless, he concludes on the possibilities if this genre that,

in any case, a biography turns into a history of an epoch's episteme. One may, (...) devoting a few years of one's life, seek — and maybe even find — that generative trajectory which has been constituted by ideas themselves, as they developed by being born from one another, bursting out from contradictions, from a wish to eliminate, or at least to wrap up nicely, constantly emerging aporias (...).¹⁶

The image of ideas bursting out from contradictions expresses, of course, the principle of Friedrich Hegel's dialectical logic, which in Greimas's semiotics works in distinctive ways¹⁷. The biographical dimension of the *I* inscribes itself into history. “A man's activities are the inscription of oneself into commonly human activities, conscious contribution to the historical process understood as the acceleration of the dynamics of liberating man”¹⁸. The closing sentence of this article is nothing less than a paraphrase of a fundamental tenet of Hegel's: “The procession of humanity to freedom is called History”¹⁹.

The crystal of this multi-perspectival egology sheds light on a very broad field covering Greimas's view on the flow of a person's life, with or without death as its boundary in mind, on sensuous experiences and feelings, and finally on the lived world itself. The entire thinking of Greimas turns out to be egological, and all he wrote can be read from an egological perspective.

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As already noted, when writing “I”, Greimas had in mind both the transcendental egological centre of experience and specifically himself. However, for a reader of his egodocuments this is inevitably an *alter ego*: one can understand these utterances only by adopting them as one's own, in the “analogical mode”, unless one is the actual addressee of his letters²⁰. On the other hand, Greimas

14 “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 33.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 An examination of the relationship between the Greimassian semiotic square and the Hegelian dialectic triad would clarify this. Semiotics brings into logics the dialectical moment of mediation.

18 A.J. Greimas, “Laisvės problema egzistencializmo, marksizmo ir freudizmo amžiuje”, in Vytautas Kavolis (ed.), *Lietuviškasis liberalizmas*, Chicago, Santaros-Šviesos federacija, 1959, p. 88.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

20 The idea to publish Greimas's letters was not his own; there is no evidence he ever thought about it. His letters to Aleksandra Kašuba came out thanks to her determined decision and care. (Aleksandra Kašubienė and Gintautė Lidžiuvienė (eds.), *Algirdo Juliaus Greimo ir Aleksandros Kašubienės laišakai 1988-1992*, Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2008). He did not preserve his correspondents' letters (with three significant

himself did not only understand, as a theorist and analyst of discourse, but also, as a sensitive man, acutely felt the inescapability of the formative mediation of writing even in a personal letter.

For an epistolary exchange to be accepted as a literary genre, the gaze of a stranger — a reader from the outside of this field — must penetrate its newly inaugurated intimacy, transforming it into a spectacle and a discursive configuration. (...) What used to be ordinary communication between “real” actors turns into “unreal” communication between author and reader.²¹

Aleksandra, dear, I am sending you a letter written the day before yesterday. Written to you and myself, and to literature — you must be sick and tired of listening how I cannot write.²²

But literature (or any written text) never may “be sick and tired” of anything, since “its” attention is none other than the rapt attention of its readers.

The written body of Greimas’s reflections on himself is not particularly extensive, nor has he written comprehensively on this topic. Abrupt, erratic, aphoristic, often highly suggestive utterances of self-reflection are mostly scattered through his private correspondence and concern specific experiences. Their proverbiality and a lack of wider explications cause difficulties. His texts embody a cluster of singular distinctions that animate the living thought, of internal, sometimes extremely sharp contradictions, and of frequent *pro* and *contra* or “yes, but” turns, and the line of his thought often branches in several directions or moves on several thematic planes at once, leaping between them here and there. Self-reflective utterances, nonetheless, recur throughout Greimas’s writing, he returns to the same matter now and again, linking the segments of it in yet another way or endowing them with yet another meaning. There also are a characteristic dynamic and ruptures that no reading of his texts should ignore. One of the recurrent moves of his thought is a counterstatement to or a clarification of what he said earlier or even immediately above, drawing on an antithesis or at least a difference. These are characteristic Heideggerian-Derridean cancellations by crossing out, which do not erase what they negate. This brings about twofold, equivocal notions and designations, sudden turns of thought, thematic ruptures, and idiosyncratic confluences, especially obvious as one juxtaposes different utterances. This mode of writing, it seems to me, essentially demands continuation, supplementation, and interpretation. Hence, Greimas’s egological insights can only be found in a comprehensive reading of all his texts and put together into a meaningful, coherent whole. This way of reading could be called

exceptions : Henrikas Radauskas (see A.J. Greimas, “Vienašalis pasikalbėjimas su Henriku Radausku”, *Metmenys*, 64, 1993, pp. 92-123), Aleksandra Kašubienė, and Aleksys Churginas), instructed his niece Daiva Kviklienė to burn the letters she had, and his brother Romualdas, with whom Greimas kept an epistolary contact, refused to show any of his letters or tell about him to anybody, including Greimas’s biographer.

²¹ A.J. Greimas, “Préface”, *La Lettre : approches sémiotiques*, Fribourg, Éditions universitaires de Fribourg, 1988, p. 6 : “pour que l’échange épistolaire soit accepté comme genre littéraire, il faut encore qu’un œil étranger, celui du lecteur hors champ, transperce l’intimité à peine inaugurée en la transformant en spectacle et en configuration discursive. (...) ce qui n’était qu’une communication ordinaire entre acteurs ‘réels’ devient une communication ‘iréelle’ entre auteur et lecteur”.

²² *Algirdo Juliaus Greimo ir Aleksandros Kašubienės laišakai*, *op. cit.*, p. 133, quoted from the original manuscript, held at the archives of the Manuscript Department of the Library of Vilnius University, F245-167.

reconstruction, or, in some cases, anastylosis. The anastylosis I offer below is “postmodern” : it does not aim to reassemble what was there once, in the past (for such a text never existed), but tries to see what meaningful whole comes together. This kind of reading somewhat reminds of the Lévi-Straussian *bricolage* : the new mosaic text says something its parts did not say in their original contexts. This, clearly, is always done at the risk of the interpreter.

1.1. Nothingness and masks. The Cartesian *ego* and the *I* as Being-in-the-World

For Greimas, self-identification and his own identity were problematic already in childhood. “My first memory is (...) a wish to not be myself, which crystallised back in early childhood : ‘I am not Greimas,’ they say I would announce solemnly, ‘I am Algirdas Gedimauckas Fartling !’”²³ Self-naming and finding a form of addressing another, naming the interlocutor never became self-evident for Greimas, but remained subject to discussion²⁴. He varied signatures for closing letters to the same addressees, for example, and struggled to establish a stable interpersonal distance : from the singular Lithuanian pronoun *tu* to address his interlocutor he would inadvertently slide back into the more formal plural *jūs*. The judgment of his consciousness as a child, just quoted above, led Greimas to a very general and philosophically important conclusion : “A profound sense of nonbeing, which constantly, like some secret agent, follows you — this will, most probably, be the departure point of ‘the system of significations of life’”²⁵. The profoundest ground that gives rise to meanings is the experience of nonbeing, nothingness, and in this case of the *I* as nothingness. Many years ago, reading Greimas’s “Attempt at an Intellectual Auto-Biography” in the journal *Metmenys* for the first time, I was deeply struck by a statement near the end of it :

estrangement, alienation as a feeling (...) come about every time when you happen to encounter yourself. I think, this is a rather common phenomenon — the rupture opening between oneself acting, speaking, willing on the one hand and, on the other, the gaze into one’s “inner” I, which sounds empty like a deep well, no, not deep — like an empty tin bucket.²⁶

This statement struck me not only as a radical and merciless self-characterisation of one’s own self by such an intellectual as Greimas but also as an example of how, while perceiving oneself in this way, it is nonetheless possible to make peace and live with oneself. Even more importantly, it is this basis — this non-basis, the absence of a basis — that “grounds” every possible meaning, all questions about meaning, and every quest for it. In the ontological horizon, this departure point is characterised as nothingness, and in the horizon of semiotics, it shows as meaninglessness.

Greimas’s designations of the *I* as a void, nonbeing, and nothingness varied, and he repeatedly used scatological images : “According to Malraux, an individual’s inner life, if we were to uncover it,

23 “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 34.

24 One letter closes as follows : “Your Algirdas / P. S. Although ‘Greimas’ is fine, because I never had, as I must have said, a real name” (to Aleksandra Kašubienė, 22 July 1988, *AJG1*, p. 320). Another letter opens with : “My dear Aleksandra, / I don’t know how to call you : what name would like to give yourself ? Choose.” (to A. Kašubienė, [31 August 1988], *AJG1*, p. 321).

25 “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 34.

26 *Ibid.*

will show as ‘a tiny little pile of shit’²⁷. The self-perception of the *I* as nothingness manifested itself in communication with others, too. “I know that I sometimes — do I often? — give an impression of someone ‘intelligent,’ knowledgeable, or of an utter eejit. But this is out of my inability to say to myself and others what I am for myself”²⁸. The latter impression, I think, could arise only to Greimas himself, by way of the Hegelian-Sartrean-Lacanian view of an imagined other person.

Greimas mentions several times that, while still a student, he used to keep a note with the slogan *larvatus prodeo* at his desk²⁹. These are the words of the young, twenty-three years old, René Descartes, written in his notebook and known from the transcriptions from it made by Gottfried Leibniz³⁰. Greimas is unlikely to have read those transcriptions, he must have found them quoted somewhere. He repeatedly refers to his favourite poetic lines, well-known sayings, or book titles, using them in a distinctive way, as emblems. His use of this Cartesian slogan is a case in point. Descartes took a note about wearing a mask for quite different reasons : in his time, open expression of radical views was dangerous and masking oneself was a pragmatic and conscious choice for an active person to cover up his actual position. Nietzsche mentioned a mask, too, although for him this was a far more intimate matter than for Descartes : “Every profound spirit needs a mask : what is more, a mask is constantly growing around every profound spirit, thanks to the consistently false (which is to say *shallow*) interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he displays”³¹.

Greimas internalises this move of masking oneself even further. He mentions people, for example, who “by all sorts of tin-plates, more or less safe to rely on, cover themselves up to protect themselves from the pain, from the communication with oneself as ‘a little pile of dung’...”³². This kind of a mask covers oneself from oneself, but Greimas also describes it in a more radical, even most radical way — as a mask that, rather than merely hiding something, covers a void, nothingness : “Man is not lonely, he is alone ; even further : he is not alone, he is not at all, he is just the sum of all his external manifestations”³³. Similar remarks punctuate his letters but none of them ever appear in any of Greimas’s public texts³⁴. They posit expression, manifestation as the correlate of nothingness discovered within oneself. “(...) the theory of all these things goes something like this : either I do not exist as a subject at all (...) or one is just a sum of quite a large number of various roles, with no coherence”³⁵. In a variation of this idea, Greimas reaches a moment of self-reflection : “(...) my

27 Algirdo Juliaus Greimas ir Aleksandros Kašubienės laišakai, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161.

28 To A. Kašubienė, 22 July [1990], *AJG1*, p. 399.

29 *Ibid.*, 22 July 1988, *AJG1*, p. 318 ; 10 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 354; 17 August [1990], *AJG1*, p. 404.

30 R. Descartes, *Cogitationes privatae*, *Œuvres*, vol. 10, Paris, Leopold Cerf, 1908, p. 213.

31 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil : Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, transl. Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 39.

32 To A. Kašubienė, 19 July [1990], *AJG1*, pp. 397-398.

33 “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 41.

34 Which, however, did not prevent a few among his readers from uncovering, by the side of Greimas’s “positive” and most visible figure, the presence of its obscure contrary, even in his French written theoretical production. “To seek by all means the ‘truth of the subject’ while claiming at the same time that the very notions of ‘truth’, ‘authenticity’, ‘sincerity’ and such like can only designate pure simulacra, since they amount to no more than simple effects of meaning produced by discourses. To explore tirelessly the structures and conditions of meaning without ever forgetting that in the end it is quite likely that meaning has no sense at all”. E. Landowski, “Le sémioticien et son double”, in *id.* (ed.), *Lire Greimas*, Limoges, Pulim, 1997, pp. 251-252.

35 To A. Kašubienė, 4 September [1990], *AJG1*, p. 412.

'scientific' thesis is : there is no such thing as myself, as an individual, there is only acting out of roles, of which one is also, into the bargain, a spectator"³⁶.

According to one of my "theoretical" — but, I think, quite authentically lived through — formulations, the subject, i. e. "I", is an empty place, one can say anything at all about it only speaking of its external manifestations. Alas, this is no longer "I". And those external manifestations, if looked into more closely, arrange themselves as the constellations of roles played rather well or rather badly. Hence this personage, covered up by just the bodily skin, is no more than some mishmash of no cohesion.³⁷

Self-perception, which sees through the expressive surface, through an irreducible variety of manifestations in the depth of interiority, discovers nothingness, chaos and a multiplicity of no identity or cohesion. Such is the fundamental aporethics of the *ego*.

Greimas's criticism of the self-reflective *I* as opening no more than a void is closely related to the critique, which spread widely in the twentieth century, of the Cartesian *ego* assumed to be transparent to self-reflection. Greimas must have discovered its problematics back in the years before the Second World War, reading Unamuno's book *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*. As Unamuno puts it,

he [Descartes – A.S.] comes to the *cogito ergo sum* (...). But the *ego* implied in this enthymeme, *ego cogito, ergo ego sum*, is an unreal, that is, an ideal *ego*, and its *sum*, its existence, something unreal as well. "I think, therefore I am" can only mean "I think, therefore I am a thinker" ; the *being* in the *I am*, derived from *I think*, is no more than a knowing ; that *being* is knowledge, not life.³⁸

One of the most crucial theoretical bases for the critique of the Cartesian notion of the *ego* in the twentieth century has been provided by psychoanalysis. This is evident even in its basic notions : egology is a science of the *ego* ; but Sigmund Freud's topology of the psyche comprises the celebrated triad of *id*, *ego*, and *superego* ; hence the Cartesian point of the *I* here is replaced with an opaque, equivocal, and tensional set-up of interiority. Greimas indeed had good reasons to take interest in psychoanalysis³⁹. He acknowledged Freud as "a revolutionary of the twentieth-century humanities"⁴⁰. For him, perhaps the most significant aspect about psychoanalysis was that it uncovered the essential

36 *Ibid.*, 27 January [1989], *AJG1*, p. 334.

37 *Ibid.*, [26 March 1989], *AJG1*, p. 338.

38 M. de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

39 See Ivan Darrault-Harris, "Psichoanalizės vieta Greimo semiotinėje teorijoje : nuo *Struktūrinės semantikos* iki *Pasijų semiotikos*", transl. Lina Perkauskytė, *Semiotika*, 11, 2015, pp. 73-82. This topic is worth a much more comprehensive analysis including an examination of Greimas's relation to the theory of Jacques Lacan.

40 A.J. Greimas, "Laisvės problema egzistencializmo, marksizmo ir freudizmo amžiuje", in V. Kavolis (ed.), *Lietuviškasis liberalizmas*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

multiplicity of the *I* and its genesis. Greimas also claimed that nobody coincides with one's own consciousness⁴¹ :

(...) the human unconscious manages itself according to its own laws, which are accessible to knowledge but unknown to our psychological *I*. The Cartesian *cogito*, which proudly assured man of his own existence, of that of God as well as that of the external world, is not at all the master of itself.⁴²

Here Greimas draws on and even quotes (which he rarely did) his contemporary Jacques Lacan. "The creator of the modern French psychoanalysis Lacan paraphrases the famous formula of Descartes as follows : 'I think where I am not ; I am where I do not think'⁴³. Greimas takes Lacan's idea further in a direction of his own : "Not only does an individual's *I* not know itself but, moreover, it is also a deceitful actor playing out for itself a comedy of wants, will, and values"⁴⁴. In a correspondence with the theatre of social roles, there is an internal theatre, one in which roles are being played for oneself. In fact, the relationship between the origins of the interiority and sociality of a person is even more complex.

Ever since Rimbaud announced that "I is another", everybody knows that the "I" is just an effort to find one's identity. Philosophers explain that for this identity to constitute itself — or its illusion — it needs another, whom it strives to recognise in a "mirror" : so the emergence of the subject can be imagined only in the framework of intersubjectivity.⁴⁵

As an alternative to Descartes, Greimas outlined a notion of the *I* as Being-in-the-World, similar to the one that Paul Ricœur associated with the so-called *détour* of the hermeneutic reflection. To criticise the Cartesian conception of direct self-reflection, Ricœur claims :

I am, I think ; to exist, for me, is to think : I exist *insofar as* I think. But this truth is a vain truth ; it is like a first step which cannot be followed by any other, so long as the *ego* of the

41 "The man himself, and not his consciousness, comes to commit to certain values" (A.J. Greimas, "Mitai ir ideologijos", *Iš arti ir iš toli. Literatūra, kultūra, grožis*, sudarė Saulius Žukas, Vilnius, Vaga, 1991, p. 361). Unamuno wrote : "There are people, in fact, who appear to think only with their brain, or with whatever else the specific thinking organ may be. And there are others who think with their whole body and soul, with their blood, with the marrow of their bones, with their heart and lungs and viscera, with their whole life" (*The Tragic Sense of Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 18). Further back in time, Nietzsche, thinking about the reality of the multifaceted *I*, proposed to replace the reflection of the *cogito* with an interpretative description of the body, which would reach beyond the fiction of the conscious *I* and grasp the dynamic whole of the life of instincts called the body. Thinking, consciousness, the *I* are merely the instrument, expression, and interpretation of the body. Greimas localised his perception of this sphere auto-biographically. "Having rejected the world of ideas and the supremacy of reason over reality — and we have mentioned already that this was the major direct consequence of the Great War, — there was a need to look for those forces that control the 'real' man, a man made of flesh and bones, as Unamuno puts it. This is the point of discovering the *unconscious* (...)" (*Laisvė ir 'užsiangažavimas'*, *Iš arti ir iš toli, op. cit.*, p. 301).

42 "Laisvės problema egzistencializmo, marksizmo ir freudizmo amžiuje", *op. cit.*, p. 84.

43 *Ibid.* The exact quote reads : "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think" (Jacques Lacan, *Écrits. A Selection*, transl. Alan Sheridan, London, Tavistock Publications, 1977, p. 166 ["Agency of the letter in the unconscious", pp. 146-178]).

44 *Ibid.*

45 A.J. Greimas, "Préface", *La Lettre, op. cit.*, p. 7.

ego cogito has not been recaptured in the mirror of its objects, of its works, and, finally, of its acts.⁴⁶

The mirror is a well-known traditional, most important and most productive metaphor for reflection. I have already had an occasion to write that “the hermeneutic philosophy strives to reflect on the fact that we get to know ourselves primarily by direct participation in an ongoing process of the constitution of sense (be it in the form of myth, life, culture, or language)”⁴⁷. Hermeneutic reflection aims to bring to consciousness and examine our participation, which consciousness always finds already taking place, in various strata of the constitution of sense. Without mentioning Ricœur, Greimas lays out a similar conception of self-perception, alternative to the self-reflective one. The difference is that Greimas draws on the experiential plane of the sensuous grasp, or *esthesis*.

Things look somewhat different from the viewpoint of “the world” rather than the “I”. (...) Then a human being, the subject, is just a place of receiving and registering all sensual perceptions, “sensations” : meadows and wastelands, the fireplace and the dog — they all become separate little pieces of your “I”. To make it even more real, perhaps : the greenery spreading outside the window, the letters scrawled on the page, the silence of the morning, the stench, the stench of the breeze Rudis is sniffing — if and when you can take them in, they become that authentic “I”. Man then coincides with the world, which turns bearable for him, which allows one to bear oneself from time to time.⁴⁸

This authentic *I*, or the *I* as being-in-the-world, draws on experience as phenomenology defines it. “He [a man – A.S.] is surrounded by a familiar, inevitable horizon of the world. (...) Both he and the world are given together. There are no such things as separately a man and the world, there is only a human being in a given situation he must identify”⁴⁹. Greimas gave a very specific and plastic description of this self-perception of oneself as being-in-the-world, incompatible with the empty self-reflection of the *ego* :

Events are taking place around me : a mouthful of coffee just swallowed, Rudis asking to get out for a walk, a lightbulb left on near the Cross, the letter *g* mistakenly written in a word instead of a *d* ; a new event : Rudis brings a white bitch for a visit, the bitch dashes to Rudis’s empty dish to lick it, runs to me to lick my hand, runs out through the open door. The end of the event.⁵⁰

46 P. Ricœur, “Existence and Hermeneutics”, transl. Kathleen Mc Laughlin, *The Conflict of Interpretations : Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Dohn Ihde, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2007, p. 17.

