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KANT, SOEMMERRING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SENSE OF HEARING

ABSTRACT: The following essay takes its cue from the importance that Soemmerring attributes to the sense of hearing in the *Über das Organ der Seele* (1796), a text published with a comment by Kant. First, I point out that the idea of a primacy of the sense of hearing is shared by Soemmerring with Heinse, a famous writer of the time (and by Heinse with Herder). Second, I compare these ideas with Kant's growing interest for the close connection between the sense of hearing, language and thought, giving due attention to his theses on deafness. Finally, I propose the hypothesis that not a late and tacit agreement with Herder, but Soemmerring's statement that hearing is the most important of our senses, might be the reason for the strengthening of Kant's conviction that "thinking is speaking and the latter is hearing", testified by the *Opus Postumum*.

SOMMARIO: Il seguente saggio prende spunto dall'importanza che Soemmerring attribuisce al senso dell'udito in *Über das Organ der Seele* (1796), un testo che contiene in appendice un commento di Kant. In primo luogo, si fa notare che le idee circa il primato del senso dell'udito sono condivise da Soemmerring con Heinse, un famoso scrittore del tempo (e sono condivise da Heinse con Herder). In secondo luogo, si pongono a paragone queste idee con il crescente interesse di Kant per la stretta connessione fra il senso dell'udito, il linguaggio e il pensiero, dando la dovuta attenzione alle sue tesi sulla sordità. Infine, si propone l'ipotesi che non un tardo e tacito accordo con Herder, ma l'affermazione di Soemmerring che l'udito è il più importante dei nostri sensi sia la ragione del rafforzamento della convinzione di Kant che "pensare è parlare e quest'ultimo è un udire", testimoniato nell'*Opus Postumum*.

KEYWORDS: Kant; Soemmerring; Heinse; Hearing; Language

In 1795 Samuel Thomas Soemmerring (1755-1830)¹ – the author of a monumental work in six volumes on the construction of the human body² – asked Kant to comment on an essay he was going to publish with the title *Über das Organ der Seele*, in which he intended to locate the ‘seat of the soul’ in the ventricular fluids of the brain.³

1. *Asking Kant for a philosophical comment*

It is strange that Soemmerring should ask Kant for a comment. In his essay Soemmerring mentions Ernst Platner, whose work he acknowledges not only as one of his sources but even as one of the foundations of his main idea.⁴ Kant had a low opinion of Platner’s program of a “physiological anthropology”, as exposed in the *Neue Anthropologie für Ärzte und Weltweise*.⁵ In a letter to Herz, written around 1773, Kant refers to a review of Platner’s book published by his correspondent but only to highlight the novelty of his own plan to make anthropology into a “proper academic discipline”, a plan from which, he says, the “eternally futile inquiries as to the manner in which bodily organs are connected with thought I omit entirely”.⁶

In 1791 this kind of criticism had been publicly renewed by Ludwig Heinrich Jakob, one of Kant’s acknowledged followers. In a book, containing a chapter entitled “Von der Gemeinschaft der Seele und des Körpers”, Jakob maintains:

¹ The name of this author is spelled in a variety of ways: Sömmerring, Sömmerring, Soemmerring. The choice of the spelling Soemmerring is in agreement with AA 12, p. 30, as well as with recent scholarship. Nonetheless, other spellings have been maintained, where necessary, for philological reasons.

² S. T. Sömmerring, *Vom Baue des menschlichen Körpers*, 6 vols, Frankfurt, Varrentrapp & Wenner, 1791-1796.

³ Id., *Über das Organ der Seele*, Königsberg, Nicolovius, 1796.

⁴ Ibid., § 62, p. 67, quotes extensively, and in total agreement, a text by Platner that he calls *Quaestiones Physiologicae*, but whose exact title is E. Platner, *Quaestionum physiologicarum libri duo: quorum altero generalis altero particularis physiologicae potiora capita illustrantur; praecedit prooemium tripartitum de constituenda physiologiae disciplinae*, Lipsiae, Crusius, 1794, Liber I, § 1, p. 57.

⁵ E. Platner, *Neue Anthropologie für Ärzte und Weltweise*, Leipzig, Dyck, 1772.