47 A. Sverdiolas, “Paulio Ricoeuro užuolankos”, *Būti ir klausti. Hermeneutinės filosofijos studijos – 1*, Vilnius, Strofa, 2002, p. 261.

48 To A. Kašubienė, 26 March 1989, *AJG1*, p. 338.

49 “Laisvės problema egzistencializmo, marksizmo ir freudizmo amžiuje”, *op. cit.*, p. 87

50 To A. Kašubienė, [26 March 1989], p. 339. In Greimas’s late manuscripts, missing or misplaced letters occur quite frequently. This passage makes it obvious that he himself was acutely aware of the concrete, momentous plane of writing and included it into the orbit of self-perception.

Greimas performs an essential phenomenological move from the transcendental *ego* to the *I* as being-in-the-world, a move characteristically made by each Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Eugen Fink, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Greimas's thought also registers tension between the two notions of the *ego*. The determination of the self-reflective *I* as inadequate does not make it possible to simply reject it and consciously choose the other viewpoint, of the *I* as being-in-the-world. Rather, there is a profound link involving both contamination and involuntary oscillation between them, with consequences of essential significance : "This struggle between the feeling of the void of the 'I' and the hopes of the world too-full is what makes life hard, deceitful"⁵¹.

Greimas — just as Freud, Husserl, Unamuno, Merleau-Ponty, who were all important to him, and many others — thinks after Nietzsche. Nietzsche dismantled the metaphysical conception of the subject, describing instead the inner multiplicity, conflicts, and dynamics of the *I*. According to him, the *I* is a mere perspectival illusion covering a multifaceted play of forces and impulses. "The assumption of *one subject* is not necessary ; is it not just as possible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interplay and struggle generally grounds our thought and consciousness?"⁵² After Nietzsche, the subject is, so to speak, an effect of play between the sub-subjective forces of the will to power. Nietzsche spoke of various roles, masks, and even persons situated next to or moving towards one another. Greimas, too, thought that the worldly *I* is neither a substantial wholeness of the ancient ontology nor the givenness of the pure *I* to itself of the Modern metaphysics of subjectivity — for it is essentially multiple. We always perceive ourselves not as one but as a multiplicity, as a totality of incomplete existents, a kind of sub-subjects which Gilles Deleuze named larval subjects. The subject is a multiplicity which creates a fiction for itself, an optical illusion : an imaginary unitary *I*.

To comment on Aleksandra Kašubienė's descriptions of "a multifaceted, polyphonic character of man as a subject" and "the maps of mental phenomena", Greimas called them post-modern, applied to himself, and transformed to extend the theme of a mask that covers a void : "I myself came to the conclusion that I, as a subject, don't exist at all, that I am just a kind of sixteenth-century fantastic map of various simulacra forced on my non-existent 'I'"⁵³. Another characteristic of this self-image is its falsity :

Collages, in my understanding, correspond to another perception of our "post-modern" world : the ability to get to know the world only in fragments and, for representing it, resort to metonymies. (...) Whether this comes to an impression of a totality — here is the whole question. (...) (Take my awkward letters — they are just a collage of fragments trying to speak out an awkward truth.)⁵⁴

To elaborate on this question, Greimas gave an auto-biographical example :

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁵² F. Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1884–1885, Kritische Studienausgabe*, Bd. 11, München, Walter de Gruyter, 1999, p. 650 ; translation quoted from Michel Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, transl. and ed. Michael Gendre, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996.

⁵³ To A. Kašubienė, 22 July 1988, *AJG1*, p. 319.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 February 1990, *AJG1*, p. 373.

I am beginning to think : is one's life made of scattered bits, does it make any sense by tying those bits to a thread that leads somewhere ? I was born in Tula, in a family of refugees and will end up somewhere a refugee just the same, a vagrant. That's after choosing a path to learning, going through three colleges, teaching others, five universities : life looks like a kaleidoscope, just give it a shake and another phase of it opens.⁵⁵

Fragmentarity is an essential characteristic because, at large, Greimas understood truth in Hegelian terms : he directly associated it with totality, wholeness. The so-called principle of totality is presented in the powerful formula from the Introduction to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* : “The True is the whole”⁵⁶. Yet if this is what it is, then a part is always “untrue” ; and the whole does not exist in actuality. Speaking of the essential inaccessibility of truth, Greimas assumed precisely this notion of it. All that remains is metonymical references. That is why he is overcome with “sadness that the crystal palace of Truth has shattered, that we carry in our hearts only tiny crumbs of it, unable to arrange these shards into a fireplace from which emanates the only and great truth”⁵⁷.

*

Greimas applied the principle of indirect self-perception in his work in semiotics, too, albeit without naming it hermeneutic reflection, as Ricœur did. The Lithuanian philosopher Arvydas Šliogeris, on reading the book *On Imperfection*, had asked him why he spoke “of the others’ *guizzo* rather than [of his] own bursts, the revelations of the good and the beautiful”. And he comments : “If I reply to him, I will say maybe (...) that I fear to betray myself or that I have nothing to say”⁵⁸. One betrays oneself by a failed expression. Greimas would acknowledge the failure of expression at times. Later he wrote on the same in a somewhat different way, leaving the question open yet again : “A whim of Šliogeris’s : for me to be myself a philosopher and speak of myself, not the others, now demanding explanation : am I hiding from myself speaking in the name of others ; or else : this is my understanding of ‘modesty’”⁵⁹. Greimas did try to answer this question : he assumes to be trying, “after some practice of covering oneself up with descriptions of others’ experiences, to secretly describe my own *guizzo*, maybe even more than that : make it authentic, or even more authentic, while describing it”⁶⁰. This is an attempt to approach oneself indirectly, via the text of another *I*. Curiously, for Greimas, authenticity has degrees. We will see that this is not accidental — the Nietzschean truth-illusion has degrees, too. To Šliogeris Greimas gave a different reply — a radical one, I would say : “ruptures cannot be described, they can only be ‘lived through,’ although there is no word for this thing in the French language : sitting exams in aesthetics back in 1939, I had to speak of the aesthetics of *Erlebnis* in French”⁶¹. So Greimas had to resort to the notion elaborated in the hermeneutic philosophy of

55 “Šiaulius prisimenant”, *AJG1*, p. 11.

56 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 11.

57 “Šiapus ir anapus”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 432.

58 A.J. Greimo ir Aleksandros Kašubienės laiškai, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

59 *Ibid.*, 19 July [1990], *AJG1*, p. 398.

60 *Ibid.*, 22 July [1990], *AJG1*, p. 399.

61 To A. Šliogeris, 5 August 1990, *AJG1*, p. 402.

Wilhelm Dilthey⁶². Nonetheless, experience itself is inexpressible, incommunicable to another, it remains within the sphere of a particular interiority, while Greimas, for reasons already discussed, consistently avoided speaking and thinking about interiority and its contents. The object of attention in semiotics is essentially exterior — it is the so-called *manifestation*, or expression, which is another notion of the post-Nietzschean “expressionist” philosophy of culture⁶³. Greimas linked culture to expression and form essentially : “culture is none other than the global speaking out — by the signs of literature, philosophy, art, and music — of our authentic, entire present (...)”⁶⁴, that is, all actualised content of interiority.

However, he specified that, speaking about expression, “the greatest threat is to stay in the register of feeling (beauty as feeling, as we used to say in young years) and not to be able to show a way towards ‘sensual transcendence’”⁶⁵. This is the same threat that is posed by psychologising the *ego*. The development of Dilthey’s philosophy, besides, moves from the psychological conception of experience towards a hermeneutic notion of understanding and explaining meaning⁶⁶. And sensual transcendence is a notion of Šliogeris’s philosophy, deliberately used here by Greimas. In the book *The Thing and Art*, which Greimas valued highly, Šliogeris writes : “Being is absolute transcendence. For theoretical reflection, beauty is this same absolute transcendence, even if it is right here, opening up sensually, evidently”⁶⁷. As it happens, he used this notion speaking of Greimas’s book *On Imperfection*⁶⁸. Greimas thought that the notion of sensual transcendence enables one to move away from interiority as a chaos of inarticulated experiences. At the risk of drawing on a tautology, one could say that expression must be expressive. An analyst of the text, just as its author, expresses himself and simultaneously covers himself up, even if not quite in the same way. “If I were a poet, I would probably try to describe something ; but since I am not, then maybe the most ‘virtuous’ way is to cover up with the veils made by others”⁶⁹.

Literary expression is bipolar : not only of the *ego* but also of the world. In his reflections on poetry Greimas consider Henrikas Radauskas as an exemplary author.

There is hardly any other of our poets (...) who feels this inaccessibility of the world, this impenetrability of it like Henrikas Radauskas. There is hardly anyone else who feels all the tragic amphibology of poetry : poetry is the only way to speak out the world which is impossible to speak out. The world and poetry are the same thing for him, they both have one common name : the fairy tale. Reality is unreachable, it merely plays with reflections

62 A. Sverdiolas, “Gyvenimo hermeneutika : Wilhelmas Dilthey’us”, *Būti ir klausti, op. cit.*, pp. 49-77.

63 For example, “true literature (...), just like any true art, is an autonomous, global plane of the expression of the human, linked by dialectic relations to the plane of lived reality : one loves or observes in the ways books teach one to love and observe, and books describe love and the sacred (...) according to the society’s canons of love and the sacred” (“Lytingumas’ lietuvių literatūroje,” *Iš arti ir iš toli*, pp. 426-427).

64 “Istorijos vaizdai ir istorinė galvosena” [“Images of History and a Historical Way of Thinking”], *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 332.

65 To A. Šliogeris, 5 August [1990], *AJG1*, p. 403.

66 A. Sverdiolas, “Gyvenimo hermeneutika : Wilhelmas Dilthey’us”, *Būti ir klausti, op. cit.*, pp. 49-77.

67 A. Šliogeris, *Daiktas ir menas. Du meno kūrinio ontologijos etiudai*, Vilnius, Mintis, 1988, p. 35.

68 A. Šliogeris, “Blyksniai Greimo horizontuose”, *Baltos lankos*, 2, 1992, pp. 10-11, 14 ; reedited in *AJG2*, pp. 273-286.

69 To A. Šliogeris, 5 August [1990], *AJG1*, p. 403.

in our eyes. This theme of reflection — the world as reflected and the world as thought — sits at the heart of his poetry.⁷⁰

Greimas's work in semiotics may also be understood in this context of indirect self-reflection relying on expressive manifestations : it is a detour, avoiding dubious introspection, around authentic — or merely more authentic — thinking of oneself and, with it, the experience of the world.

However, even here Greimas also points to an alternative path, that of a radical negation : according to him, “in fact, only what is not said, what is maybe even impossible to say, is important (...)”⁷¹; he also mentions “the intangibility of [his] own life”⁷². These conclusions are radical, coming from a linguist, semiotician, and analyst of culture : the background of equivocal discourse, or expression, is silence — which is just as equivocal and enigmatic.

1.2. Poly-egology

In Greimas, as well as in Husserl, poly-egology and related problematics of intersubjectivity are essential constituents of egology. As the next step to follow the examination of ownness, Husserl projected “a phenomenology of transcendental intersubjectivity”⁷³. The Fifth *Cartesian Meditation* is titled “Uncovering the sphere of transcendental being as monadological intersubjectivity”⁷⁴. The only way towards philosophical knowledge is “the path of universal self-knowledge — first monadic, and then intermonadic”⁷⁵. Greimas, too, remarks that interpersonal ties are an alternative to nothingness uncovered by the self-reflective *ego* : “Some kind of relief is to stick together, to maintain those spiderweb ties that give you an illusion you exist”⁷⁶. Among the grounding and contextual conditions for one's ability to say, to express is an interpersonal connection between intimately bound people. In his letters to Kašubienė, Greimas writes about “*fiducie*”, a feeling of trust-and-faith, which makes people understand one another without words, through a certain feeling-through of “being together” : “(...) this is, more or less, how I imagine heaven that does not exist : this peculiar ‘warmth’ — the only proof that I exist, that the world exists. This is my esthesis — waiting and nostalgia”⁷⁷.

Writing to Šliogeris, Greimas identifies this grounding condition with the feelings of respect for the epistolary interlocutor and trust in him, bound to the fact that they share a common space of theoretical reflection. Answering a question about his relationship with Roland Barthes, he gave another kind of reply : “Pecuniary difficulties, a search for a job that allows ‘to work’, a conviction that you have something to say but nobody listens to you, then some recognition, the emergence of common ‘enemies’ — all of these are things that tie people together”⁷⁸. This reply, however, also brings

70 “Mintys apie H. Radauską ir jo strėlės vietą lietuviškame danguje”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 118.

71 To A. Kašubienė, 22 July 1988, *AJG1*, p. 319.

72 *Ibid.*, 12 February 1990, *AJG1*, p. 370.

73 E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, op. cit., p. 30.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

76 To A. Kašubienė, 27 January [1989], *AJG1*, p. 334.

77 *Ibid.*, 10 August 1988, *AJG1*, p. 320.

78 “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 42.

up the question about the limits of communication : the conviction that “you have something to say but nobody listens” delimits interaction to the circle of those who, after all, do listen.

All of this, nonetheless, is not enough.

Surely, it would be better if God *were* there and guaranteed walks in apple-tree gardens, but since “die Blätter fallen... und wir alle fallen”, all that’s left is a friendly hand to which one can try to hold for two seconds and remain suspended in that slow and constant falling into non-existence. A touch, a feeling that something “goes away” — that’s all that matters.⁷⁹

Another letter reiterates : “I am sure that things we say to each other don’t matter at all, that only a feeling that one speaks and that things ‘go away,’ that something ‘connects’ — only this matters. That’s why I believe you’ll take this awkward letter of mine as a truest note of fake money”⁸⁰. The most important aim is to get a message addressed to another through the Jakobsonian channel of communication : the *phatic* function fundamentally grounds all other communicative functions.

Breaking through the incommunicability of expression greatly intensifies the significance of the interpersonal. Even if imperfect, interpersonal ties stand for something like a blessed communion between saints, a communion that cannot be guaranteed by God, desired yet non-existent (more about this further below). And yet, interpersonal connection — relationship and dialogue between persons — is, for Greimas, just as equivocal, self-contradictory, fragile, dubious, and questionable as the *ego* itself. The experience of the self-reflective *ego* has crucial implications for communication between persons as well as for a person’s practical activities. “And when one begins to see oneself in this way, one turns into a caterpillar who doesn’t know which foot to move, which foot moves. And this ‘fake rabbit’ finds it very hard, sometimes impossible to communicate”⁸¹. Communication needs language, but Greimas comments :

my material is words, which I cannot keep in control, which twist and turn as if drunk, like puppets. Here, see — I lose the thread again. When I write, who speaks ? Is it me ? Which me ? Is it that “I” which is an empty place taken up by various roles one after another ? — I’m beginning a poor philosophy again.⁸²

The words for “losing thread” — *nušneku* or *nusišneku* in the original Lithuanian, which literally translates as “getting carried away from one’s line of thought while speaking” — repeatedly appear in letters as an acknowledgement, on reflection, of a failure of expression. Something that wants to be communicated remains unexpressed despite all efforts⁸³.

79 To A. Kašubienė, 6-8 January 1989, *AJG1*, p. 329.

80 *Ibid.*, 20 October 1988, *AJG1*, p. 325.

81 *Ibid.* [26 March 1989], *AJG1*, p. 338. In Lithuanian, a “fake rabbit” is the name for a meat loaf : a loaf of minced meat baked in the oven.

82 *Ibid.*, 20 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 357.

83 “I take a glance at your letter and notice that I lose the thread (*nušneku*), that I am not replying to it, that this is turning into what Radauskas called a ‘conversation between dogs’ calling from one hamlet to another, heard in a Lithuanian village at the evening twilight (to A. Kašubienė, 20 October 1988, *AJG1*, p. 325. Greimas

The direct description of the “event” in which the *ego* perceives itself as being-in-the-world, quoted above, proceeds as follows :

And I am sitting here and poorly, with distortions, am writing down these fragments of the event. I am sitting here unwanted and I feel that I cannot convey to you even this unwantedness. And why convey ? (...) Why write ? Is it not that same hopeless need for “connection” ? The need to say that there is nothing sayable. And with it a secret desire, covered over with lies, that there should be what to say, that there should be sense, instead of an empty want for sense.⁸⁴

From the viewpoint of psychoanalysis, as it happens, a desire “covered over with lies” is not at all untrue.

There’s a want to write, a want to talk, to communicate : a true conversation perhaps would be a crucial step to the truth, to life-death. But this is an illusion, too, for there are no true words which were stuck to your flesh and which you could tear out and send as if a part of your own self. You see, I am trying to tell some truth, but what is going on on this sheet of paper already is an awkward, as if manneristic style from which I as an “I” yet again feel distanced, alienated.⁸⁵

My word cannot remain a part of me, its alienation as it turns into expression in an effort to communicate is its essential characteristic. This holds true for the personal as well as for theoretical word.

So is this “sincere” talk of mine any better than the jargon I have been creating for fifteen years, than that metalanguage whose aim was to call things their true, univocal names and, in that way, make “science” ? Either, in either one or the other case, one is lying to the others and oneself, or one doesn’t exist at all, and one’s “life” then is just an idle blabber of several separate, autonomous “I”s made of paper. It’s better, then, to be silent, or live out of habit, because one is used to live. But now and then, in the daily life, for

alludes to the poem “Conversations between dogs” from the collection *Fontanas*). “I’m scared to read how much of and what nonsense I’ve written to you. Off the topic and off the mark...” (*ibid.*, [26 March 1989], *AJG1*, p. 339) ; “[I]t turns out I don’t know how to write letters at all : having received yours, I scribbled a whole page as if in reply, but it turns out I lost the thread (*nušnekėjau*) and it had to be thrown away” (to A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 436). Extreme efforts to communicate, to reach one another brought the relationship between Greimas and Kašubienė to a crisis and, in one letter to Šliogeris, Greimas referred to complications of their epistolary conversation, too : “[Your] last letter, from the hospital, was full of pain. A sense of powerlessness : whether and how to help. By a letter — which, even if it were the best, is a *papier mâché* flower. Having taken two weeks one way, it would take another two weeks to get back and would definitely find you in another state of spirit. [...] What could I have done any better than chemicals can do ? So, I went quiet in face of pain or numbness — two forms I am quite familiar with” (to A. Šliogeris, 9 November 1991, *AJG1*, p. 464-465). To go silent means to find an unsurmountable barrier to communication and resign, leave the other person alone or stay alone oneself.

84 To A. Kašubienė, [26 March 1989], *AJG1*, p. 339.

85 *Ibid.*, 20 October 1988, *AJG1*, pp. 324-325.

some reason, from nowhere in particular comes again a quiet melody of nostalgia and you begin to speak, to write, as if —⁸⁶

The feeling of the emptiness of the *I* covers the interpersonal plane, too. In a postscript to a short note, Greimas writes : “A letter will follow when the void fills at least a little – A.”⁸⁷

I fear I won't be sending this letter, I'm beginning to doubt if it's sincere. And if not, what am I acting out ? And if I am not acting out, then maybe I am looking for a “sisterly soul” that will “understand me” ? But how is one to call, my dear psychiatrist, this kind of madness when one simultaneously both wants to be understood and laughs at oneself and one's wanting to be understood ?⁸⁸

It seems that similar obstacles occurred in the epistolary communication with Šliogeris.

I recently had a similar thing going on with the friend of my young days Fledžinskaitė-Kašubienė. We began writing to one another, one more elaborately than the other, one more cordially than the other — and we ended up like that caterpillar having to understand what its 467th foot is doing. So I boarded a plane and visited her in New York — and the relationship, with nuances and intonations, became self-evidently clear. — The same for the two of us : it would be best if you just came over to the Country House for a couple of weeks and, well, maybe for a little walk in Paris ?⁸⁹

A live conversation, being together might solve the crisis, that is.