⁶ Kant’s letter to Markus Herz, AA 10, p. 145, in I. Kant, *Correspondence*, trans. and ed. by A. Zweig, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999. See T. Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, Münster, Mentis, 2009, p. 265 (see also the whole chapter on “The Critique of Physiologicae”).

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Looking for the physical point of this community, i.e., wanting to search for the seat of the soul, means to occupy oneself with a totally useless work. For a place is a relation in space and the latter can therefore pertain only a material substance. But, since the soul is not an object of the outer sense (§ 12), the soul is no material substance; thus it follows that no place can be attributed to it, and the question of the seat of the soul is completely senseless. The soul is everywhere she acts and produces changes. In this sense, therefore, the body, with which she is in immediate community, is her place, because she acts in and through it.

Den physischen Punkt dieser Gemeinschaft suchen, d.h. den Sitz der Seele bestimmen zu wollen, heißt sich mit einer ganz vergeblichen Arbeit abgeben. Denn ein Ort ist ein Verhältniß im Raume, und dieser kann daher nur einer materiellen Substanz zukommen. Da aber die Seele gar kein Gegenstand des äussern Sinnes (§. 12) mithin auch keine materielle Substanz ist; so folgt, daß ihr gar kein Ort beigelegt werden kann; und daß die Frage über den Sitz der Seele völlig sinnlos ist. Die Seele ist allenthalben, wo sie wirkt und Veränderungen hervorbringt. In diesem Sinne ist also der Körper, mit dem sie in unmittelbarer Gemeinschaft steht, ihr Ort, weil sie in und durch denselben wirkt.⁷

In 1795, the same year Soemmerring asked Kant to comment on his essay so indebted to Platner, the latter published a polemical reply to the criticism of the Kantian Jakob.⁸

Briefly, no one familiar with the views of Kant and his followers about the location of the soul would have asked him to comment on Soemmerring's essay. But no one familiar with these views would have imagined that Kant would have accepted to write a comment.

2. Kant: A comment based on scientific data

Kant did write a comment but in his own terms.⁹

He rejects the very idea that a local presence of the soul should enter scientific arguments. Therefore, both his published comment and the

⁷ L. H. Jakob, *Grundriß der Erfahrungs-Seelenlehre*, Halle, Hemmerde-Schwetschke, 1791, § 44.

⁸ See E. Platner, *Lehrbuch der Logik und Metaphysik*, Leipzig, Schwichertschen Verlag, 1795 (this is an *Auszug*, destined to lectures, of the *Philosophische Aphorismen*), p. 15-16: Platner argues that Jakob's proposal to consider the whole body as the seat of the soul, rather than searching for it "in einer einzelnen Stelle des Gehirn", does not eliminate the difficulties raised by Jakob himself concerning the spatial location of the soul.

⁹ I. Kant, *Über das Organ der Seele*, trans. as *From Soemmerring's On the organ of the soul*, in I. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. by G. Zöllner, R. B. Loudon, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, AA 12, p. 31-35. Kant's comment was originally printed in Soemmerring, *Über das Organ der Seele*, p. 81-86.

manuscripts related to his comment intend to use Soemmerring's anatomical findings to the end of offering a scientific explanation of the cooperation of our senses. In particular, Kant tries to give an answer to the question of how the ventricular fluid in the brain might be organized, given that the merging of our sensations into a single experience must involve some sort of ordering principle. But how can a fluid substance be organized if, by its very nature, it cannot have a spatial, and even less a mechanical, organization? Kant's interesting suggestion is that this organization might occur dynamically, as a sequential ordering of chemical solutions.¹⁰ In sum, the philosopher Kant chooses to address a scientific question he is interested in, and offers a solution in line with his late attraction for the new developments of chemistry.¹¹

Kant's refusal to solve a philosophical problem by physiological means can be better understood if we consider how deeply he reflected on the relation between soul and body in a philosophical perspective. It suffices to mention here that, in a letter to Herz, he considers this relation as concerning two faculties, namely sense and understanding, even resorting to a personal interpretation of Leibniz's pre-established harmony:

I am quite convinced that Leibniz, in his pre-established harmony (which he, like Baumgarten after him, made very general), had in mind not the harmony of two different natures, namely, sense and understanding, but that of two faculties belonging to the same nature, in which sensibility and understanding harmonize to form experiential knowledge.¹²

All the same, Kant had a keen interest for medicine, in particular for physiology. Was this interest a consequence of his well-documented hypochondria?¹³ Or was his curiosity for craniology a mere consequence of having Karl Reusch, a student of Gall, as a frequent dinner guest in his later

¹⁰ Kant, *From Soemmerring's On the organ of the soul*, AA 12, p. 33-34.

¹¹ See M. Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 264-290.

¹² Kant's letter to Herz of May 26 1787, in Kant, *Correspondence*, AA 11, p. 48-55. For an extensive treatment of this subject, see M. Capozzi, "L'io e la conoscenza di sé in Kant", in E. Canone (ed.), *Per una storia del concetto di mente*, vol. II, Firenze, Olschki, 2007, p. 267-326.

¹³ See *General Introduction*, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, p. 3. Kant's constant preoccupation with his health occupies part of his, otherwise philosophically important, correspondence with the physician Markus Herz, see A. Zweig, "Introduction", in Kant, *Correspondence*, p. 18.

years?¹⁴ The answer to these suggestions is negative. Kant was very much attracted by medicine, not only as a cure but also as the study of the workings of the body, especially for their relevance in cognitive processes. A good example is offered by the importance Kant attributes to the bodily sense of hearing, as can be appreciated by returning to Soemmerring's essay.

3. The sense of hearing: Soemmerring and Heinse

In his letter of August 22 1795, where he thanks Kant for writing the comment on his essay, Soemmerring draws Kant's attention to the fact that *Über das Organ der Seele* gives scientific support to a speculative thesis, advanced by Heinse, to the effect that hearing is the most important sense:

Heinse and I were much rejoiced when we found [...] that we had been working, without knowing of each other, for the proposition: hearing is the most important sense. He had found the proposition out of speculation and I could give him the anatomical reason for it.

*Heinse und ich hatten große Freude als wir [...] fanden daß wir ohne von einander zu wissen für den Satz, das Gehör ist der wichtigste Sinn gearbeitet hatten. Er hatte den Satz aus speculation gefunden und ich konnte ihm den anatomischen Grund dafür geben.*¹⁵

This statement raises two questions. The first question concerns the reason why Soemmerring highlights his interest for the sense of hearing in *Über das Organ der Seele*. The second question concerns the reason why Soemmerring considers Heinse's speculations on hearing to be relevant for his anatomical and physiological studies.

As to the first question, Soemmerring has much to say about the sense of hearing because his whole investigation begins with an examination of the auditory nerves that originate from the labyrinths and end on the walls of the fourth ventricle. He notices, first of all, that the vibrations and oscillations of the auditory nerves, and the movements that originate from them, are different from those of the sight nerves. In the second place, he notices that *only* the ends of the auditory nerves are directly and without detours connected to the liquid of the *sensorium commune*. Therefore, on the one hand, only the vibrations of the auditory nerves are proved to lead

¹⁴ See S. M. Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation and Community*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 448.

¹⁵ See AA 12, p. 40.

to the very center of all sensations, which is the *medium uniens* of the actions of the nerves, and are consequently proved to lead to the true 'seat' of the soul.¹⁶ On the other hand, only by analogy with the auditory nerves it is possible to apply the results of these anatomical observations to the olfactory and optic nerves.