86 *Ibid.*, 20 October 1988, *AJG1*, p. 325. The word “metalanguage” is used in English in the original. — The Merleau-Pontian *chair*, the flesh, or one's own body *corps propre*, would be the word of reality itself and an overcoming of appearance. “It is a search of a correspondence between what an individual is and does and, on the other hand, what he thinks he does and is. This disparity between what I am and what I think I am is the source of all lies. This gives rise to an illusion, to a dream to find a language that sticks to things (...). If we found a way to call things by their true names and eliminate that gap between our existence and our blabber, then maybe we would find the truth” (“Mitai ir ideologijos,” *Iš arti ir iš toli*, pp. 357-358). “One's daily being becomes tragic when there is a wish to say the truth but words always turn out equivocal. It is not possible to break from this vicious circle” (*ibid.*, p. 359).

87 To A. Kašubienė, 6-8 January 1989, p. 329. — “You see : the more I write the more I lose the thread (*nušneku*). That partly explains my silence” (to A. Kašubienė, [18 February 1991], *AJG1*, p. 436).

88 *Ibid.*, 21 April [1989], *AJG1*, p. 347. — Sincerity is crossed out but kept in place. It is hard to talk of oneself. “I'm afraid you might read in me the role of ‘a sighing romantic,’ which comes very close to self-pity [the word in English in the original] : nobody loves me, I'll go and hang myself” (*ibid.*, 10 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 355). Greimas described the feeling of writing an obituary of a person he knew closely just as equivocally : “I got the news that the only woman of the group of my pupils (between forty and fifty years of age) died of cancer at last, the woman whom I myself and we all liked very much although didn't really know how to love her. I had to write an obituary instantly, and so I spent the day between pitying her (and myself too, surely, as it happens usually) and stylistic exercises, looking for simple ways to say simple things, while also derisively mocking all this” (*ibid.*, [13 October 1988], *AJG1*, p. 324). There may be an allusion here to the lines from the poem “Forgive me” by Jonas Aistis : “O Viešpatie, aš jos mylėti nemokėjau, / O Dieve mano, — jos !” [“Oh Lord, I didn't know how to love her, / Oh my God, — her !”] — this would be another layer of indirect speech.

89 To A. Šliogeris, 3 December 1991, *AJG1*, p. 468. — Greimas repeatedly wrote to him with invitations to visit. “Let's meet, talk” (9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 439) ; “Hence in hope to see one another somewhere some time, why not in Condé ?” (14 March [1990], *AJG1*, p. 379) ; “The Huisne is a clean little river to fish for the trout — why don't you come for next summer ?” (29 August [1990], *AJG1*, p. 410) ; “You should come visit us as we get nearer to the spring or in the summer. Nastopka was quite impressed by Provence. You could supposedly take a language class time to time, but actually — take some walks, breathe some sky-blue air, and as well see me” (9 November 1991, *AJG1*, p. 465).

It is, however, shared silence that is “even better” than immediate conversation. “Silent walks in the Prienai woods with my father are the beautiful memories of my youth”⁹⁰. “I learned to take walks in the forest for hours without saying a word, just the two of us. And I think that’s a great lesson, for two people to be able to be together without having to say anything, and thereby to communicate”⁹¹. He spoke of a joy “to stay around, to be together frequently, keeping silent together” and “to communicate while being silent”⁹².

2. Sense : Philosophy or/and Semiotics⁹³

Sense, for Greimas, was the most important life objective. He states it quite directly : “The problem that has dominated my entire conscious life is the problem of the meaning of life, or, to put it in a more intellectual manner, the problem of a reliable system of values”⁹⁴. This quest for sense, trying to find access to it, gave rise to the objective Greimas set for himself and relentlessly sought for many years : to create a theory of sense, or, as he usually said, a “project of semiotics”.

What exactly makes one or another person take interest in questions about sense ? It seems to me that it is, first of all, a juvenile anxiety of thinking about the meaning of one’s life not yet begun. And this is followed, naturally, by questions about the meaning of the life of nations, humanity – generally, about the meaning of life and co-living of people’s communities.⁹⁵

Later, in old age, Greimas returned to the same question. “Everyone seeks the meaning of his life, consciously or unconsciously, or at least, when already quite weary, looks back and tries to transform his winding path into a straight line”⁹⁶. The question of sense is very broad and undetermined, it is a liminal question and has to do with the horizon. Greimas never spoke of sense as already found or held in possession but only as of something yet to be reached.

This quest for meaning stems from the unbearable experience of meaninglessness. As noted repeatedly, for Greimas this was, first of all, the intense experience of the absurdity of war. “The war, its absurdity, causes concern about the meaning of all the ignominies taking place in front of one’s

90 To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 439.

91 A.J. Greimas, in conversation with Françoise Piolot, 14 February 1989, as quoted in the original manuscript in English of T.F. Broden, “Algirdas Julius Greimas : vaikystė, mokslai, ir karo metai”, *AJG1*, p. 654.

92 “Apie Antaną Liutką ir padorius lietuvius”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 247.

93 *Translator’s note* : The phenomenological framework of this study determines the choice to translate the Lithuanian *prasmė*, standing for the French *sens*, by “sense” as opposed to “meaning” used in many English translations of Greimas’s semiotic texts. “Meaning” is used here only when English idiomatics does not allow otherwise and in quotations from former English translations. Greimas’s *signification* in its semiotic sense is translated consistently as “signification”. Greimas himself discusses the parasynonymy of *sens* and *signification*, explicitly referring to their phenomenological counterparts in both German (*Sinn*) and English (sense) in a letter to his Lithuanian translator Rolandas Pavilionis (7 November 1986, Manuscript Department at the Vilnius University Library, Rolandas Pavilionis collection F290-706).

94 “Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 24.

95 “Semiotiko žvilgsniu (B. Genzelio pokalbis su A. J. Greimu)”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 88.

96 A.J. Greimas, “Vietoj pratarmės”, *Semiotika. Darbų rinktinė*, transl. Rolandas Pavilionis, Vilnius, Mintis, 1989, p. 5.

eyes. This was the psychological ‘bottom line’ of mine”⁹⁷. “I had a very strong sense of the absurd, this non-sense was what led me towards the quest for sense”⁹⁸. Greimas, however, had already experienced meaninglessness before this, in his pre-war youth of which he writes : “Our paths to culture were difficult, without authorities or guidelines. Neither the systems of human values nor the ways of valuation were clear”⁹⁹. His biographer T.F. Broden comments that “in his view, this first wave of Lithuanian citizens lacked clear collective models or lessons in moral priorities”¹⁰⁰, and Greimas himself mentions “the atmosphere of starvation for ideology in the 1930s”¹⁰¹. It seems that, from the sociological point of view, this resulted from an immense anomy brought about by the development of Lithuanian society and the recent restoration of the independent state. The sociologist Émile Durkheim, who proposed this notion designating the state of being without the Greek *nomos* – “the law”, or “the norm” – explains that this is a state of affairs when “all regulation is lacking for a time. The limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate”¹⁰². Such excessiveness, immesurability, and disorientation of aspirations are of different extent and depth, and they manifest themselves in various spheres. In the nineteenth century setting of the erosion of traditional society and the rise of an unprecedented crisis of traditional authority, anomy becomes systematic, “the state of crisis and anomy is constant and, so to speak, normal”¹⁰³. The “normality” of normlessness means that anomy is universal. Anthony Giddens, consciously or unconsciously paraphrasing Durkheim, writes that “in conditions of high modernity, crisis becomes normalised”¹⁰⁴. The history of Lithuanian anomy, which has to do with the incorporation of a largely traditional society into high modernity, a process that has still not been completed today, unfortunately, has not been written yet.

Anomy is a matter of personal experience as well as sociology. Its existential possibility demands philosophical reflection. It has to do with the experience of lacking meaning and values, of aimlessness, chaos, and alienation. For Greimas, the experience of disorientation was deeply personal. His egodocuments testify time and again that his quest for sense was not immediately rewarded with success, even if relative, and there was a rather painful and long period of chaos. He spoke about this in drastic terms :

I lived in the oblivion of a dimwit. I can’t say there was the formation of my thinking or what. You go on living and take everything in, and then all must be digested. How this

97 “Au commencement était Greimas”, interview with Philippe Manière, *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 11 February 1986, p. 22 : “la guerre, son absurdité, poussent à s’inquiéter du sens de toutes les ignominies qui se passent sous vos yeux. Ce ‘fond’ psychologique était le mien”.

98 “La France est gagnée par l’insignifiance”, interview with Michel Kajman, Corine Lesnes, *Le Monde*, 22 octobre 1991, p. 45.

99 “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 34.

100 T.F. Broden, “Algirdas Julius Greimas : vaikystė, mokslai, ir karo metai”, *AJG1*, p. 643.

101 “Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 24.

102 Émile Durkheim, *Suicide : A Study in Sociology*, transl. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, London, Routledge Classics, 2002, p. 213.

103 É. Durkheim, *ibid.*, p. 216.

104 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity : Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, p. 184.

digestion happened in my life, I don't know. Maybe in Alexandria mostly ?¹⁰⁵

It happens sometimes that one doesn't get anything right — I didn't understand anything. It's a sort of intermingling of cultures. [...] When you look at your life like this, it seems that there is no direct line whatsoever, it just clutters around somehow.¹⁰⁶

A direct line would be the French *sens* — “sense” and “direction” simultaneously. But Greimas characterises the formation of his thinking as “taking everything in” without digesting it, as intermingling and cluttering.

What he calls a psychological “bottom line” of his — that is, the perception of meaninglessness — must be considered as the special and fundamental experience of crucial implications for every quest for sense. The most profound assumption of Greimas's semiotic theory — an assumption that itself remains untheorized but nonetheless is always within his view — is the nihilistic insight that the “ground” of sense is meaninglessness. Eric Landowski recalls Greimas's remark to his semiotician disciples — that is, to professional analysts of sense : “What you need, he used to say to Françoise Bastide and myself, is a nice little war”¹⁰⁷. In the absence of such experience, the opposition of sense and meaninglessness sets itself on the flat horizontal plane, remaining purely theoretical, logical. But for Greimas sense and meaninglessness was and always remained not just an opposition of concepts but a vertically distributed distinction actualised in lived experience.

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As I already noted, Greimas, just as Husserl or Merleau-Ponty, considered the world as the correlate of the ego. Therefore, his egology embraces very broad philosophical problematics. An effort to clarify this must involve at least some reconstruction of Greimas's philosophy. But is it not somewhat awkward to discuss about his philosophy ? Greimas did not consider himself a philosopher, repeatedly distanced himself from philosophy, and drew a clear divide between philosophy and the spheres of semiotics and its methods. Other representatives of the Greimassian semiotics have taken a similar stance, some more categorically than others¹⁰⁸. This divide, important to the self-perception of

105 “Semiotikos istorija yra mano asmeninė istorija”, *AJG1*, p. 58.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.

107 E. Landowski, “Honoris causa”, *Actes Sémiotiques*, 112, 2009.

108 Once, to follow up a lecture by Denis Bertrand about a text in which he saw a reflection on the conditions of the possibility of narrative — hence the problematics of semiotics — I asked : would it not be possible to see in this text, also, a reflection on the very conditions of *being*, hence a sketch of an ontology ? Bertrand rejected this very clearly : “Semioticians, at least those who focus on their practical work and analyse linguistically produced forms of signification, would not ask such a question” (A. Sverdiolas, “Filosofas tarp semiotikų,” *Aiškinimo ratas. Hermeneutinės filosofijos studijos – 2*, Vilnius, Strofa, 2003, p. 271). Nonetheless, the question remained open. Luisa Ruiz Moreno, a semiotician from Mexico, asked Teresa Mary Keane Greimas : “Regardless of Greimas's own cautious relationship with the discipline, it is obvious that his later works are closer to philosophy than linguistics. This has already been discussed in academic circles and will be discussed further. I'd like to continue this discussion in relation to the field that may be called personal philosophy : the philosophy that was Greimas's own. Who were his philosophers alongside those he acknowledged clearly : Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Piaget, Ricœur ? who else ? Heidegger ? The philosophers of German Romanticism ? (“Algirdas Julius Greimas, žmogus ir kūryba” : Teresa Mary Keane Greimas kalbina Luisa Ruiz Moreno, *AJG1*, p. 503). She responded in a very Greimassian manner : “Greimas stated and repeated that the problem of being, of ontology, belongs to the sphere of philosophers. [...] I don't intend to deny the ‘ontological horizon’ that surfaces in the book *On Imperfection*, in which a Heideggerian affected by the German Romanticism would find a lot of food for thought” (*ibid.*, p. 503). Greimas himself spoke about this with a smile : “I never pretended to be a philosopher but, because philosophising is now back in fashion, increasingly more often I meet knowledgeable people who discuss in what ways I was ‘influenced’ by Hegel, Husserl, or Merleau-Ponty.

semiotics as a scientific discipline, will have to be considered further. Moreover, in the history of thought, drawing boundaries never is ultimate, since they are constantly erased and redrawn. So, for example, a semiotician of the younger generation does on the contrary claim that “attention to philosophy is a dominant characteristic of today’s Greimassian semiotics”...¹⁰⁹

It is another matter and necessity to examine what philosophical tenets surface in Greimas’s semiotics — a scientific discipline, or rather a scientific project, as Greimas himself tended to call it. Attempts to find philosophically significant elements in semiotics have already been taken. Paul Ricœur did it in his works repeatedly. In my understanding, Greimas’s neglect of philosophical premises and refusal to discuss them gives us a distorted notion of semiotics. He mentions such an analytic perspective as a possibility : “It is hard to imagine what one would come up with if an attempt were made to reconstitute Saussure’s or Hjelmslev’s philosophical sources”¹¹⁰. Greimas did not feel concerned about this nor thought it important, but this is exactly what an analysis of his semiotics and his thinking in general might try to do : to trace their philosophical genealogy and sense, inscribing Greimas’s thought into the context of Western philosophy. One could also ask : what philosophical sense does semiotics make, what significance does semiotics have or could have to philosophy ? The objective here is not to examine the philosophical sense of the contents of semiotics, nor to re-write semiotics in philosophical terms, but it is to note that this perhaps should be done before we can fully assess Greimas’s philosophy.

To abandon philosophy for the sake of creating semiotics was a crucial decision of Greimas. This, however, does not have to mean that philosophy should abandon him. To criticise philosophy or even reject it is in itself a way of philosophising. (Ludwig Wittgenstein’s anti-philosophical position exemplifies that sufficiently). Back in the early twentieth century, Rudolf Carnap, the early Wittgenstein and other figures considered to belong to the Vienna circle proposed programmes for reducing philosophy to science. Greimas claims that the place of philosophy must be taken over by a special science. For this, he relies mostly on Louis Hjelmslev who demands unequivocally that linguistics do away with metaphysical hypotheses and, instead, try to clarify the inner laws of language

I couldn’t say anything on this issue for the simple reason that one would have, for this purpose, to take oneself seriously” (“Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas,” *AJG1*, p. 44). He once warned Aleksandra Kašubienė : “If you don’t accept that I say almost everything half or at least one-third joking, don’t read it — we won’t get each other (...) (to A. Kašubienė, 12 February 1990, *AJG1*, p. 371). His irony and self-irony were significant and nearly constant. This has been noted specifically by Gražina Martinaitienė : “He gave an impression, which was later confirmed, that he had an ability to appreciate words, events, and phenomena somehow from multiple perspectives and see in everything, even in a most solemn thing, something even a little funny” (Gražina Marija Martinaitienė, “Prisimenant Greimą”, *AJG1*, p. 605). — However, even though Greimas had a good sense of humour, irony, and self-irony, we would be mistaken to think he never and not at all took himself seriously. Self-irony was, rather, one of the important *beau geste* of his. In a Palermo seminar in 1987, Greimas gave it away : “We are turning into philosophers more and more...” (“Suprasti prasmę, atrasti prasmės,” *AJG2*, p. 43).

109 Driss Ablali, “Sémiotique et phénoménologie”, *Semiotica*, 151, 1/4, 2004, p. 220.

110 A.J. Greimas, “The Meaning of Meaning”, in *The Social Sciences. A Semiotic view*, transl. Paul Perron and Frank H. Collins, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1990, p. 6. — Greimas himself gives examples of such reconstitution. In his interview with Herman Parret, he explains the semiotic understanding of modalities as follows : “They are only logical formulations of the concepts which also belong to the psychology of mental faculties and finally to classical philosophy. When I propose for example to consider narrativity an articulation of the subject along the three modalities of volition, knowledge and power, I only try to give a logical form to concepts which indeed can be considered ‘psychological’” (Herman Parret, *Discussing Language. Dialogues with N. Chomsky, A.J. Greimas, M.A.K. Halliday*, The Hague, Mouton, 1974, p. 70).

as “independent of all reference to experience”¹¹¹. To Herman Parret’s remark that, from the philosophical viewpoint, linguistics is reductionist, Greimas replies that this is what every science is and must be¹¹².

Describing the field of semantics, Greimas states that its “epistemological presuppositions must be as few and as general as possible”¹¹³. This principle of the economy of assumptions, or Occam’s razor, link Hjelmslev and Greimas to neo-positivist philosophy, which sometimes goes unnoticed as philosophy by either of them, because they regard it as the very basis of whatever science.

And yet Greimas realised perfectly well that distancing oneself from philosophy is not at all an easy thing to do. On the one hand, “good theory is a theory in which all terms are inter-defined”¹¹⁴, but, on the other,

in the course of building up the construction [of a theory], one must set aside words that do not lend themselves to any definition. This is where philosophical problems begin. Philosophy is impossible to avoid however much one wants it, so one has to look at it with open eyes, to not be naïve. But one should not philosophise either because in that case the scientific project will vanish. It remains, then, to gather all [scientifically – A.S.] undefineable concepts and, using them, formulate one’s own axiomatics, for it is only then that a theory can be operative.¹¹⁵

Greimas aimed to remove philosophical presuppositions from his semiotic project as much as he could, but he also acknowledged that this cannot be done comprehensively.

This crucial resolution seems to draw on his most fundamental, radically sceptical thesis or assumption: reality is unknowable and nothing certain can be said either about being in general or about the being of any existent in particular¹¹⁶. So, the fundamental question of philosophy — about the nature of reality — is unanswerable, which means that philosophy proves incapable of accomplishing what it aspires, intends, and promises to do. Greimas abandoned philosophy precisely because to say what exactly reality is turned out impossible. But the decision about the unknowability of reality is essentially philosophical. Radical scepticism maintains that we do not and, even further, cannot know it and thus essentially eliminates the very possibility of ontology. Such radically sceptical views were already expressed by Nietzsche: “The novelty of our current view of philosophy is a conviction that does not characterise any other epoch: *that we do not know the truth*. All people in the

111 François Dosse, *History of Structuralism: The Rising Sign. 1945-1966*, transl. Deborah Glassman, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 69.

112 Herman Parret, *Discussing language*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

113 A.J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics. An Attempt at a Method*, transl. Danielle McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, and Alan Velie, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1983, p. 7.

114 “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas,” *AJG1*, p. 44.

115 *Ibid.*

116 For Greimas, most general philosophical questions would arise in discussions of very specific problems. Elaborating on the principles of literary criticism (Greimas did not believe in the theory of literature), he noted: “The assessment of literature according to the principle of the adequacy of the work to reality is valid only as long as we are sure that Reality as such exists indestructibly, independently from us. But since every textbook persistently repeats that Reality is just an illusion, just a projection structured by our perceptions, so the possibilities of a ‘realistic criticism’ fall apart” (“Apie literatūrinę kritiką ir moderniškąją literatūrinę avantiūrą,” *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 378).

past ‘knew the truth,’ even sceptics”¹¹⁷. And Unamuno, whom Greimas read before the war, generalising on the result achieved by the subjective philosophy of Modernity and drawing conclusions on the plane of practical philosophy, or the philosophy of “life”, made a programmatic statement : “It is scepticism, uncertainty, the final position reached by reason in its exercise of self-analysis, the analysis of its own validity, that provides a foundation upon which the heart’s despair must build its hope”¹¹⁸. Greimas never elaborated or justified this radically sceptical assumption of his, but he repeatedly voiced it as a self-evident insight and always relied on it. It is on these grounds precisely that he opposed, considerably later, ontology or metaphysics to science : “(...) scientificity cannot have anything in common with metaphysical ruminations (...), we cannot utter anything, say anything consequential of *being*, which is unreachable. The only scientific approach is to say : there is something. That’s it”¹¹⁹.