As to the second question, the reference made by Soemmerring to Wilhelm Heinse (1746-1803) can be explained not so much with their personal friendship,¹⁷ but with the fact that Heinse was known to be a supporter of the doctrine that hearing is the fundamental human sense and, as such, is superior to all the other senses, even to sight. It has been observed that Herder too had expressed a similar conviction,¹⁸ but it has also been remarked that Heinse had exposed his views in the *Musikalische Dialogen*, first published posthumously in 1805, but written around 1770, so that it is even possible to suppose that the late Herder in *Kalligone* (1800) could have been inspired by Heinse.¹⁹

Soemmerring had long known his friend's ideas. But something new had happened at the time of *Über das Organ der Seele*: between 1795 and 1796 Heinse had published his famous novel *Hildegard von Hohenthal*,²⁰

¹⁶ See the accurate description in M. Di Giandomenico, "Kant, Soemmerring e il dibattito sulla 'sede dell'anima'", in C. Esposito, P. Ponzio, P. Porro, V. Castellano (eds), *Verum et Certum. Studi di storiografia filosofica in onore di Ada Lamacchia*, Bari, Levante Editori, 1998, p. 167-193.

¹⁷ See M. Dick, "Der Literat und der Naturforscher. W. Heinse und S. Th. Soemmerring", in *S. Th. Soemmerring und die Gelehrten des Goethezeit*, ed. by G. Mann and F. Dumont, Stuttgart-New York, Fisher, 1985, p. 203-228. See also M. Wenzel, "'Wir beide haben ohne dieß genug Neider!' Die Freundschaft zwischen Heinse und Soemmerring", in *Das Maß des Bacchanten. Wilhelm Heineses Über-Lebenskunst*, ed. G. Theile, München, Fink, 1998, p. 159-184.

¹⁸ See M. Di Manno, *Tra sensi e spirito. La concezione della musica e la rappresentazione del musicista nella letteratura tedesca alle soglie del Romanticismo*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2009, p. 44.

¹⁹ See A. Stollberg, *Ohr und Auge - Klang und Form: Facetten einer musikästhetischen Dichotomie bei Johann Gottfried Herder, Richard Wagner und Franz Schreker*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft, 58, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006. See also R. Terras, "Wilhelm Heinse's *Musikalische Dialogen*", *Goethe Yearbook: Publications of the Goethe Society of North America*, 6, 1992, p. 181-92.

²⁰ W. Heinse, *Hildegard von Hohenthal*, in Id. *Hildegard von Hohenthal und Musikalische Dialogen*, ed. Werner Keil with B. Petersen, Hildesheim, Olms, 2002, p. 7-376. For literature on Heinse, see M. L. Baeumer, "Zur neuen Heinse-Forschung", in Theile, *Das Maß des Bacchanten*, p. 13-24.

where he argues at length in favor of the superiority of the sense of hearing. From this novel Soemmerring quotes the following passage:

The ear is certainly our most accurate sense, and even tact, which up to now has been held for the most infallible, forms itself after it [...] On that account those who are born deaf are also so much more sad and unhappy than the blind, because they do not have the principal sense of the understanding, [the sense] that gets the other senses accustomed to accuracy, and so, of all the arts, music gives the soul the brightest and freshest enjoyment.

Das Ohr ist gewiß unser richtigster Sinn; und selbst das Gefühl, welches man bisher für den untrüglichsten gehalten hat, bildet sich nach ihm [...] Deßwegen sind die Taubgeborenen auch um so vieles trauriger und unglücklicher, als die Blinden, weil sie den Hauptsinn des Verstandes, der die andern zur Richtigkeit gewöhnt, nicht haben; und so giebt die Musik unter allen Künsten der Seele den hellsten und frischesten Genuß.²¹

Having cited this text, Soemmerring concludes:

Therefore I believe to be able to give the physical reason for the truth of this new assertion. That is, among all the nerves, as I indicated before, there is none that is so immediately, so plainly and simply in contact with the humidity of the ventricles, and consequently that also stirs the common *sensorium* so immediately – that is, in other words: the hearing nerve acts most accurately and gives the brightest and freshest sensations.

So glaube ich den physischen Grund für die Wahrheit dieser neuen Behauptung angeben zu können. Unter allen Nerven nämlich ist keiner, wie ich oben zeigte, der so unmittelbar, so nackt und bloß mit der Feuchtigkeit der Hirnhöhlen in Berührung steht; folglich auch so unmittelbar das Gemeinsame Sensorium rührt – das ist mit andern Worten: Der Hörnerven wirkt am richtigsten, und giebt die hellsten und frischsten Empfindungen.²²

It is interesting that, just as Soemmerring declares to have found a ‘speculative’ support in Heinse, so Heinse declares in *Hildegard von Hohenthal* to have found scientific support in Soemmerring’s still unpublished essay on the organ of the soul:

Soemmerring believes, in his very recent, important, still unpublished writing about the *sensorium commune*, to be able to specify the physical reason for the truth of this thesis. “Of all the nerves”, he says, “there is none that is so immediately, so plainly and simply in contact with the humidity of the ventricles (in which he seeks the organ of the *sensorium commune*), and consequently that also so immediately stirs

²¹ Soemmerring, *Über das Organ der Seele*, § 39, p. 48.

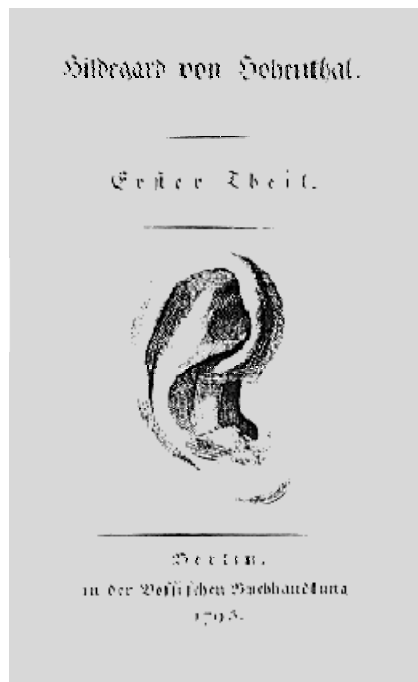
²² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

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the common sensorium. For the beginning, or the outermost cerebral-end of this nerve is so manifestly and distinctly set out by nature itself that it would be truly absurd to want to discover by art still something more regarding the cerebral ends of the pair of auditory nerves.

Sömmering glaubt in seiner neuesten, wichtigen, noch ungedruckten Schrift über das Sensorium commune den physischen Grund für die Wahrheit dieser Behauptung angeben zu können. „Unter allen Nerven nämlich,“ sagt er, „ist keiner, der so unmittelbar, so nackt und bloß mit der Feuchtigkeit der Hirnhöhlen (worin er das Organ des Sensorium commune sucht) in Berührung steht; folglich auch so unmittelbar das gemeinsame Sensorium rührt. Denn der Anfang, oder das äußerste Hirnende dieses Nerven ist so offenbar und deutlich von der Natur selbst dargelegt, daß es wahrlich ungereimt sein würde, in Rücksicht der Hirnenden des Hörnervenpaars noch etwas mehr durch die Kunst entdecken zu wollen.“²³

Given these reciprocal quotations, and the hymn to the ear they contain, it is no surprise that the title page of the first edition of *Hildegard von Hohenthal* features the following image:



²³ Heinse, *Hildegard von Hohenthal*, p. 47 n.

This image is a tribute to Soemmerring because it is the latter's drawing of the ideal (female) ear.²⁴

Soemmerring reciprocated Heine's admiration to the point that he honored his memory by placing "Heine's skull in his library next to Heine's own poetry".²⁵

4. *Kant and the sense of hearing*

Soemmerring underscores in his letter to Kant the importance of the sense of hearing and connects this importance to Heine's views. Given the emphasis with which he insists on this question in his essay, it is strange that he should bring it again to Kant's attention. Clearly Soemmerring must have been surprised that Kant never touched this subject in his comment,²⁶ and probably Heine too would have liked to know Kant's opinion. In fact, a study of his notebooks has shown that, in writing *Hildegard*, he had been comparing the views of Soemmerring on how sound affects the body with those of Kant in the third *Critique*.²⁷

Was Kant uninterested in hearing?²⁸ This question must be given a negative answer because: I) Kant considers language indispensable to thinking; II) the importance he accords to language cannot be fully appreciated if it is not connected with the importance he accords to the sense of hearing.