Notably, Greimas in fact distanced himself from a *certain* philosophy : from philosophy as a special science of being, that is from ontology and the notion of truth associated with it. For him, being is not a matter of knowledge but of imagination :

one can imagine that the world is there — not as *paraître*, but *être* — the world about which we in fact don’t know anything at all (...). We can neither understand nor know *être*. In other words, God is unknowable. One may call him *l’Être*, one may tell tales, write poetry, but all these are merely simulacra, merely visions one writes down. But being itself cannot be described.¹²⁰

These “other words” of Greimas’s are not a self-evident but a highly significant reformulation : as if inadvertently, it leaps from being to God’s being. This is not an accidental leap. The monotheistic Western tradition characterises personal God philosophically as a special, self-sustaining existent whose being is assumed to be real, the most real : the source and ground of all other beings. Etienne Gilson writes that it is essentially characteristic of Christian metaphysics to identify being with God¹²¹. For Greimas, God is, to use a semiotic notion of his own, a figurative expression of being. Formally, ontology is but an attempt to address being. Heidegger called this unity of being and God onto-theology¹²². The basis of ontology, the science of being, is the “word” — the *logos* — of being itself, and the

117 F. Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1880-1882*, Kritische Studienausgabe, Bd. 9, p. 52.

118 M. de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

119 To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 437-438. — This is a fundamental philosophical claim in reponse to Leibniz’s question about the grounds of ontology, remembered and elaborated by Heidegger : “Why is there something rather than, on the contrary, nothing ?” (A. Sverdiolas, “Būties mąstymo link : Martino Heideggerio hermeneutika”, *Būti ir klausti*, pp. 151-153).

120 “Semiotikos istorija yra mano asmeninė istorija”, *AJG1*, p. 83.

121 “There is but one God and this God is Being, that is the corner-stone of all Christian philosophy (...)” (Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940, p. 51). This philosophy aims to contemplate being as the God of the Biblical revelation. The Permenidian being here finds a theological equivalent.

122 Heidegger discussed the foundations of ontotheology by raising the question how God enters philosophy (M. Heidegger, “Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik”, *Identität und Differenz*, Pfullingen, 1957, p. 35-77 / “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics”, *Identity and Difference*, transl. Joan Stambaugh, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 42-74). Concerning metaphysics, he writes : “This unconcealedness of a being opened a possibility for Christian theology to subject to itself Greek philosophy, for the first time (...)” (M. Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio

basis of theology is the word of God, the revelation. Greimas reflects on both these bases and says unequivocally that there is neither the *logos* of being nor the word of God — only human words about being and God, images that human beings have and representations they create — which are, according to him, completely different things. He reports that once “a theologian raised the ultimate question, willing to know what I thought about Truth. I said I was incompetent on this issue and that semiotics is concerned only with discursive processes of uttering “truths” (or lies)”¹²³. Onto-theo-logy may appear essentially unconvincing and, from some point in the history of Western thought, begins to be unconvincing. It did not convince Nietzsche, Heidegger, or Unamuno, nor did it convince Greimas : in his view, words about God are bound to a simulacrum, a product of imagination. This fundamental position surfaces even more clearly as Greimas discusses translation problems in preparation of a Lithuanian collection of his works in semiotics¹²⁴. In a letter to the editor of the translation Bronys Savukynas he writes :

It gets a bit worse with *véridiction* : the word is compound, and it says precisely what it has to say (as opposed to, e.g., *véracité* or *réalité*) : *saying the truth*. This means that there is no external truth [that is, self-given truth, Heidegger would say the truth of being – A.S.], that it comes about only in discourse. This is a philosophical postulate.¹²⁵

To accept the radical sceptical thesis that reality is unknowable means to do away with a major part of Western philosophical thinking : Platonism and Aristotelianism, including their post- and neo-, as well as metaphysics and ontology. Having dismissed such an immense lump of tradition, Greimas sets out to create, in its stead, a different discipline which will seek sense without relying on a metaphysical foundation or ontological suppositions : semiotics.

2.1. The natural and the human sciences

Once arrived at the radically sceptical conclusion that being is unknowable, another direction of thought presented itself. It was transcendentalism, which appears to have become the main line for the development of philosophical thought in Modernity. Kant declared being, with its predicates, unknowable as a thing-in-itself (or *noumenon*). Having determined the unknowability of being, Kant moved towards an analysis of its experience, or as a thing-for the experiencing subjectivity. This move from being-in-itself, or being of things, towards experience gave a systematic basis to phenomenology. Husserl, too, considered it impossible to speak responsibly about *being* itself. In *Ideas I*, in the paragraph titled “The Natural World as a Correlate of Consciousness”, he says :

It must always be borne in mind here that *whatever physical things are* — the only physical things about which we can make statements, the only ones about the being or

Klostermann, 1949, pp. 19-20). Greek philosophy here is conflated with metaphysics. Heidegger considered this fundamental choice questionable and unsatisfactory, raising a question of an alternative : “Will Christian theology, conforming to the Apostle’s Creed, dare again to seriously regard philosophy as stupidity? (*Ibid.*, p. 109).

123 To A. Šliogeris, 29 August [1990], *AJG1*, p. 406.

124 A.J. Greimas, *Semiotika. Darbų rinktinė*, transl. Rolandas Pavilionis, Vilnius, Mintis, 1989.

125 To Bronys Savukynas, 7 January 1988, *AJG1*, p. 313.

non-being, the being-thus or being-otherwise of which we can disagree and make rational decisions — *they are as experienceable physical things*. It is experience alone that prescribes their sense ; and, since we are speaking of physical things in fact, it is actual experience alone which does so in its definitely ordered experiential concatenations.¹²⁶

This fundamental turn of thought is crucial to semiotics, too. Ricœur, examining the principles of the Lévi-Straussian anthropology, spoke of “structuralist philosophy” as “a Kantianism without a transcendental subject”¹²⁷. The notion of a transcendental field without subject aptly characterises other variants of structuralism, too.

Kant’s transcendentalism grounded the divide, proposed by neo-Kantians, between the natural sciences and the human sciences (including humanities, social sciences, anthropology, and history). Just as neo-positivists, neo-Kantians rejected the possibility of philosophy as metaphysics. In the tradition of Western thought dominated by the ontology of the Thing, the natural sciences, which in Modernity replaced cosmology, were close to ontology as if “by nature”, while the human sciences lacked a traditional philosophical designation, although anthropological issues were analysed in various disciplines. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the distinction between the natural and the human sciences was being drawn by the neo-Kantians Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert, also by Max Weber, Dilthey, and others. To define the object of their inquiry, they examined the specificity of the sciences of the spirit, contrasting them with the natural sciences. Windelband distinguished these sciences not according to the objects of their inquiry but according to their methods, either ideographic or nomothetic. Rickert claimed that the human sciences are definitively characterised by an evaluative approach to the object of inquiry. Dilthey’s statement that “we explain nature, we understand psychic life” has become almost an aphorism¹²⁸. Later on, the notion of “psychic life” was replaced with the so-called sciences of the spirit (we would say today, rather, human or cultural sciences), which built on the specific principle of *Verstehung*, or understanding, as opposed to *Erklärung*, or cause-and-effect explanation characteristic of the natural sciences¹²⁹. Dilthey’s project was of a *Critique of Historical Reason* and of universal hermeneutics aiming to know “life” itself, or human reality, through its multifaceted expressions. In Dilthey’s philosophy, which is not only post-Kantian but also post-Hegelian, all reality is cultural reality by definition, and all philosophy is the philosophy of culture. In the programmatic article “The Rise of Hermeneutics”, Dilthey stated that the “theory of the rules of understanding textually fixed objectifications of life we call hermeneutics”¹³⁰. Here he also defines the field of hermeneutics in much broader terms : it covers, beyond written texts, the entire scope of culture : “understanding ranges from grasping the babblings of children to *Hamlet* or the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Through stone and

126 E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, p. 100. / *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book, p. 105-106.

127 P. Ricœur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

128 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding*, transl. Richard M. Zaner and Kenneth L. Heighes, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, p. 27.

129 A. Sverdiolas, “Gyvenimo hermeneutika : Wilhelmas Dilthey’us”, *Būti ir klausti*, pp. 46-49.

130 W. Dilthey, “The Rise of Hermeneutics”, transl. Fredric R. Jameson and Rudolf A. Makkreel, in *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, Ewin, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 252.

marble, musical notes, gestures, words, and texts, actions, economic regulations and constitutions, the same human spirit addresses us and demands interpretation”¹³¹.

Greimas repeats this move of the early-twentieth-century German philosophy in his own words : “the natural sciences study what is, while the human sciences study what these existing things mean”¹³². In *Structural Semantics*, he reiterates : “(...) if the natural sciences ask questions in order to understand how man and the world are, the human sciences pose the question, more or less explicitly, of what both of them signify”¹³³. His claim that semiotics examines that which *means*, as opposed to that which *is*, relies precisely on the presupposition that the Being is the being of a thing. In his view, the human sciences still are in the state of becoming : “I think that the twentieth century has a mission of its own and that this mission is to create the sciences of the human”¹³⁴.

I am convinced that these days we are living through a period — that of the birth of the humanities, the human sciences — which is comparable maybe only to the eighteenth century in the history of the exact and natural sciences. The notions of totality, signification, structure seem to me most urgent and revolutionary. Thinkers whose works inspire this revolution of the Human sciences most profoundly, are Husserl, Marx, Saussure, Freud.¹³⁵

In the same way as the natural sciences have done, the human sciences can also assert their autonomy, which comes not from the “nature” of the objects of investigation — words or things, nature or culture — but *from the method of approach that constitutes them all into human objects, into signifying objects*.¹³⁶

In this setting of the universe of significations, semiotics is supposed to become to the human sciences what mathematics is to the natural sciences — the basis of their scientificity. “My aim has always been and still remains [in 1986 – A.S.] to contribute to the development of the human and social sciences which still haven’t grown out of nappies. To achieve this, we must try to put together for ourselves a coherent metalanguage, to build a theoretical construction”¹³⁷.

Hence, the question about what a thing *is* (whatever it might be) is regarded either as an ontological (metaphysical) question or as belonging to the natural sciences, while the question about what a thing *means* (again, any kind of thing), as a semantic one. Defining the object of semiotics, Greimas distanced himself from both ontology (metaphysics) and the natural sciences or naturalistic explanations, staying instead within the horizon of anthropology (understood broadly, to include

131 *Ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

132 “Bendrosios semiotikos problemas”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 41.

133 *Structural Semantics*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

134 “Bendrosios semiotikos problemas”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 39.

135 “Kuo daugiau sąmoningumo”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 323-324.

136 “Toward a Semiotics of the Natural World”, *On Meaning, Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, transl. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 19.

137 “Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 44. — “To create the human sciences does not mean to eliminate or push aside what has already been done in linguistics, psychology, or sociology. On the contrary, we must create and propose new methods, a certain new language common to all disciplines of the human sciences, a language of the kind that the natural sciences have in the form of the mathematical language” (“Bendrosios semiotikos problemas”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 40).

history as well) and searching for its characteristic method¹³⁸. Such a purpose, according to him, requires and deserves devoting oneself personally : “science is something worth living for”¹³⁹.

2.2. Axiology instead of ontology

One of Greimas’s letters features a somewhat odd statement — “an axiological, and not an ontological statement : ‘I wish there were something’”¹⁴⁰. How is this supposed to be understood ? “The semiotics I profess is precisely a semiotics that is an axiology, a theory, and a teaching of values”¹⁴¹. The fact that the notions of signification and *value* at times appear almost synonymous brings axiology and semiotics even closer¹⁴².

Greimas thought in the post-Nietzschean horizon¹⁴³. Although he did not expand on Nietzsche’s concerns but only referred to them occasionally, his entire thinking was indeed post-Nietzschean. Nietzsche elaborated on the traditional problematics of Western philosophy by, first of all, radically criticising it. In one of his aphoristically concise marginal notes, he bluntly states he “must deny *being*”¹⁴⁴. While *being* had been a fundamental problem of philosophy since Parmenides, Nietzsche sets the aim to overcome metaphysics, drawing a very broad outline of the history of Western metaphysics : “Parmenides said : ‘One cannot think that which is not’. We are at the other end and we say : ‘What can be thought must surely be a fiction’”¹⁴⁵. At this point in the history of thought, all that is thinkable is, to use Greimas’s words, an illusion or a simulacrum. Assuming a radically sceptical stance on the possibility to know being or speak it out, Greimas made the same move as Nietzsche.

138 Eric Landowski pertinently elaborates on these questions of the relationships between semiotics and philosophy. Drawing on a remarkably subtle reconstruction of Greimas’s position of distancing semiotics from philosophy, he shows, in effect, that semiotics dissociates itself from ontology, the science of being, but not from phenomenology, the science of experience ; that a semiotician faces philosophical objectives in his work ; and that semiotics itself, grounded as it is on rigorously defined concepts and methods, also manifests philosophical and cultural presuppositions (E. Landowski, *Prasmė anapus teksto. Sociosemiotinės esė*, trad. Paulius Jevsejevas, Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2015, pp. 225-327).

139 “Semiotikos istorija yra mano asmeninė istorija”, *AJG1*, p. 58 ; also see “Bendrosios semiotikos problemos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, pp. 40, 47.

140 To Arvydas Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 438.

141 “La France est gagnée par l’insignifiance”, *Le Monde*, 22 octobre 1991, *arrt.cit.*

142 The notion of value figures in Ferdinand de Saussure’s conception of language, which semiotics took for its basis. To explain what linguistic value is, Saussure draws on the example of economic value (of cost, which turns different things into equivalents), on that of the value of chess figures (which depends on their position on the board), and of the correspondence between a phoneme and its grapheme, and the like. The definitive characteristic of linguistic value is, according to him, the relationship between idea and sound, or sound substance (Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* [1916], Paris, Payot, 1995, p. 155). Greimas spoke of value in its linguistic, economic, and axiological sense without drawing clear distinctions between them. Jean Petitot did not let this polysemy go unnoticed, calling it “an ingenious aporia” (cf. A.J. Greimas, “Suprasti prasmę, atrasti prasmės”, *AJG2*, p. 37). — In the most general sense, Greimas characterised value in the same way as Plato characterised the good : they are “objects of lack or desire” (“A Problem of Narrative Semiotics : Objects of Value”, *On Meaning, op. cit.*, p. 85). Admittedly, several pages further Greimas expresses a characteristic reservation of his : that he does not pretend to be making any metaphysical claims. As he has it, “by defining semiotic existence as structural relation, [we] exclude from our considerations the ontological problematics of subject and object (...)” (*ibid.*, p. 90). However, in this case yet again, the phenomenological line of thought would go alongside the semiotic one, rather than standing in opposition to it.

143 It is not easy to say how precisely this outlook shaped itself. On graduation from secondary school, his father gave him the works of Nietzsche as a present.

144 F. Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1884–1885*, Kritische Studienausgabe, Bd. 11, p. 147.

145 *Ibid.*, Bd. 13, p. 332.

Nietzsche essentially redefined the starting point and the horizon of philosophical thought : he replaced ontology with axiology, put *value*, or *worth*, into the very centre of philosophy, and analysed it in the universal philosophical sense¹⁴⁶. This is an essential transformation since, generally speaking, the core of metaphysics comprised the problematics of being and truth : the ancient Greece and the Christian Middle Ages were mostly concerned with being, while Modernity focused on knowledge. Meanwhile, Nietzsche focused his thought on worth. Worth is not the object of any specific philosophical discipline. “The question of worth is *more fundamental* than the question of certitude : the latter becomes a real question on condition that there is an answer to the question of worth”¹⁴⁷. Drawing on one of Greimas’s interviews, Thomas F. Broden notes that Nietzsche “emboldened him to critique ineffectual ideologies and strike out in search of alternative values. *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* presumably played a key role in forming these outlooks”¹⁴⁸. According to Nietzsche, the illusory perspective of idealism must be replaced with a radical critique : the revaluation of all values. This critical strategy was very important to Greimas. “Especially Nietzsche’s role, as a nagger of the universe of values, should be brought up and emphasised (...) : this might be one of the most effective ways — in longer distances — ‘to freedom’”¹⁴⁹.

Yet Nietzsche combined his radical critique of metaphysics with a project of new philosophy : even in a critique, the ultimate objective of a philosopher must be positive : it should aim at values. This is how he explains the meaning of remaining “faithful to the earth” : “Let your spirit and your virtue serve the sense of the earth, my brothers ; and let the value of all things be posited newly by you”¹⁵⁰. Greimas agrees with it : “The twentieth century [...] is the century of the crisis of all values, foretold by Nietzsche. Facing the religious ruins of artistic, scientific, and material values, he attempts a new intellectual venture, seeks for new foundations to support new human constructions”¹⁵¹.

Even the quest for truth can be understood in the framework of axiology. The self-evident worth of truth was one of the most fundamental premises of Western civilisation, unimaginable without an imperative quest for it (*Oedipus Rex* sufficiently illustrates that). Maybe this is precisely why the fundamental premise that truth is good does not usually turn into a specific theme of thought : thinking begins only when something self-evident ceases to be self-evident and becomes problematic. The question of the value of truth arose in the framework of Nietzsche’s radical thought. He questioned the notion of truth in our entire tradition of philosophy in very unexpected terms : he called truth a value and asked what it is really worth. Thereby he turned epistemological problematics into the problematics of value and placed it next to the problematics of ethics and aesthetics ; truth here is the same kind of value as the good and the beautiful. The question about truth understood as

146 Value in the axiological sense is often called “worth”. (Translator’s note).

147 *Ibid.*, Bd. 12, p. 311.

148 T.F. Broden, “Algirdas Julius Greimas : vaikystė, mokslai ir karo metai”, *AJG1*, p. 641, quoted from the original manuscript in English.

149 To A. Šliogeris, [19 October 1990], forthcoming in *Baltos lankos*, 40, 2019.

150 F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *op. cit.*, p. 76, 77.

151 “Apie literatūrinę kritiką ir moderniškąją literatūrinę avantiūrą”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 380. — Greimas approached Marxism in the same Nietzschean framework, as an unmasking, destructive analysis of values that is simultaneously constructive : it appears to be “a method that allows to understand, how (...) the process of history gives birth to new human values which add to and go beyond the old, outdated values” (“Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 26). Greimas’s relationship with Marxism would obviously require a more comprehensive analysis.

the correspondence of thought to reality turned into the question about the value of truth to life. This is exactly how Greimas raised this question, too :

Does the understanding of man and of the world help man to live or does it not, does it make any sense to understand ? [...] This is not some absurd question but a certain history of humanity, which has been going on for twenty-five centuries, and a certain ethics [i.e. orientation in a framework of values – A.S.], a certain Eurocentricity, in which knowledge is considered of value. So, do you agree to play this game or don't you ? If you do, then there are the rules of the game, according to which a certain clairvoyance, an understanding of what the world is, what society is, what man is, also has value.¹⁵²

In Nietzsche's terms, the world is seen evaluatively, as first of all subjected to the interest of preserving and reinforcing the power of men as "a particular species of animals". This is a kind of pragmatism : truth here can only be a useful or harmful fiction. Greimas introduced a nuance into this perspective : for him, the source of values is not in the will to power but in play, with a special emphasis on imagination.

2.3. Existentialism

Inscribing Greimas's quest for sense into the specific philosophical and historical context of his time, it is easy to anticipate that, as his theoretical thinking crystallised, his relation to existentialist philosophy must have acquired importance. In 1944, when the twenty-seven-year-old Greimas found himself in Paris, existentialism was flourishing¹⁵³. But his relationship with this philosophy was not at all unequivocal or unchanging in the course of time.

He tried to take a critical look at existentialism quite early. In 1948, he wrote a short review of a critique of existentialism, *Tradition of Existentialism, or Philosophies of Life* by Julien Benda, who was most famous for the book *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. According to Greimas,

the French rationalist Julien Benda and the German historiographer Oswald Spengler, in different ways and each one led by his own concerns, both come to almost the same view in their assessment of the development of European civilisation in the last few centuries : the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aristocratic understanding of the world, the primacy of the spiritual origin meant the apogee of the civilisation which, overripe, is going down the road of devaluation and vulgarisation of the world of ideas, of exalting man's emotional and intuitional depths.¹⁵⁴

152 "Bendrosios semiotikos problemos," *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 50.

153 Greimas translated Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Wall* ("Jean-Paul Sartre, *Siena*", *Mintis*, 231-238, 1946.12.11-1947.1.2) and an extract from Albert Camus's *The Plague* (*Darbas*, 3-4 (34-35), 1957). He also wrote about Sartre's book *What is Literature ?* (J.-P. Sartre, *Situations, II. Qu'est-ce que la littérature ?*, Paris, Gallimard, 1948) and passionately participated in debates on *littérature engagée*. "Writers, artists, and scholars 'commit' themselves because they find, in the immense sea of unbelief and non-sense, a surrogate for belief and sense, which, even being a surrogate, is nonetheless a nutritious and life-sustaining product". ("Laisvė ir 'užsiangažavimas'", *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 301).

154 "Julien Benda : Egzistencializmo tradicija arba gyvenimo filozofijos", *Mintis*, 95 (478), 1948.9.10, p. 3.

The rationalism of the Enlightenment and the aristocratism of the *Ancien Régime* were and always remained close to Greimas's heart. Yet at the same time he stood for existentialism and against metaphysics. "The old humanism [i.e. the Greek notion of man and its extensions up to the eighteenth century – A.S.] drew on the postulate of an eternal, unchanging human nature. Individual people, according to it, were merely more or less perfect reproductions of the human essence"¹⁵⁵. However, with the rise and increasing dominance of historicism at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this metaphysical basis of anthropology proved inadequate, for it led to the conclusion that "there is no unchanging human nature, there are only individuals living in a given society, within a defined historical period of time"¹⁵⁶. The origin and ground of contemporary thought is human experience, to which both phenomenology and existential philosophy grant supreme authority. "What do we know of the world of essences, who and what can guarantee that this harmonious world of essences really exists?"¹⁵⁷, Greimas asked rhetorically, anticipating the answers "nothing," "no one," and "nothing." He insisted on a comprehensive account for these tenets of contemporary thinking.

In an existentialist style, Greimas immediately proceeds with a discussion of what remains, in these circumstances :

One thing is certain : I, a human being, am here, thrown into the world like a lost puppy. (...) Only the fact of my existence is certain, the rest — philosophical systems, scientific constructions, axiologies of the good and the true — maybe all this is the truth, but it is only the truth I have lived through. Man has no right to rely on anything ; there is nothing ensured, nothing promised.¹⁵⁸

The only solid foundation for all the enumerated spheres of the mind's work is the living experience of a person. It is a consistent reliance on it, removing from one's thinking every metaphysical remnant, that Greimas called "consciousness"¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁵ "Laisvės problema egzistencializmo, marksizmo ir freudizmo amžiuje", *Lietuviškasis liberalizmas, op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁶ "Apie literatūrinę kritiką ir moderniškąją literatūrinę avantiūrą," *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 377. — He discerned the same in the development of Modern literary criticism. "The oldest, yet also the most enduring form of literary criticism was born in the atmosphere of the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century classicism. Just as the philosophy of this time, it grounds itself in the postulate that human nature is given once for all times, unchanging and eternal". However, "even if some literary critics, for metaphysical reasons, recognise this postulate, literary criticism based on it is possible only in a society that, as a whole, has accepted it as an unconscious category of its collective thinking. But a society of this type does not exist in Europe since the beginning of the nineteenth century" (*ibid.*, p. 377). Greimas's thinking contains the Hegelian intuition about the historicity of any so-called "essence". Consciousness, for him, is essentially changeable, historical.

¹⁵⁷ "Laisvės problema", *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ "Consciousness is the pride of the Modern human, it is the new humanism, but there are traps for it on every step. The most dangerous one is the metaphysical trap. Lithuanian Modern poetry has fallen into it and there is no hope for rescue in sight yet. Its presumed existentialism (...) hardly veils the postulates of an eternal, unchanging human nature. Its *soil* is not soil but the notion of soil. Concrete experience — forgetting that even for Husserl, an adversary of history, essences are concrete — is transformed by the magic poetic word into an abstract notion of human existence. *Transformer l'expérience en conscience!* Experience is transformed into consciousness but no dialectical connection directs the beam of consciousness back onto the concrete experience of a human" ("Sąmonė ir sąžinė. Cz. Milosz'o poezijos vertimus perskaičius", *Iš arti ir iš toli*, pp. 420-421). — Vytautas Kavolis, a Lithuanian émigré sociologist, who lived in the United States and collaborated with Greimas, proposed a notion of consciousness which was very similar to (and, quite probably, developed under the influence of) the Greimassian one. Kavolis, too, linked consciousness primarily to

Consciousness, for him, is directly linked with unmasking. It is its unmasking, even subversive potential that he found most appealing in existentialism.

Having rejected all traditional values, pulled off all masks, profaned all sanctities, he [man, today – A.S.] is as if a newborn at the dawn of a new epoch. (...) His consciousness, which manifests itself first of all as the negation of all – existential and societal – lies, seeks its truth in the assertion of bare human existence.¹⁶⁰

Hence, the truth dwells in the horizon of existence and is discussed in negative terms : as non-lie, as the exposure, the denunciation, of a lie. There are good reasons why the article I quote is concerned precisely with the critical theories of the twentieth-century thought : existentialism, Marxism, and Freudism. In positive terms, consciousness is a historically contingent openness to that which really is, and the correlative possibility to perceive the truth.

Nietzsche, a classic of the strategy of unmasking and critical subversion, was an important – if not the most important – figure to Greimas’s quest for meaning. He acknowledged it as follows :

If I must give the name of an author who (...) helped me register a whole range of disparate thoughts and emotional inclinations, this name for me is : Nietzsche. Nietzsche posed the only philosophical question – let’s not forget my seventeen years of age [in 1934 – A.S.] – in all its bareness : what is it *worth* to live for ? as Albert Camus later repeated it in his own way : why doesn’t a man kill himself ? All the rest is lies.¹⁶¹

Suicide is significant philosophically as a radical and effective refusal to be, while a refusal to commit suicide, then, is a consent to be. The horizon opened by Nietzsche always remained important to Greimas, even if he does not seem to have returned to his works for a more comprehensive analysis later.

What he adds to this insight stems also from existentialism, directly inspired as it is by Sartre and Camus :

The very first existential feeling is horror. The horror of being in the world, surrounded by things whose essence is not given for you to know. The horror of living amongst people whose gaze constantly turns you into a thing, with whom no authentic communication is possible. The first existential thought is the absurdity of life and the world.¹⁶²

It is in the context of existentialism and in its terms that Greimas thematised the experience of primordial meaninglessness which he kept in mind from early youth.

disillusionment and the crisis of metaphysical thinking, as well as considering it the fundamental structure of the “landless generation” of exiles to which he belonged (A. Sverdiolas, “Vytauto Kavolio kultūros filosofija,” *Kultūra lietuvių filosofų akiratyje*, Vilnius, Apostrofa, 2012, pp. 495-508). Kavolis also made the next Greimassian move, towards analysing ensembles of meanings functioning in the society.

160 “Laisvės problema...”, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

161 “Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 25.

162 “Laisvės problema...”, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Having lost all ties with tradition, detached from the conventional forms of civilisation which had developed through ages, man is left hanging in mid-air. With no paved way into the future in sight, with no ingrained moral code of conduct, he finds himself free, endowed with this meaningless freedom of no use to anybody, with which he does not know where to begin.¹⁶³

In 1959, Greimas formulates a fundamental Sartrean thesis : “There is no freedom either in human nature or in the world. For man, freedom is not the natural form of life but an exception”¹⁶⁴. This statement presupposes, even if it does not elaborate on, Sartre’s fundamental notion of consciousness as nothingness, as a fracture in being, which makes one completely free¹⁶⁵. To clarify what he means by his famous statement that existence is prior to essence, Sartre says : “If man, as the existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself”¹⁶⁶.

For Greimas, an activist of the Lithuanian anti-Nazi resistance during the war, Camus’s notion of rebellion had a special appeal¹⁶⁷. He articulated this theoretically, reflecting on the experience of the resistance:

(...) resistance first of all is an act of resolution made by a free man, an authentic commitment of a man who dares to take a frank look at himself and the world, opting against the old values and for a particular system of values which he may be not fully conscious of but which is implied in his very act of resolution.¹⁶⁸

He voiced his attitude regarding Lithuanian existentialists on several occasions, mostly with rather sharp criticism.

I am still struck by the fact that my generation, separated from Europe by the language barrier, lived tackling the same problems, looking for answers to the same questions. We were existentialists well before it came into fashion. Maybe this is why we looked at the “real” Lithuanian existentialists, who emerged in the first post-war years – I mean Nyka and Nagys – both with fondness, as akin to us, and with a smile, as the ones who discovered America somewhat belatedly.¹⁶⁹

The “we” here may denote either Greimas’s closest circle, or maybe just himself alone. “Having not lived, one could say, a Lithuanian inter-war life, I identified with the ‘old’ generation, looking at my

163 “Verlaine’as – žmogus ir poetas,” *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 438.

164 “Laisvės problema...”, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

165 “This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free” (J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, transl. by Hazel E. Barnes, New York, Philosophical Library, 1956, p. 439).

166 J.-P. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* [1948], transl. Philip Mairet, London, Methuen, 1980, p. 28.

167 “Laisvės problema...”, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

168 “Rezistencijos sąvoka”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, pp. 304-305.

169 “Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, pp. 24-25.

existentialist contemporaries and ‘žemininkai’, the offspring of the great crisis, from afar — and sometimes down on, too”¹⁷⁰.

The basis of this duality — a feeling of affinity, which comes with a somewhat patronising smile, “looking down” — demands clarification. In fact, they all belonged to the same generation : Greimas was born in 1917, Juozas Girnius in 1915, Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas in 1919, and Henrikas Nagys in 1920. So, Lithuanian existentialists appear simply to have fallen behind, while Greimas considered lagging behind an essential fault of thinking, stating instead that one must move along with one’s time and even ahead of it, because time itself moves relentlessly and constantly raises new challenges to thought and action¹⁷¹. As far back as 1965, in an address to the Convention of Lithuanians in the North-american association Santara-Šviesa, he expressed bewilderment at the fact that the young generation of Lithuanians in the United States still found existentialism relevant :

I don’t know how things look from here, but looking at them from Paris, the problem of existentialism is now past. And there is nothing worse in cultural life than, inquiring into human problematics, to lag one generation behind. (...) too bad if the Šviesa community gets an impression that existentialism still is our affair.¹⁷²

It seems that this reproach to the contemporaries for lagging behind implied another one : that representatives of the so-called theistic existentialism are “behind” essentially. Greimas’s attitude towards them was especially severe.

The so-called Christian existentialism is just a blabber : either one already has his God, and then all talk about any kind of existential feelings is just posing in front of a mirror ; or there is no God, and then no affirmation of existence will help substantiate the existence of God.¹⁷³

The question of God did not seem irrelevant to Greimas at all but, quite on the contrary, he thought it was the most crucial question. He inscribed his own answer to it into an autobiographical horizon. “I myself was convinced before the war, by Miguel de Unamuno, with his *credo quia absurdum*, that the problems of Christian existentialism deserve attention”¹⁷⁴.

When, in the German occupation years, it [existentialism] began to manifest itself in Lithuania, it seemed to me juvenile and rather awkward (...). And besides, it seemed to me that I had already lived through it in Grenoble [in 1936-1939 – A.S.], keenly reading

170 “Jonas Kossu-Aleksandravičius. Intymus žmogus ir intymumo poezija”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, pp. 107-108. “Žemininkai” refers to the group of Lithuanian émigré poets whose work was published in an anthology entitled *Žemė (The Land)* in 1951.

171 A. Sverdiolas, “Greimo demiurgija : lietuvių kultūros projektas”, *Darbai ir dienos*, 68, 2017, pp. 85-128.

172 “Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 354.

173 “Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 25. Girnius’s *Žmogus be Dievo* (Man without God) came out in 1964.

174 To A. Šliogeris, 8 July [1990], *AJG1*, p. 394. Unamuno mentions this statement attributed to Tertullian in *The Tragic Sense of Life*, *op. cit.* (p. 82).

Unamuno's *Sentimiento trágico de la vida* (= *credo quia absurdum*, such was his salvationist Catholicism), well, and Kierkegaard.¹⁷⁵

It is difficult to judge from Greimas's texts how attentively and comprehensively he read Søren Kierkegaard but what is certain is that Unamuno addressed Kierkegaard's ideas. Greimas acknowledged and respected the radical way, refined by Kierkegaard, of asking and simultaneously answering, resolving the question of belief. There is no identification of God with being, no onto-theological complex here; God's existence here is not being justified or proved, and belief has no rational basis¹⁷⁶.

Greimas himself made a determined, and negative, resolution about belief. He recounted several times that a Jesuit friend of his, the multidisciplinary scholar Michel de Certeau, replied to a journalist's question whether he believes in God with a retort that it is his personal matter. Greimas himself, on the contrary, never tried to avoid answering this question, putting forward his negative thesis on belief — a kind of negative confession of faith — very straightforwardly. "Unamuno's *credo quia absurdum* sounds noble and enticing but nonetheless does not convince us (...)"¹⁷⁷. This is a kind of fideism upside down: Greimas accepts that God is not to be known but to be believed in, yet he himself does not believe. His principal thesis on belief — that there is no God — is even more radical than his radically sceptic thesis that being is unknowable. The equivalent of scepticism in the sphere of belief is agnosticism, while belief as Greimas understands it here has nothing to do with knowledge. One doubts even if a conscious resolution is the right name for it; this is, rather, a manifestation of a profound and total experience, a primordial grasp of what really *is* or *is not* for you, and how. It turns out to be essential as he formulates what appears to be the first question for him, that of sense, which arises "when you understand that there is no God, that there is nothing given or guaranteed; that there is no sense, that you must make it up yourself, that you must nonetheless give this life foisted on you some kind of form, some kind of continuity"¹⁷⁸.

Greimas's sensibility as "a man without God" was not at all triumphant — he, rather, regretted there was no God. A made up, constructed meaning cannot fully replace meaning that has been given as a gift. Yet this is not a matter of choice but of fate.

As to Lithuanian existentialists, he reproved them for inconsistency, compromise, and disguised metaphysics¹⁷⁹. Another reproach he had was for dishonesty on the decisive question, of God's

175 To Saulius Žukas, 21-22 December [1989], *AJG1*, p. 364.

176 A. Sverdiolas, "Įkandin Abraomo. Søren Kierkegaard antihermeneutika", in Antanas Andrijauskas (ed.), *Egzistencijos paradoklai: Kierkegaard filosofinės interpretacijos*, Vilnius, Versus aureus, 2006, pp. 245-274. — Heidegger reached the conclusion that metaphysical thinking is not sufficient to justify belief (M. Heidegger, "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics", *Identity and Difference*, transl. Joan Stambaugh, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 42-74, 70-72). According to him, "the god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit" (*ibid.*, p. 72).

177 "Laisvė ir 'užsiangažavimas,'" *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 302.

178 "Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas", *AJG1*, p. 23.

179 But he also wrote: "This generation of the last war and post-war years brings the thematics and the problems of its own. Exposed to all kinds of influences, wounded in its soul by the self-imposed exile, they desperately try to surpass the problematics of the-human-being-thrown-into-the-absurd-world — which we will find in the poems of Nyka-Niliūnas's or the verses by Henrikas Nagys — by putting ever more stringent

existence. In a letter to Šliogeris he wrote rather crudely : “And all those Girnius and Čipkuses (Nyka-Niliūnas) are primping spinsters” because “they know of old that God exists and are putting on a lowbrow comedy”¹⁸⁰.

The French version of this [theistic – A.S.] existentialism (with Gabriel Marcel), which was represented [in Lithuanian philosophy – A.S.] by Girnius, looks to me like the game of pulling a kitten’s tail : he knows in advance that God exists, that Christianity = truth, but he needs 200 pages to perform some sort of the senselessness of life.¹⁸¹

Concerning Nyka-Niliūnas, this reproach seems ungrounded : his *Diary Fragments* do not by any means confirm that he “knows of old that God exists” or that his doubts are “a comedy”. I would say that the existence of Nyka-Niliūnas’s God is very akin to His semiotic existence as defined by Greimas or Nietzsche (I will come to this later on). Nor is Juozas Girnius’s major work *Man without God*, which Greimas primarily had in mind, completely unequivocal in this respect. This book is a cautious effort to approach the phenomena of unbelief, or the forms of atheistic existence, and understand them¹⁸².

Another essential characteristic Greimas attributed to Lithuanian existentialists and reproved them for was inaction.

Besides, at the time I actively, sometimes day and night, “worked” in the resistance against the Germans, then against everybody else, while these seigneurs were sighing about the hopelessness of life and the kaleidoscopic beauty of their navels. (...) Past the resistance period – up to 52 (or so) – the question to face was about man as the victim of the historical process or as “a sick animal”. That’s probably why the gang of existentialist commanded by Girnius (a nice person, on the whole) seemed to me just a forgery. (...) my trajectory of life was dominated by ethics (my heroes were the adepts of *beau geste*) and not pathemics.¹⁸³

He also found the poetry of his generation inflicted with what the existentialists called *mauvaise foi*.

requirements for their art” (“Lietuvių literatūros istorijos santrauka,” in Jūratė Levina (ed.), *Apie viską ir nieką. Žmogus, visuomenė, kultūra*, forthcoming; also see “Littérature lithuanienne”, *Histoire des littératures*, vol. 2, *Littératures occidentales*, dir. Raymond Queneau, *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*, Paris, Gallimard, 1956, p. 1450).

180 To A. Šliogeris, 8 July [1990], *AJG1*, p. 394.

181 To S. Žukas, 21-22 December [1989], *AJG1*, pp. 364-365.

182 A. Sverdiolas, “Juozas Girnius – kartos filosofas”, “Juozo Girniaus praktinė filosofija”, *Kultūra lietuvių filosofų akiratyje*, pp. 443-476; A. Sverdiolas, “Tarp amžinybės ir laiko”, *Naujasis židinys-Aidai*, 6, 2015, pp. 21-30. — According to Girnius, in a philosophical consideration, there always remains the primacy of the question against answers, which also applies to the question of God. He admitted having read mostly unbelievers, rather than theologians; asked why, he replied with a joke : “It seems fitting to say that the devil knows” (“Laisvę turi apmokėti” : Juoza Girnių kalbina Arūnas Sverdiolas, *Naujasis židinys-Aidai*, 6, 2015, p. 19). Also see A. Sverdiolas, “Religijos iššūkis kultūros istorikui”, *Aiškinimo ratas. Hermeneutinės filosofijos studijos – 2*, pp. 229-252.

183 To S. Žukas, 21-22 December [1989], *AJG1*, p. 365. Incidentally, neither Girnius nor Nyka-Niliūnas or Nagys were “seigneurs”. Sometimes Greimas was carried away by his own rhetoric.

The so-called existentialist poetry is hypocrisy in front of oneself : bathing in the “horror” of life is a luxury, a holiday from life, just like bathing on a seaside beach : a man seeks for a way out from his authentic horror, he seeks to make life livable, to ground it in a system of values of his own — he does not invite others to the feast of his misery and desperation. The logical conclusion of choosing a particular system of values is action.¹⁸⁴

Greimas agreed with the activist version of existentialism and the Sartrean understanding of transcendence as a verb, as “transcending”¹⁸⁵. “Human activity (...) appears as a constant transcending of the human condition, as a daily surpassing, in the name of particular values chosen right here, of the given and always new situation”¹⁸⁶. “Knowledge must give grounds to action. To be free today means to know where you are and what you must do”¹⁸⁷. “Acknowledging the nature of these particular, immanent values (...) allows us to see real opportunities and sectors for human action.”¹⁸⁸ A man makes and completes himself in his actions in the world and not in interiority. Making his projects a reality, he simultaneously creates himself. Drawing a distinction between his view and that of Lithuanian existentialists within the territory of existentialism itself and proposing his own version of existentialism, Greimas resolutely asserted his own choice :

however wretched a man, his duty remains to gain knowledge of the world and to motivate human action with this knowledge. This is why existentialist philosophies, too, are worth just as much as they give an answer to the question what one should make of one’s own life, and how.¹⁸⁹

184 “Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas,” *AJG1*, p. 25. — Greimas agreed with Benda’s derivation of existentialism from Romanticism. “Romanticism was the first, in his view, to reject the aristocratic, male view of the world, grounded in the intellect, duty, and clarity, by escaping into ‘gentle phantasies’, quests for happiness, and consolation in religion. (...) Existentialism is only the extreme conclusion of this process, the crowning of it (...)” (“Julien Benda : Egzistencializmo tradicija arba gyvenimo filozofijos”, *Mintis*, *op. cit.*). Greimas testified that the historical time he lived placed a demand on nearly everyone to make a radical resolution and to act : “All were equally forced, day after day, to take a position, to choose, to tell the good from the bad — not in theory, not in the church, in the twilight of the confessional, but in real life, committing one’s own, and often one’s family’s, fate” (“Rašytojas ir moralė”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 370). “One was faced with the necessity to make, within hardly a few hours, a decision demanding to commit one’s whole life, whether to choose the East or the West, oppression or freedom” (“Nerami sąžinė”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 314). The Lithuanian existentialists he mentions, however, who chose exile for freedom at the same time as him, give very similar testimonies.

185 “Man is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized ; and, on the other hand, it is in pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist. Since man is this transcendence, he is himself the core and focus of this transcendence. The only universe that exists is the human one — the universe of human subjectivity” (J.-P. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, *op. cit.*, p. 52).

186 “Laisvės problema”, *Lietuviškasis liberalizmas*, *op. cit.*, p. 87. His aspiration for action reaches back into his youth and was a characteristic of his generation. “It is not possible to understand today that insanity, that madness which had taken over the youth of entire Europe in the twenties of the twentieth century, that drive for action which possessed it : act, act by all means, do something, push it whatever it takes... A youngster would become a fascist or a communist just because of the environment or circumstances (“Intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas,” *AJG1*, pp. 36-37 ; “Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas,” *AJG1*, p. 27).

187 “Laisvės problema”, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

188 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

189 *Ibid.*, p. 81. “The most painful fact in a man’s life — this will not be new — is, of course, birth. More painful than death. With death — even though this is a great injustice — one somehow, in a more or less satisfactory way, manages to deal. Against the fact of birth one is completely helpless. The other equally painful fact is

For him, living in itself was insufficient : it must be motivated, “justified” — dedicated to something, devoted. He reaffirmed and elaborated on this conviction later on.

3. Between sense and signification

Existential philosophy formatively affected a particular period of Greimas’s thinking and then remained a persistent stratum of his thought, covered up and transformed by other, subsequent frameworks. The quest for sense led Greimas away from existentialism — which, in his terms, primarily contemplates senselessness — towards the construction of a discipline — semiotics — which he defined as “a theory of meaning aiming at scientificity” (*à vocation scientifique*). The subject matter of semiotics will be discussed here just as much as necessary to examine its relations with philosophy which, in my view, constitute the frame and tenets of the theory Greimas developed. It seems to me possible and important to examine the entire content of semiotics from the philosophical viewpoint and to foregrounding the philosophical premises of semiotic principles¹⁹⁰. Nijolė Keršytė aptly remarks : “Since semiotics lack philosophical self-reflection, this ‘archeological’ work must be done ‘from the outside’”¹⁹¹. Greimas’s thought appears to have shifted along the same line of development he ascribed to the twentieth-century thought. The characteristically existentialist concern with the experience of essential senselessness, as Greimas’s insight goes, was followed by the phase of a positive search for sense (meanings) and worth (values), with which he associated his own theoretical efforts, too. With, first of all, Sartre and Camus as the departure points in mind, he wrote : “Our problem today (...) is not to examine the horror of human existence, not the senselessness of human life, but first of all to understand the human world”¹⁹².

In his maturity, Greimas claimed that his intentions remained the same as before, but his search took a different direction. In a 1971 lecture at Vilnius University, he said : “Thoughts about the meaning of life, thoughts that characterise the youth of every one of us, led me into thoughts about the meaning of things and the world”¹⁹³. To put it simply,

consciousness. Consciousness that you are alive, that you must live, that you must make of this life something” (“Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 23).

190 Paul Ricœur’s contribution to this is perhaps the most significant. Nijolė Keršytė has made several important steps in this direction (N. Keršytė, “A. J. Greimo semiotika teksto ir juslinės patirties analizės kryžkelėje”, *Filosofija. Sociologija*, t. 20, 1, 2009, pp. 44-53 ; *id.*, “Algirdo Juliaus Greimo semiotika tarp logocentrinio ir fenomenologinio mąstymo”, *Baltos lankos*, 30, 2009, pp. 111-126 ; *id.*, “Struktūralizmo ir fenomenologijos ‘santuoka’ A.J. Greimo semiotikoje”, *Athena*, 5, 2009, pp. 141-159 ; also see A. Sverdiolas, “Filosofas tarp semiotikų”, *Aiškinimo ratas*, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-276).

191 Nijolė Keršytė, “Struktūralizmo ir fenomenologijos ‘santuoka’ A. J. Greimo semiotikoje”, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

192 “Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 355. Greimas identified a parallel move of the twentieth-century thought in literature. “Alain Robbe-Grillet, a leading figure of the French neo-novel, has elaborated once on the difference between literature produced by his own generation and existentialist literature : the latter, denying sense to the human being and the world, makes them absurd ; the new generation, on the contrary, thinks that nonsense is a kind of affirmation of a form of sense and affirms not the senselessness of the world but its *nonsense*” (“Algimantas Mackus, arba namų ieškotojas”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 124). Greimas regarded Algimantas Mackus, a Lithuanian émigré poet of the younger generation, as “a poet of *Non-Sense* and not of the Absurd” (*ibid.*).

193 “Bendrosios semiotikos problemos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 39. Greimas considered the semiotic quest for sense parallel to other kinds of quests for sense. “Of course, a youngster may dream up sense, a poet write many beautiful verses about senselessness, a philosopher create profound theories : all these are different ways of acquiring knowledge of life and sense. And a man of science, willing to objectively apprehend and describe this self-evident and simultaneously incomprehensible phenomenon [sense – A.S.], what tools and facts can he operate ?” (“Vietoj pratarmės”, *Semiotika. Darbų rinktinė*, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6).

we live plunged like pups in a world where we are surrounded by things that are significant, that “attack” us with their meanings. From dawn to dusk all kinds of signs wouldn’t leave us alone but affect us either consciously or unconsciously. And this comprehension of the significant world can be an object of scientific inquiry.¹⁹⁴

Now Greimas uses the image of a pup to rewrite the Heideggerian notion *Geworfenheit*, thrownness into the world, adopted by existentialists through Sartre, in ostensibly semiotic terms, to set an aim of a scientific inquiry into human significations.

In an effort to establish a distance from the earlier phase in the twentieth-century (and his own) thinking and mark the specificity of the semiotic quest for sense, Greimas distinguished the notions of sense and signification. “The problem of sense, the problem of the meaning of human existence, was indeed an acute problem back in 1945 (...). But now this problem of *sense* for us (...) has been replaced with another problem, namely, the problem of *signification*”, he said in 1965¹⁹⁵. For “us” here means for Parisian intellectuals, the representatives of the human and social sciences, who dissociated themselves from existentialism and began creating what is generally called structuralism. These were, also, the years of thriving for structuralism. It is in the context of this development of thought that Greimas began his project of semiotics.

However, alongside this crucial change in thinking, he also saw continuity.

One may agree with one simple statement of fact, very similar in its projection to the existentialist starting point located, specifically, in man’s existence. We look at how man lives : we see that his life is surrounded by a screen of significations. All things, all that constitutes his context, all that is his environment pierce into him, irradiate him and signify something all the time. (...) And in this world of significations, he wants to understand what exactly that world signifies, what it wants to communicate to him, what it wants to impart.¹⁹⁶

Establishing a relative distance from existentialism, Greimas at the same time moved closer to phenomenology, the other fundamental source of his thought¹⁹⁷. Asked by Herman Parret about the role of sensuous perception in the constitution of meanings in language, he replied :

I will confess to you something that being a linguist I should not say. Of course I have been influenced both by Merleau-Ponty and by Husserl, and by phenomenology in general. That is the *epistémè* of my youth. It is nevertheless clear that linguists should succeed in putting between brackets the linguists’s philosophical *a priori*s.¹⁹⁸

194 “Bendrosios semiotikos problemas”, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

195 “Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 354.

196 *Ibid.*, pp. 354-355.

197 “But then I didn’t know either Husserl or Heidegger, or even Jaspers, no phenomenology as such, and I still consider existentialism just a childish deviation from it” (to Saulius Žukas, 21-22 December [1989], *AJG1*, p. 365).

198 H. Parret, *Discussing language*, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

The structural linguistics of Saussure and Hjelmslev required to bracket the referentiality of language, the relation of the word to the thing it refers to¹⁹⁹. This move, performed by linguistics, is parallel to the most important move of phenomenology itself: the reduction of metaphysical assumptions²⁰⁰. Having denied the possibility of ontology in radically sceptical terms, Greimas moved from being towards phenomena and their experience, towards given manifestations. After this move, he choses — without elaborating on it in detail — a new way forward which will be presupposed by his future investigations about sense: phenomenology. This is an anti- or post-metaphysical option. Greimas viewed philosophy as ontology, as the theory of the Thing, of substance, and distanced himself from it; but the philosophical theory of the manifestation and experience of the world — phenomenology — remains standing *alongside* semiotics, on the same side rather than in opposition to it. In other words, the nature of being and things as object of analysis has been replaced with manifestation (*fainestai*), with phenomenon (*fainomenon*).

The question is: manifestation of what? From the viewpoint of phenomenological philosophy, it is important that the reduction, the bracketing, does not eliminate the bracketed matter but only methodically delays its consideration, asking about its manifestation and givenness first. But Greimas's radical sceptical thesis about the unknowability of reality goes much further: in post-Nietzschean terms, it speaks about a manifestation without that which is manifested, about an appearance that has no reality beyond it. Values, meanings, or significations essentially link themselves not to that which is in-itself but to that which they are *for*, to their manifestation and experience. Unsurprisingly, Greimas says of the semiotics he created that this was “a variant of the Western episteme” of the 1960-70s, “choosing Merleau-Ponty and not Sartre — and Husserl rather than Heidegger”²⁰¹.

He highly valued phenomenology but did not discuss in detail either phenomenology itself or the relation of semiotics to it. Nonetheless, the characteristics of this relation may be reconstructed to an extent. According to him, the task for all thinking is to grasp the characteristic mode of being-in-the-world of every existent. “Every thing, animal, or human being has its own way of existing. The

199 Saussure did not deny either physical or mental realities but only separated them from the plane of linguistics and thus established its autonomy. Greimas claims to be doing the same: “So if I call *meaning* the relation of reciprocal presupposition between *signifier* and *signified*, I only interdefine those concepts and I make them operational without any metaphysical involvement” (*Discussing language*, p. 75). He gives a significant example: “A physicist is not asked whether he is a believer or an atheist. Why should one ask this to the linguist?” (*ibid.*) That is, metaphysical involvement, which Greimas does not at all deny but only methodologically brackets, falls into the domain of belief. And nonetheless, there is much more to have in mind, too. “Thought and reality are nebulae, as Saussure said — it is better to replace them by operational concepts. (...) Whatever ontological status may be given to reality, we are only concerned with it to the degree that is observable and describable” (*ibid.*). Observability is linked to perceptual givenness or “manifestation”, and describability to discursive articulation. “Yes, the world exists as it *is*, but it exists also according to what it *signifies*. It is the world of common sense, the world of perceptible qualities” (*ibid.*, pp. 75-76). Greimas does not notice that thereby he also, and quite essentially, in the empiricist framework of Modernity, defines the status of reality.

200 Jacques Derrida explains that Saussure, by distinguishing the “sound-image” from the objective sound, “gives himself the right to ‘reduce’, in the phenomenological sense, the sciences of acoustics and physiology at the moment that he institutes the science of language” (J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 63). Derrida continues: “The sound-image is the structure of the appearing of the sound [*l'apparaître du son*] which is anything but the sound appearing [*le son apparaissant*]” (*ibid.*), i.e. a phenomenon of linguistics, discovered by performing a phenomenological reduction.

201 To A. Šliogeris, 14 March [1990], *AJG1*, pp. 244-245.

relation of an observer to them, their appropriation depends on the grasp of an authentic tonality”²⁰². In essence, this is a Heideggerian characterisation of the phenomenological method of work, even if given *en passant*.

There is an important difference from phenomenology, however, which surfaces as soon as Greimas focuses on his pursuit of science, his “*vocation scientifique*”. Perhaps the most important plane on which he defines his own, semiotic, method of work is the distinction, already mentioned above, between philosophy and science.

A refusal to go into metaphysics or resort to the cheap evasion saying that “sense undoubtedly is there but nothing can be said about it” [this would be half-scepticism – A.S.²⁰³] leaves, to my mind, only one way out : instead of looking for ways to discuss the essence of sense, settle for the “scientific” viewpoint on this matter, trying to figure out in what conditions sense manifests itself, when and how one can speak about it.²⁰⁴

The question “What is the essence of sense ?”, which Greimas considers philosophical and unanswerable, must be replaced with a scientific – that is, semiotic – analysis of the manifestation of sense, or, to put it more precisely, of multiple and diverse significations. The scientific and the phenomenological do not coincide with but are very close to one another. Husserl too, after all, claims that phenomenological work must be carried out “in the realm where everything that can have a possible sense for us” manifests itself²⁰⁵.

Another Greimassian formula for the relationship between these theoretical disciplines proposes to integrate philosophy and linguistics.

But this is metaphysics already, this is Hegel if you wish, but Saussure also. My effort was, precisely, to integrate philosophical thinking with the thinking of linguistics and, in general, to search how sense comes about, how sense becomes signification. Since signification is articulation, the unsettling of sense, then sense, *sens*, is... What is *sens*, His Majesty God ?²⁰⁶

In other words, God here is not the source of being but the source of sense. Yet Greimas voices this as a question because to state this means to draw on onto-theo-logy, which he does not accept. The alternative he chooses is to examine the birth of sense, its constitution in a particular immanent region. “How does this abstract and pure matter give way to first articulations when people begin to understand one another, to see something ?”²⁰⁷ The Aristotelian primal matter, or chaos, turns into the semiotic nebula of sense. Greimas continues : “In what conditions ? This is like Husserl. He gave an

202 “Apie Antaną Liutkų ir padorius lietuvius,” *Iš arti ir iš toli*, pp. 244-245.

203 This relates to the tradition of the American linguist Leonard Bloomfield. Cf. A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, Paris, Hachette, 1979, p. 116.

204 “Poetika ir semiotika (S. Žuko pokalbis su A. J. Greimu),” *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 83.

205 E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

206 “Semiotikos istorija yra mano asmeninė istorija”, *AJG1*, p. 81.

207 *Ibid.*

example : a green leaf — how do we get to feel this, what is the perception of that green leaf ? (...). There is a problem here, what is the origin of that sense ?”²⁰⁸ On the one hand, “sense always manifests itself as an immediate given : this suffices for men to live and act in a significant world”²⁰⁹. On the other hand, Greimas stresses that nothing can be said about this immediately given sense without articulating it. So semiotics aims, precisely, to articulate sense, to turn it into a defined *signification*. It is impossible to speak meaningfully about sense but it is possible to speak about significations. As Mykolas Drunga put it, in a conference talk : “Greimas was a pessimist about sense but not about signification”. “The concept of meaning [*sens*] (...) is undefineable. (...) Before its manifestation in the form of an articulated signification, nothing can be said about meaning, unless metaphysical presuppositions full of implications are introduced”²¹⁰. Signification articulates sense. The analysis of significations is a kind of a cyclical detour, a hermeneutic circle leading from unarticulated to articulated sense. “We arrive at a first delimitation of the semantic field embraced by ‘signification,’ by opposing it to ‘meaning’, *i.e.*, by saving the latter term for that which is anterior to semiotic production”²¹¹. To say the same somewhat differently, “signification is simply [the] transposition of one level of language into a different language, and meaning [*sens*] is simply this possibility of transcoding”²¹². The possibility, but also the condition, the ground. And one could add that Greimas was not satisfied with signification alone : he yearned for sense, his “pessimism” about sense, even if in spite of itself, positively presumes a dimension of sense as depth, as opposed to the postmodern flatness of the limitless networks of significations.

He began his inquiry into the manifestation of sense as an inquiry into semantics. Biographically, this coincided with his work in Alexandria in 1949-1958. “Nine years (...) went by for me in a private, intimate contemplation on what exactly linguistics is, what language is, how one could make science out of it and, with the help of this science, understand the world”²¹³. It is with this precise period that he associated one of the most crucial transformative points in his intellectual biography : getting control of the inner chaos, acquiring an orientation, and crystallising his own theoretical stance. In a conversation with the historian of structuralism François Dosse, he characterised the same period as, also (even if with a grain of salt), a period of epistemology and phenomenology :

What can you talk about together when you have a philosopher, a sociologist, a historian, and a linguist ? The only common theme was to think about epistemology. I remember having thrown out the word, because they made fun of me at first, not really knowing very

208 *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

209 “La structure sémantique”, *Du sens. Essais sémiotiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, p. 39. “Men live in a signifying world. For them the problem of meaning does not arise ; meaning is a given : it imposes itself as an obvious fact, as an entirely natural ‘feeling of understanding’” (A.J. Greimas, “The Meaning of Meaning”, *The Social Sciences*, *op. cit.*, p. 7). Ronald Schleifer remarks that sense, according to Greimas, is the “given” he starts with and that its nature is experiential (R. Schleifer, *A.J. Greimas and the Nature of Meaning : Linguistics, Semiotics, and Discourse Theory*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1987, p. xvii, xix).

210 A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and Language. An Analytical Dictionary*, trans. Larry Crist et al., Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 187.

211 *Ibid.*, p. 298.

212 “The Meaning of Meaning”, *The Social Sciences*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

213 “Bendrosios semiotikos problemas,” *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 39.

well what it entailed. Phenomenology was in style and they were doing the phenomenology of whatever.²¹⁴

As to the analysis of sense, Greimas described its nature in his own terms : as, precisely, trans-coding, or simply paraphrase :

To paraphrase what a word or a sentence means, to say it “in other words” indeed is the only way to “grasp” sense. Sense, then, is precisely — now with no ontological commitment whatsoever — this possibility to talk about sense, this dynamic process of its construction.²¹⁵

To describe the current state of semantics and its conditions, the opening sentences of *Structural Semantics* say:

The problem of signification is at the centre of the preoccupations of our time. In order to transform an inventory of behavioral traits into anthropology and events in series into history [i. e. the human sciences – A.S.], our questions must concern themselves with the meaning [*sens*] of human activities and the meaning [*sens*] of history. The human world as it appears to us is defined essentially as the world of signification. The human world can only be called “human” to the extent that it means [*signifie*] something.²¹⁶

Sense and signification, the attributes of man, here are, so to speak, parasynonyms that intertwine in a discussion of one or the other.

The field of inquiry thus defined is remarkably broad :

The first observation concerning signification must deal with its character, which is both omnipresent and multiform. One is naïvely surprised when one starts to reflect on the situation *of man*, who, from morning to evening and from birth to death, is literally assailed by significations challenging him from everywhere, by messages reaching him at every moment and in all forms.²¹⁷

The specific “semantics which proceeds from this declaration of the omnipresence of signification can only be confused with the theory of knowledge, striving either to supersede it or yield to some particular epistemology”²¹⁸. Subsequently Greimas developed semiotics by moving from semantics towards discourse analysis.

Let us briefly return to the question of the minimal philosophical premises of semiotics. Considering such inevitable premises, even if they must be kept at bay to the best of one’s capacity,

214 In F. Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, *op. cit.*, p. 68. *Histoire du structuralisme*, Paris, La découverte, 1992.

215 “Poetika ir semiotika”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 83. See also “La structure sémantique”, *Du sens*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

216 *Structural Semantics*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

217 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

218 *Ibid.*

Greimas turned to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception : "It is self-consciously that we propose to consider perception as the nonlinguistic place where the apprehension of signification is situated"²¹⁹. As he has it, "it is difficult to imagine other criteria of relevancy acceptable to everyone"²²⁰. This is a philosophical residue which, as it turns out, one cannot do without. As Greimas himself puts it, "semantics is recognized openly as an attempt to describe the world of sensible qualities"²²¹. That is, the manifestation of sense and its grasp take place in a region that is not restricted to the plane of language : semantics breaks through the boundaries of language to include sensuous perception and corporeal being in the world.

The same question returns in the article "Toward a Semiotics of the Natural World," as it reformulates Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception in semiotic terms. As Greimas has it,

the only conceivable presence signification can take on in the world is through its manifestation in the "substance" surrounding men. From this perspective the sensible world as a whole becomes the object of the quest for signification. (...) Signification can be concealed behind all sensible phenomena ; it is present *behind* sounds, but also behind images, odors, and flavors, without being in sounds or in images (as perceptions) *themselves*.²²²

Sounds and images "themselves" are abstractions — they are what Saussure calls substance. Besides, this is a metaphysical notion — just as perception is, if it is understood in the sense used in empiricism, as the sensible data. These are not phenomena but the products of their analysis, of breaking them apart. Yet both semiotics and phenomenology are concerned with something else : with manifestation, with phenomena. Merleau-Ponty describes : "When through the water's thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of a pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections there ; I see it through them and because of them"²²³. To answer a question asked by Saulius Žukas, Greimas put it in a more precise way : "perception is neither in the eyes nor in the things but somewhere half-way"²²⁴.

He explains that an effort to include sensuous perception into the field of inquiry is

primarily destined to broaden the problematics of this "natural" dimension of semiotics being studied. Only in this way can the diverse and multiple manifestations of meaning be understood, interpreted, and integrated into a generalized theory of semiotics.²²⁵

He speaks of an "effort to go beyond a linguistics limited to natural languages and to work out a general semiotics (...)"²²⁶. This resolution removes "the distinction between linguistic semantics and

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² A.J. Greimas, *On Meaning*, *op. cit.*, p. 17 (translation modified).

²²³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", transl. Carleton Dallery, in James M. Edie (ed.), *The Primacy of Perception and other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 182.

²²⁴ "Semiotikos istorija yra mano asmeninė istorija", *AJG1*, pp. 71-72.

²²⁵ "Toward a Semiotics of the Natural World", *On Meaning*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

Saussurean semiology”²²⁷, which vastly expands the field of possible research, for it opens a way towards a universal semiotics covering what phenomenology calls the lived world (*Lebenswelt*) in its entirety, as opposed to the semiotics of discourses only²²⁸. The world is primarily meaningful for semiotics in the same way as it is primarily experienced for phenomenology. The *Analytical Dictionary* of semiotics states that “the natural world is a figurative language the figures of which — which we encounter once again on the content plane of natural languages — are made up of the ‘sensible qualities’ of the world and act directly — without linguistic mediation — upon us”²²⁹.

A doubt remains, however, whether the binding of the givenness of the world to the “sensible qualities” of things is not a characteristically empiristic naïvety (Greimas puts them into inverted quotes for a reason). Although this frequently goes unnoticed, a sensible quality is a monstrous (phenomenological-metaphysical) compound of the thing itself with its givenness to experience. Yet Eric Landowski explains that

a statement about the *direct* or “unmediated” quality of the sense effects being described is not at all the naturalization of sense but, on the contrary, this (...) is an attempt to account for categories at work in these sense relations. (...) the “natural world” is, too, a kind of “language” (...) and the effort is, precisely, to construct its “grammar.”²³⁰

This is an acknowledgement that a language of “the world itself” is a premise of semiotics. General semiotics, as Greimas has it, allows that

we (...) consider the extralinguistic world as no longer being the *absolute* referent, but as the place where what is manifested through the senses can become the *manifestation* of human meaning, that is to say, of signification. In short, all we have to do is to consider the referent as a set of more or less implicit semiotic systems.²³¹

Hence

it is necessary to postulate the existence and the possibility of a *semiotics of the natural world* and to think of the relation between (“natural”) signs and linguistic systems, on the

226 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

227 *Structural Semantics*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

228 Such a project of a semiotics of the lived world — beyond discourse — has been in part implemented by Greimas himself, notably in his last book, *De l'Imperfection* (Périgueux, Fanlac, 1987), and further developed by some among his disciples. See for example Eric Landowski, *Les interactions risquées*, Limoges, Pulim, 2005 ; Francesco Marsciani, *Tracciati di etnosemiotica*, Milano, FrancoAngeli 2007 ; Jacques Fontanille, « La sémiotique des mondes vivants », *Actes Sémiotiques*, 122, 2019.

229 A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and Language*, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

230 E. Landowski, “Drugys Jano veidu,” in A.J. Greimas, *Struktūrinė semantika*, Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2005, p. 26.

231 “Toward a Semiotics of the Natural World,” *On Meaning*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

one hand, and signs and systems of signification of the natural world, on the other, (...) as a *network of correlations between the two levels of signifying reality*.²³²

3.1. Semiotic existence and His Majesty God

Greimas also spoke of a special — sense-oriented, or semiotic — existence.

And the chair itself, where is it now ? Hanging in the air somewhere. This is *signifié*. That signified has a particular *mode d'existence*, it exists in a particular way. This way of existence I call semiotic existence.²³³

One of the most primary functions of a figurative language is, of course, its obligation to create the so-called internal referent of discourse, giving an impression that the writer, by using the images and figures of the world, in fact describes and pictures the world's reality. This way discourse creates its own illusions of “reality” and “truth.”²³⁴

Truth might be talked about if reality itself spoke. But reality itself, as Greimas has it, is unknowable, hence there can be no such talk. This is precisely why the classical Aristotelian notion of referential truth, truth as the correspondence of thought to reality, is replaced with the notion of truth as the internal coherence of discourse and, simultaneously, illusion.

There is no reality of the world or its orthoscopic representation, there are only efforts to imagine it, to symbolise it. (...) The four-century old European world of Euclidian geometry is the same kind of superstition as the Byzantine or African style of it. Our world is a human-made selection, and to describe and organise this selection one needs a continuous, valid system of signing.²³⁵

Total illusion, appearance or the imaginary bring us back to Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche's most radical thesis concerning the problematics of knowledge was paradoxical : truth is an error.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ “Semiotikos istorija yra mano asmeninė istorija”, *AJG1*, pp. 97-98. It is also possible to speak of the phenomenological existence of a chair. “What is at stake for semiotics today is to affirm this *praesentia in absentia*, that semiotic *existence* as the object of its own discourse and as the condition of its activity of theoretical constructions happens to be, while nevertheless maintaining the necessary distance with respect to ontological commitments. For semiotics, to raise the issue of an ‘ontic horizon’ is to question a set of conditions and preconditions, to sketch an image of meaning both prior to and necessary for its discretisation, and not to attempt to lay bare its ontological foundations. It is only in this way that semiotic theory can justify its own activity, without transforming itself into philosophy, which it can never be” (A.J. Greimas and J. Fontanille, *The Semiotics of Passions. From States of Affairs to States of Feeling*, transl. Paul Perron and Frank Collins, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. xix).

²³⁴ “Poetika ir semiotika”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 82. “Meaning effect (...) is an impression of ‘reality’ produced by our senses in contact with meaning, that is to say, with an underlying semiotic system. It can be said, for example, that the world of common sense is the meaning effect produced by the encounter of the human subject and the world as object. (...) the word ‘meaning’ must be understood as ‘meaning effect,’ the sole graspable reality, but one which cannot be apprehended directly. As a result, semantics is not description of meaning, but it is the construction which, aiming at producing a representation of signification, will be validated only to the extent to which it can give rise to a comparable meaning effect” (A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and Language*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-188).

²³⁵ “Mintys apie H. Radauską ir jo strėlės vietą lietuviškame danguje”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 118.

Appearance, in the sense I take it, is the true and unique reality of things — that only to which all existing predicates are applied and that which, to a certain extent, could not be better defined as by the totality of those predicates, i.e., also by contradictory predicates. (...) I do not posit therefore “appearance” in opposition to “reality” ; on the contrary, I consider that appearance is reality, the one that resists any transformation into an imaginary “true world”.²³⁶

Therefore, philosophy must concern itself with appearance. The scholar of Nietzsche’s philosophy Michel Haar, to my mind, puts it in most precise terms, and his conclusion also applies to Greimas :

“Appearance” is not a subject among others, but the one *subject* to which all thinkable attributes are adequate ; it is the unique structure, and the unique content, of every being — whether manifest or hidden, true or deceitful, inessential or essential. It designates the totality of everything in existence and that is why all “positive” or “negative” predicates can be applied to it. There is nothing like nonappearance, except pure nothingness. Every being — real, possible, imaginary, logical or illogical — belongs to “appearance”.²³⁷

Reflecting on such total appearance, Nietzsche proposed a corresponding notion of truth, asking rhetorically : “Actually, why do we even assume that “true” and “false” are intrinsically opposed ? Isn’t it enough to assume that there are levels of appearance and tones of appearance — different *valeurs*, to use the language of painters ?”²³⁸ This range of *valeurs* — that is, reflections and hues, as well as values — manifests nothing other than the principle of gradation, proposed here instead of the opposition principle characteristic of metaphysics. Nietzsche drew on the gradation of appearances in the so-called philosophy of life and axiology, which he created as an alternative to the ontology he denounced. He applied the notions of reflections, shades, and most importantly values, borrowed from the fine arts, to the sphere of life considered to be the all-embracing primal reality. In Nietzsche’s philosophy, appearance is a phenomenon that has no reality behind it. The horizon of illusions is all-embracing and intransgressible. Jean Baudrillard will call this “hyperreality”. The Nietzschean notion of total appearance essentially characterises Greimas’s thought, too. Here is the reason why he referred to semiotic existence as “being-as-if”. In a letter to Arvydas Šliogeris, he writes :

everything happens on another plane already, a plane characterised perfectly well by the little phrase “as if” which you use very well. (...) “Everything happens as if...” and this is then followed by all kinds of great truths...²³⁹

236 F. Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, op. cit., Bd. 11, p. 654 ; translation quoted from M. Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

237 M. Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, op. cit., p. 58.

238 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, op. cit., p. 35.

239 To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, pp. 438-439.

“Then” means on the plane of assumption. “‘Everything happens as if...’ is a sign of the scientific approach”²⁴⁰. Scientific here stands for semiotic, of course.

However, it would not be right to say that Greimas and Šliogeris agreed on the subject ; on the contrary, this in fact is the point of essential difference between their ways of thinking. For Šliogeris, “as if” marks illusoriness, unreality, it presupposes that which is concealed by appearance and which is *true* and truly *is*. The as-if-being, as Šliogeris understands it, is a veil that covers the thing-being, and he formulates his conception of sensuous transcendence accordingly. Meanwhile, for Greimas, assumed appearance is the only “reality” which can be experienced and beyond which there is no other, “true” reality²⁴¹.

*

A shift from ontology to axiology and semiotics does not cancel questions about either being at large or God ; it transforms them instead, for them to arise anew on the planes of sense and value, manifestation and illusion, and anthropology. This is a turn in the history of Western thought which had crucial consequences and which Nietzsche called the death of God. Greimas thought that God does not exist but makes sense. As he puts it, “approaching God in the semantic sense (but not adding the problem of existence, which is not relevant to us), God is made of all we say and say and say about him, and nothing else”²⁴². In other words, his existence is semiotic. On the semiotic plane, God, formerly the paramount existent and the source of the being of all existents, turns into the source, the signifier, and the so-called “Sender” of sense²⁴³. “Whether the name of God is mentioned, as in Hegel, or not mentioned, as in Marx, this is just the same illusion of humanity”²⁴⁴. In other words, ontological transcendence here turns into a Kantian transcendentality, into a Nietzschean “illusion” belonging to a

240 *Ibid.*, p. 430.

241 Greimas identified a turn of thought parallel to his own Nietzschean move from being and truth to appearance, illusion, and assumption, in the poetry of his *alter ego*, Henrikas Radauskas (see above). In his obituary for him, Greimas wrote : “Henrikas Radauskas was a chivalrous man of Albert Camus’s generation and his chosen style *to live as if...* / I believe not in the world, but in the fairytale I do. / To live as if both life and death were just a fairytale. To enjoy, like a child, the tales of others, to write beautiful tales oneself. To take tales seriously” (“Henrikas Radauskas (1910.IV.23–1970.VII.27)”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 272). “His everyday aestheticism was just as consistent and demanding as his poetry. He attempted to act according to the same principle : *to live as if* life was beautiful” (*ibid.*, p. 273). Such aestheticism presupposes a corresponding notion of culture : “Culture is form, it means just that which its form says, its meaning is the richness of forms” (*ibid.*).

242 “Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 356.

243 “Often posited as belonging to the transcendent universe, the Sender is the one which communicates to the subject-Receiver (belonging to the immanent universe) not only the elements of modal competence, but also the set of values at stake” (A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and language*, *op. cit.*, p. 294). Landowski notes that the fundamental conceptual tool of semiotics — the narrative scheme — depends on fundamental premises : it “derives from a clearly defined moral (as well as psychological, social, political, and even legal) framework which determines the status of the *subject* and his relationship with his ‘sender’” (E. Landowski, “Rizikingos sąveikos”, *Prasmė anapus teksto*, *op. cit.*, p. 227). Sender, of course, is none other than the Greimassian “His Majesty God,” on the semiotic plane turned into the giver of the system of values or meanings. I would say, with Landowski again, that this notion belongs to a kind of semiotic theology and has a respectable equivalent in the tradition of Western thought to which semiotics is closely related even if it tries to methodologically distance itself from it, by rigorously defining and controlling its conceptual tools. “God on the one hand, the Sender on the other : on two distinct isotopies within the same tradition, ours, these two names, almost synonymous, syntactically designate, the former for the “believer”, the latter for the “subject”, one sole transcendental instance of which depend, for both, both the value of things and the sense of life”. (E. Landowski, “*Shikata ga nai*, ou Encore un effort pour être sémioticiens !”, *Lexia*, 11-13, 2012, p. 70). The “Sender” (with its capital letter) is no other than the monotheistic God who uses the word to create the world, with its qualities, and the human being, with his abilities.

244 “Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 357.

particular culturally delimited field, the field of the experience of Western civilisation dominated by a monotheistic religion.

The Greimassian discourse of unmasking about the illusion of belief discussed above, too, has another side. In a letter to Šliogeris he wrote : “But don’t let it upset you, His Majesty God can read better than his servants and he understands that naming him the “As-if-Being” in fact is the adoration of him, the sanctification of his name”²⁴⁵. The question of the meaning of God and of believing in him is much broader than the question of religious faith : it inscribes itself into the general problematics of appearance and assumption. This binds semiotics and belief.

There is no priest in France who doesn’t know what semiotics is. This is understandable because these are people who still have some faith, who more easily accept the rules of the game demanding not to speak of the referent. Semiotics is a method of knowledge and not the knowledge of Being.²⁴⁶

Both semiotics and faith seek sense, they both strive for the signified and not the referent. This quest, as Greimas has it, does not coincide with the knowledge of being and in this sense is contrary to it. “The Cardinal of Lyon says that faith is a *quête du sens*, a quest for sense. For a true Christian there is no question whether God does or does not exist, it is a secondary question”²⁴⁷. This presupposes a certain stance in relation to transcendence : a knowledge of its radical otherness, “the sanctification of the name” of God. In this sense, the methodological boundary is a kind of semiotic devotion.

In a monotheistic culture, the world is considered to be God’s creation. God here is the transcendental source of sense and the totality of meanings is given as “ready-made.” But in the course of secularisation, once it has been claimed that there is no God, sense can only be derived from a source which is immanent. It can be only given by man himself. Greimas, however, as a relentless quester for sense, essentially drew on the post-monotheistic insight that “the only absolutely meaningful system of values is based on God. The world without God is tragically human”²⁴⁸. When there is no Absolute, there is no absoluteness either, and all that remains is the anthropological, cultural-historical relativity and relative worlds of meanings. Dealing with them, Greimas often resorts to pejoratives. “There are no absolute criteria that could free us from those worlds of sense in which we live and which would be another kind of criteria already : what remains is only a bare fact, only men’s blabber about human condition”²⁴⁹. He goes on to call it “talks about things without touching the things themselves”²⁵⁰. Nonetheless, these disparagingly named things are essential : they are none other than the linguistic articulation of the world, “frames for entire cultures we live in to inscribe

245 To A. Šliogeris, 6 December [1990], *AJG1*, p. 427.

246 “La sémiotique, c’est le monde du sens commun”, interview with François Dosse, *Sciences humaines*, 22, 1992, p. 15. F. Dosse quotes these words that Greimas said in their meeting in his *History of Structuralism*, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

247 “Semiotikos istorija yra mano asmeninė istorija”, *AJG1*, p. 97.

248 “Pirmasis intelektualinės autobiografijos bandymas”, *AJG1*, p. 25.

249 “Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 357.

250 *Ibid.*

themselves into”²⁵¹. At the same time, these are value-charged imperatives guiding human activities, “examples, archetypes according to which we try or may try to transform ourselves”²⁵².

3.2. Loyalty to oneself and what its left

Later in life, the futurist and great planner Greimas looked back trying to reassess his past and “settle the accounts”. He also admitted : “I feel a suicidal desire for confessions”²⁵³. In private letters, he began writing about defeats and fundamental failures of his pursuits²⁵⁴. Perhaps most concisely, he summarised his failures by the following :

For fifteen years I believed in Homeland, or did I only think I believed in it ? And tried to induce this belief in others. For thirty years, I believed in Science, in the necessity and usefulness of science to humanity. And tried to induce this belief in others. What’s left of those bubbles ? The homeland is going its own way, and the science to hell.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.* — The manifestation of both signifying frames and cases of transformation can be twofold, conceptual and figurative : “Models according to which we live inscribing ourselves into value systems or ascribing sense to our activities can manifest themselves in two ways. One of them is the way of conceptualising, manifest in abstract words, scientific terminology, or political ideology, and the other is the way of mythifying manifestation, which is the existence of the same ideological truths and lies thanks to poetry, religion, the arts, and all other inscribed and hidden values” (“Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 357). Hence Greimas distinguishes conceptual and figurative thought and manifestation of experience. To characterise figurativity, he draws on the etymological link of “imagination” to “image” in Lithuanian (*vaizduotė* and *vaizdas* respectively), which is absent in the Greek *phantasia*, but has equivalents in the Latin *imaginatio*. “Fantasy in the Lithuanian imagination is nothing more than thinking with images, not with abstract concepts. It is not an invention of non-existent and unknown objects, if only because this language built on images and representations provides a means for communication, so that with its help people reach agreement and understanding. (...) figurative language is universal, a common expression of all men” (A.J. Greimas, *Of Gods and Men : Studies in Lithuanian Mythology*, transl. Milda Newman, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 15). For example, mythology is a figurative form of ideology, a form which tackles, in its characteristic ways, essential questions of human existence. But the relationship between mythology and ideology is not symmetrical. Dealing with the myth calls for its demystification. “We must take a myth, be it an ancient myth or a folktale or a literary poem, and say what it means. And this saying what it means will be, precisely, the translation of every mythology into ideology, or the so-called demystification” (“Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 357). Just as Rudolf Bultmann and other thinkers of Protestant existentialist hermeneutics, Greimas sometimes (but not always) distinguishes between demystification and demythification, the latter defined as reinterpreting the text of confessional belief in existential terms (A. Sverdiolas, “Numitinimų mazgas : Rudolfas Bultmannas ir kiti,” *Būti ir klausti*, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-324). According to him, “to demythify means to describe poetry, describe religion, moral values, and art asking what it all means” (“Mitai ir ideologijos”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 359). Later on, Greimas’s primarily demystifying orientation shifted and he himself noticed it : “At the beginning (...), semiotics essentially had a vocation to demythologise, i. e. to show what things are as opposed to what they seem to be. And to do this from a very clear moral perspective. Later, Marxism was replaced in the scale of values by psychoanalysis : from 1968 onwards, the ethics of commitment was replaced with the ethics of pleasure. Today [in 1986 – A.S.], semiotics proposes to ‘renew’ values, by focusing on what man ought to be as opposed to what he is. (...) seeking above all to make life more acceptable by expanding the boundaries of knowledge and to add to it some grace, semiotics naturally exceeds its scientific project to become an aesthetics, an ethics, and almost an ideology.” (“Au commencement était Greimas”, *Le Quotidien de Paris*, *op. cit.*, p. 22).

²⁵³ To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 437.

²⁵⁴ It is an open question whether a sense of failure always accompanied his remarkably active work as a theorist, essayist, and organiser or became a systemic constituent of his self- and world-perception only at the time when Greimas realised that his life was coming to an end.

²⁵⁵ To A. Kašubienė, 10 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 355.

On completion of two books — *On Imperfection* and *The Semiotics of Passion* —, he faced the question what to do next. “I won’t manage to perform any miracles, nor will I invent anything new, isn’t it time to finish up with this shitty life ?”²⁵⁶

In reply to Kašubienė, who was writing a childhood memoir²⁵⁷ and had sent a manuscript of it to Greimas, he wrote :

You are trying to understand yourself by returning to childhood, I’ve been doing the same for four years [i.e. from 1984 – A.S.] by trying “to settle the accounts”. Trying to understand : have I really been a fraud my whole life ? Lying to others and myself. — This is what makes it hard to write to you : whether to lie while writing or make some kind of “confession” (...) although lying, too, sometimes embellishing it and sometimes soiling, or, most simply, — intensifying contrasts.²⁵⁸

And again, more than a year later : “You find me funny maybe. Or maybe you’ll understand my desperate anxiety you might have felt from all my letters : what to write, why to write, how to write ? How to not lie, how to not betray oneself, especially as one doesn’t know what one is ?”²⁵⁹ Greimas’s very first egological insight that the *I* is ungraspable to oneself seems to have always remained the fundamental premise of his self-conception.

At a certain point, which he dates precisely (and symbolically, of course), according to him, scientific thought reached a crisis, which raised the question of what to do next : “In the month of May 1968, Science fell apart, the belief in science fell apart, a wish to believe in anything collapsed, and we found ourselves in the new postmodern world”²⁶⁰. He asked :

How comes that, and why, a whole generation, very promising and recognised by the world’s general public — Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault (...) — how comes that the entire, maybe the last generation of the twentieth century could have been completely “messed up” by illiterates, by a small gang held together by Maoist slogans ? They come to my seminar and say : “Some say the earth goes around the sun. But maybe it’s the other way around, isn’t it ?” And I had nothing to say : surely, all talk about the turning of the earths and the suns is just *talk*, but where is the truth ? — And they messed it up.²⁶¹

He was not alone in feeling the crisis. François Dosse, recounting Greimas’s words, writes : “At the Collège de France, at the heart of the Latin Quarter and of the strikes, Greimas ran into Lévi-

256 *Ibid.*, 4 September [1990], *AJG1*, p. 411.

257 Aleksandra Kasuba, *Child Ticking*, San Jose, Writers Club Press, 2001.

258 To A. Kašubienė, 10 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 355.

259 *Ibid.*, 4 September [1990], *AJG1*, p. 412.

260 To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 438. — “The idea of progress tipped in the 1960s of this century. The age of universal disbelief dawned upon us” (“Algirdas Julius Greimas. Poetika ir semiotika”, *Iš arti ir iš toli*, p. 86).

261 *Ibid.* — He spoke of the three years of recognition with irony, even though a historian of structuralism describes approximately the same years as “The Golden Age of Formal Thinking” (F. Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-215, 219-222).

Strauss, who made no secret of his regret. ‘It’s over. All scientific projects will be set back twenty years’²⁶². Greimas characterises both the argumentation of “a small gang of illiterates” and his inability to resist it too succinctly and too satirically, but the important point here is that these characterisations draw on the fundamental moves of his thought from being to sense, or “talk” about being, from ontology to axiology and semiotics, from the true reality of the classical philosophy to the post-Nietzschean illusory reality “as if.” The crisis renewed the essential questions he had always been concerned with.

Now, settling the accounts, as he put it, “all of this, it seems, is bankrupt, or, at best, is at the other end of a long way across wastelands. Not because I wrote rubbish but because nobody needs ‘serious’ stuff, even the hard sciences now follow the principle ‘anything’s possible, anything’s permissible’²⁶³. This is the voice of the present, a voice which is difficult to capture, but which reverberates everywhere, and to which Greimas listened perceptively.

This led to the epistemological *attitude* which was expressed loud and clear by Feyerabend : *tout est permis*, there’s nothing true and one can do whatever one likes. (...) This was, precisely, the contemporary direction still dominating the [hard] sciences, which has then been taken up by the human sciences, that the maximum you can do is set some programme for three years, but nobody knows where this science is going or what basis there is to support it. So this *epistémé* is like demobilisation.²⁶⁴

There was, again, a personal horizon to this : “Surely, I had to withstand this atmosphere for twenty years. You can write anything at all”²⁶⁵. Nonetheless, Greimas did not think that the historical horizon of the twentieth century must be fatal to one’s personal choice. “The fact that bankruptcy is universal does not yet justify my personal failure. I myself, like an oak tree, remained standing against and endured all tempests for about ten years, maybe even longer”²⁶⁶.

262 *History of Structuralism, op. cit.*, p. 114.

263 To A. Šliogeris, 14 March [1990], *AJG1*, p. 379.

264 “Semiotikos istorija yra mano asmeninė istorija,” *AJG1*, p. 74.

265 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

266 To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 438. — This tenacity and loyalty are dramatic because Greimas was acutely aware of the fact that the ideal of the scientific truth is embedded in the horizon of historical change. “The idea of the scientific truth, absolutely paramount in the nineteenth century, developed, from the sociological viewpoint, more or less in opposition to the religious truth, from which it nonetheless inherited the rigour of its contours, its unshakeability. The twentieth century, with its quantum and relativity theories, demolished the Euclidean building of the world and shattered the tables of nature’s laws. The scientific truth turned into a scientific theory which is proposed in order to be *partly* confirmed by experimentation and *conclusively* rejected by a new theory or incorporated into it later. Scientific progress, which up to now moved forward in a straight line, today is understood as a dialectical self-destruction. It is not the recognition of absolute scientific truths that is important now but a certain autonomy of scientific work, a scientific freedom : a freedom to propose most incredible theories that may seem absurd to an amateur, a freedom to attack most sacred and most solid truths. (...) all a scientist needs is a freedom to transcend into an autonomous world of ideas where he will speak in his own language, where he will create his own, fragile values to be surpassed” (A.J. Greimas, “Rytai ir Vakarai”, forthcoming in J. Levina, *Apie viską ir nieką*). “The confidence of nineteenth-century scholars (...) placed in science, their reliance on ‘facts’ (...) cracked and finally crumbled after several Einstein-like evolutions in a variety of fields. After having lost all certitude and learned some humility, we readily admit that the facts belonging to one or another branch of science are selected by us. Assertions are created within our theoretical frameworks, and in the description of various human phenomena, despite the use made of the most rigorous methods and logical models, intuition often plays a leading role” (*Of Gods and Men, op. cit.*, p. 14).

This epistemic turn made Greimas return to the issue of his relationship with philosophy. Apparently, science differs in this respect from philosophy which, as Greimas has it, does not have to be communicated. “The philosopher’s first task at hand is to understand by establishing a discourse on meaning taken as an immense isotopic metaphor of the world. It is essentially contemplative in nature”²⁶⁷. That is, Greimas associated philosophy with a radically self-referential discourse, a discourse addressed to oneself, or simply with an insight which does not require any kind of expression or communication. This is, of course, an extreme view. However, as he puts it, whenever semioticians feel

obliged to work in areas that are traditionally those of philosophy, they do so only in spite of themselves : they even prefer to hide behind the screen of technical terms and depersonalized discourse. (...) their attitude is also governed by the fundamental principle that thought must lead to scientific practice.²⁶⁸

This kind of thinking in spite of oneself and an effort to hide this process are significant acknowledgements, bearing in mind the issue of a rather complicated relationship between semiotics and philosophy. Positively this means no less than a certain necessity of thinking itself. In any case, Greimas thought that a philosopher can stay alone with his thought, while this is not an option for a semiotician because “‘science’ requires, on top of coherence, ‘communicability’ also : a science whose results cannot be imparted is no science”²⁶⁹. It is due to this scientific — and therefore semiotic — characteristic of communicability that “it does not make sense anymore to stand like an oak tree alone”²⁷⁰. By implication, he would see that for a philosopher it would make sense. And yet, Greimas, as he himself admits, continued to stand²⁷¹.

Next to the two most important and, ultimately, unfulfilled aspirations of his life — “the construction of semiotic theory” and “the liberation of Lithuania,” i.e. planning and organisational activities along with essay writing and journalistic work related to Lithuania —, he began speaking in his letters, perhaps for the first time, about a third sphere : the sphere of the personal, of feelings, of self-hood. This, once more, brought up the problematics of the twofold egological plane. “I don’t think there is any need to speak about the third way of ‘life’, the personal, sentimental *Erlebnis* ; about this ‘little pile of dung’, the intimate ‘I’ of a man, as it is called by André Malraux”²⁷². Greimas admits he regrets not to have given to this way of life (written in quotation marks to keep an acceptable distance from it without meaning to reject it) enough attention.

267 “The Meaning of Meaning”, *The Social Sciences*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

268 *Ibid.*

269 To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 438.

270 *Ibid.*

271 Greimas considered tenacity the first Lithuanian virtue and highly valued it. In his obituary, Jean Delorme recalled : “One day he said to a friend : ‘You are a Lithuanian’. And when asked to explain it, he answered : ‘Ambitious and stubborn’. This must have been a compliment because, when a quest is driven by these qualities, no obstacles can discourage it. *The Semiotics of Passion* characterises obstinacy as a ‘semiotic style’ that leaves future unsettled” (J. Delorme, “Algirdas Julien Greimas”, *Sémiotique et Bible*, 67, 1992, p. 12). Cf. *The Semiotics of Passions*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

272 To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 439.

The trouble is that I believed in the meaningfulness of the quest for sense, in the necessity of a “theory” (...), I believed that one must say to others what one believes, that one must care about spreading “science” (...), and that this “economy” of life left no room for one’s own “self” : the gap between the two former “services” and the obligations to myself has grown so wide that the services look like mere simulacra, while all that’s left to one’s “human self” is a life not lived and an aching body.²⁷³

The designation of an independent person in the deliberately chosen terms of the Lithuanian thinker Vydūnas is associated here with a completely non-Vydūnian, diagnostic experience of an “aching body” (and, in the context of the twentieth-century thought, the problematics of the body belongs to egology, too²⁷⁴).

Considering this obligation to oneself (which, contemporarily, was the theme of the late works of Michel Foucault), Greimas made his characteristic sudden self-reflective turn cancelling his own thought : “This, of course, looks melodramatic, laughable, and unworthy of any chatter”²⁷⁵. And another such turn : “What’s left is nostalgia : what had to happen, what didn’t happen and what won’t happen. I’ve even written a small book about it [*On imperfection* – A.S.], but on a second thought, this is a kind of spiritual pornography, or at least exhibitionism, aimed at ‘romantic souls’”²⁷⁶. Barely two months earlier he had spoken somewhat differently, more moderately : “Having always thought ‘scientifically’ about *sense*, right now I want to finish a book about emotions [*Semiotics of Passions* – A.S.], starting off from the point that the constant state of a human being is *anxiety* and showing the relationships with others and oneself as a play of simulacra, i. e. *uncertainty*”²⁷⁷.

Thus he once again returned to what he began in his youth and had been doing all his life : to a quest for sense and various forms of this quest.

Since there is no truth — the exception being, maybe, the illusion of truth which comes about time to time in the rare cases of good communication —, there are no answers to badly put questions either : that’s why literature and philosophy and my “science” all are the same thing : these are, at best, just precisely posed questions.²⁷⁸

The replacement of bad questions with the precise ones is a minimal result, but a sure one, one that has been tested by the experience of thinking. The sense and purpose of the quest for sense, as we have seen, can be self-serving. In the setting of the post-Nietzschean total illusion and contemporary senselessness, this determination and loyalty acquires radicalness.

The second capital goal of Greimas’s life positions itself nearby :

273 To A. Kašubienė, *AJG1*, p. 323.

274 On Greimas’s relation to his bodily self, see Jūratė Levina, “Privačioji Greimo semiotika”, *AJG2*, pp. 231-271.

275 To A. Kašubienė, [13 October 1988], *AJG1*, p. 323.

276 *Ibid.*

277 *Ibid.*, [31 August 1988], *AJG1*, p. 321.

278 *Ibid.*, [13 October 1988], *AJG1*, p. 323-324.

I am much concerned about Lithuania's future. Of course, from the viewpoint of eternity, one couldn't care less, but the principle of "loyalty to oneself" is still alive. You see, once I devoted seven years of my beautiful youth exclusively to the "liberation of the homeland". So I am concerned with what to do, how to help, how to partake — as I read the likes of newspapers of all kinds in their dozens about their "democracy".²⁷⁹

To look "from the viewpoint of eternity" is a remnant of metaphysics, or its necessary supplement, which Greimas rejected as a whole, while loyalty to oneself is the germ of immanence and of the *I*'s sovereignty (a sovereignty indestructible even if the reflection bears on the *I*'s void), a remnant of the being of the *I*, which has not been illuminated by self-reflection. It is this persistent rudiment that makes one "want to keep a continuity in both the liberation of the homeland and the semiotic quest for the as-if-sense, as loyalty to oneself. Let the locomotive run on old tracks, even if you no longer know where you're going"²⁸⁰. With no project for the future at this point of crisis in life and in its reflection, resolution, tenacity, and loyalty to oneself had no other support but themselves.

Personal accounts did not settle either. "And how shall one die with such life balance? Even dying doesn't make any sense. Nevermind, I've tried to prove the opposite to myself (and others)"²⁸¹.

There's also this illusion, remnant from youth: "die decently," according to the ethics of beau geste. But I won't manage that. And that's only because there is no God to observe the comedy I play. And if there's no audience, why to play a comedy?²⁸²

Next to *Don Quixote*, which Greimas recalls many times, this brings to mind *The Great Theatre of the World*, by Pedro Calderon, that he probably never mentions. Longing for the true being, the "true truth", and the true sense always remained essential to him. However, once the being of God, observing the Augustinian-Calderonian theatre of the world, is denied, one is left with a much inferior human "audience": individuals who share and live in the world of meanings (including the meaning of God).

In an interview taken after Greimas's death, Luisa Ruiz Moreno asked his widow Teresa Keane Greimas:

The theme of the last seminar Greimas led was "beau geste". Interestingly enough, rumour has it that Greimas himself was a man of beau geste. Teresa, you have observed from near and far, and you can now see other people's perceptions as if provoked by his

279 *Ibid.*, 4 September [1990], *AJG1*, p. 411. — See A. Sverdiolas, "Greimo demiurgija: lietuvių kultūros projektas", *Darbai ir dienos*, 68, 2017, pp. 85-128.

280 To A. Šliogeris, 6 December [1990], *AJG1*, p. 430.

281 To A. Kašubienė, 10 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 356.

282 *Ibid.*, 22 July [1990], *AJG1*, p. 399. "I didn't know how to live, I won't know how to die, perhaps, either" (*ibid.*, [26 March 1989], *AJG1*, p. 339). "One of my dreams — from the days of youth — was to 'die decently'. Because I don't know how to live decently. Everything gets banal, or I make it banal. This letter here, and the talk of 'death' — they've got banal already, haven't they?" (*ibid.*, 10 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 356). Such short circuits usually are ascribed to psychology, but in fact these flashes of destructive reflection completely change the sense of utterances, radicalise them extremely.

humane acts. How would you characterise these gestures, which are, also, part of Greimas's legacy?²⁸³

She gave a succinct but precise reply :

Greimas. A man of *beau geste*. The freedom of an individual to say “no” (...), to surpass the boundaries of social morality. The assertion of oneself or, which is even more important, self-respect. An *obligation* to be constant. A small, unrepeatable gesture aiming for sensitive goals. The ethics-aesthetics of everyday life while waiting for something different.²⁸⁴

Greimas's theoretical conclusions about the existence of sense were echoed by the personal and practical ones. “I, protesting against my life, throughout all life tried to build a ‘life’ worth something, a life ‘as if’ it were greater than life”²⁸⁵. Thomas Broden has commented on the his first published text : “Don Quixote becomes a symbol to inspire men to place the meaning of life above life itself”²⁸⁶. Sense, for him, was more important than anything else, including life itself. To simply live is not enough because life by itself makes no sense and is worthless. It is to be made meaningful and worthy. Thus, it is not a given but an aim, a move of transcending in the horizon of thinking opened up and articulated by Nietzsche²⁸⁷. But even this remains equivocal :

Hence the schizo-split : one has to lead a double life. But how to settle the accounts of that second life ? When unbearable moments come, it seems you have already said all you wanted to say but nobody wants it ; that what you, as it sometimes seems, still have to say – that there is a world of values, that one must search for way towards grace – that all of this makes no sense in today's world, or tomorrow's.²⁸⁸

“What's left when there's nothing left ? : ‘Ideas, if they're great, do not die like people’”²⁸⁹ he wrote, quoting a line from the poem *Jaunoji Lietuva (Young Lithuania)* by the romantic poet Maironis. “I want to naively pose ‘eternal questions’ : when there's nothing left, there's still left a will for the beautiful. *Basta*”²⁹⁰. Eternal questions and the beautiful, which Greimas peculiarly connects

283 “Algirdas Julius Greimas, žmogus ir kūryba”, Teresa Mary Keane Greimas kalbina Luisa Ruiz Moreno, *AJG1*, p. 506.

284 *Ibid.*, p. 507.

285 To A. Kašubienė, 20 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 356.

286 T.F. Broden, “Algirdas Julius Greimas : vaikystė, mokslai ir karo metai”, *AJG1*, p. 685 ; quoted from the original manuscript in English.

287 “I moaned ‘in wastelands’ because I have to do work I don't like, don't want, but which has to be done, because I am beginning to dislike things that have to come with this word ‘have to’. Alas, I haven't learned to live otherwise. Ellipsis.” (To A. Kašubienė, 25-27 December [1990], *AJG1*, p. 433).

288 To A. Kašubienė, 20 July [1989], *AJG1*, p. 356-357. — The crisis of values was a concern for him. “In the last few years, the word ‘values’ lost its value so much that we don't dare to utter it. (...) We must find a way out of this period of insignificance, that is to say of the flattening of values”. (“La France est gagnée par l'insignifiance”, *Le Monde*, *op. cit.*).

289 To A. Šliogeris, 9-11 March [1991], *AJG1*, p. 437.

290 *Algirdo Juliaus Greimo ir Aleksandro Kašubienės laiškai*, *op. cit.*, p. 221. “My labour of twenty years, completed with the construction of a scientific terminology : every word must have only one meaning and one

with a colon, seem to me very different things. To pose “eternal questions” means to return to what has been, to look back into the past or, more precisely, to return back into the pro-past of Platonic ideas, repeat them, follow them, and thereby reify them existentially. This is especially important when referring to the futurist Greimas. The so-called “will for the beautiful” means a trustful wait for aesthesis, without any programming or planning, without even a possibility of getting ready for it. For him, appearance, simulacrum, illusion, this all is far from enough: he desired reality and transcendence, and he spoke (although very cautiously) about the tearing of the veil of appearance. On the unnumbered opening page of *On Imperfection*, he wrote: “All that appears is imperfect: it covers being, (...) can this shroud of mist tear apart a little and begin opening up, towards life or towards death, who cares?”²⁹¹ The expression of indifference here tells us that transcendence is not only death but life also, and that in the very heart of immanence, within the realm of ownness, there is a nameless and speechless, ungraspable, mysterious otherness.

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definition; all words of the terminology must be inter-defined... But now all of that has gone into thin air and the last book, which came out last year, is called *On imperfection*” (To A. Kašubienė, 22 July 1988, *AJG1*, p. 318). “*Imperfection* is perhaps the last ideational stage of the journey. Right now, I am preparing an introductory seminar lecture on *beau geste*, asking myself whether ideas can be ‘beautiful’ at all” (To A. Šliogeris, 21 August [1991], *AJG1*, p. 456).

291 A.J. Greimas, *De l’Imperfection*, Périgueux, Fanlac, 1987, p. 9. — “In the end, I was immersed in aesthetics! (...) Insignificance lurking in the world around us, that persistent inherent stupidity provoked my response: there are beautiful things we have in our imagination. Perhaps there is a possibility of an encounter, a gentle breeze of plenitude, even if for a second, which brings a human being into a complete fusion with the world and gives belief in life — or in death (...). That’s all we are left with when there is nothing to lose...” (“Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992). Le maître-mot”, interview with Ugnė Karvelis [1991], *Cahiers lituaniens*, 5, 2004, p. 50). Both life and death are real — existential and not simulacral — phenomena.

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Abbreviations

AJG1 : A. Sverdiolas (ed.), *Algirdas Julius Greimas. Asmuo ir idėjos*, vol. 1, Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2017.

AJG2 : A. Sverdiolas and E. Landowski (eds.), *Algirdas Julius Greimas. Asmuo ir idėjos*, vol. 2, Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2019.

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