As to point I), Kant rejects the traditional view according to which 'judgment' (*Urtheil, iudicium*) is the mental act and 'proposition' (*Satz*,

²⁴ See Di Manno, *Tra sensi e spirito*, p. 159. The image is taken from <http://www.heinse.de/hohenthal.htm>

²⁵ S. Juterczenka, "Chamber Moors' and Court Physicians. On the Convergence of Aesthetic Consumption and Racial Anthropology at Eighteenth-Century Courts in Germany", in K. Hock-G. Mackenthun, *Entangled Knowledge. Scientific Discourses and Cultural Difference*, Münster, Waxmann, 2012, p. 172. See also M. Hagner, *Des cerveaux de génie. Une histoire de la recherche sur les cerveaux d'élite*, traduit de l'allemand par O. Mannoni, Paris, Éd. de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2008.

²⁶ Kant, *From Soemmerring's On the organ of the soul*, AA 12, p. 34, just mentions the auditory nerves.

²⁷ See T. Irvine, "Reading, Listening, and Performing in Wilhelm Heine's *Hildegard von Hohenthal* (1796)", *The Journal of Musicology*, 30, 2013, p. 502-529.

²⁸ K. Huber, "Herders Begründung der Musikästhetik", I Teil, *Archiv für Musikforschung*, 1, 1936, p. 110, says that Kant was an "enemy of the senses [*sinnenfeindlich*]".

proposition) is a judgment expressed in words.²⁹ For Kant this is nonsense, as he states in his polemic with Eberhard³⁰ and in logic lectures:

when the *logici* say [...] that a proposition is a judgment clothed in words, that means nothing, and this definition is worth nothing at all. For how will they be able to think judgments without words?³¹

M. Forster maintains that this is one of the texts, written in 1790 and after, that testifies of Kant's late conversion to Herder's point of view as concerns the importance of language.³² In my opinion there are strong philological reasons that impose to date this text in the early 1780s.³³ But, even if Forster were right, his thesis does not hold if we consider that the *Pölitz Logic*, dated at around the time of the first edition of the *Critique of pure reason*, contains the following statements:

Logicians define a proposition *per Judicium verbis prolatum*, which is false, however, we would not judge at all, if we had no words.

*Die Logiker definiren einen Satz per Judicium verbis prolatum, welches aber falsch ist, wir würden gar nicht urteilen, wenn wir keine Wörter hätten.*³⁴

Ratiocinium formale est syllogismus; one says otherwise *verbis expressum*, this is false, without words one cannot think at all.

Ratiocinium formale est Syllogismus; man sagt sonst *verbis expressum*, das ist falsch, ohne die Worte kann man gar nicht denken.³⁵

²⁹ See, e.g., G. F. Meier, *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*, Halle, Gebauer, 1752, § 462, AA 16, p. 828: "A judgment that is signified by means of terms is called a proposition (*propositio, enunciatio*) [*Ein Urtheil, welches durch Ausdrücke bezeichnet wird, heisst ein Satz (propositio, enunciatio)*]"

³⁰ *On a discovery whereby any new critique of pure reason is to be made superfluous by an older one*, in I. Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781*, ed. by H. Allison, P. Heath, trans. by G. Hatfield, M. Friedman, H. Allison, P. Heath, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, AA 8, p. 193-194.

³¹ *Vienna Logic*, in Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, AA 24, p. 934.

³² M. N. Forster, "Kant's Philosophy of Language?", *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 74, 2012, p. 485-511.

³³ See M. Capozzi, *Kant e la logica*, vol. I, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2002 (reprint 2013), p. 161-162.

³⁴ *Pölitz Logic*, AA 24, p. 580.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 588.

Therefore we simply must acknowledge that for Kant thinking needs language.³⁶ And this acknowledgment is supported by the connection of language with hearing.

This brings us to point II). I believe that, just as Jürgen Trabant has stressed the importance of hearing in Herder's philosophy of language,³⁷ it is time to do the same for Kant.

According to Kant's lectures on anthropology dated before 1781, he did not hesitate to maintain that for a child hearing is more important than sight:

The sense an old person can dispense with most, would be hearing, but for children it is sight. For hearing is an organ of reason [*Organon der Vernunft*]; without hearing there is no speech, and without speech, no signs of the concepts, and without that no use of the understanding. An old person, however, who already has this, can dispense with hearing; but the child without sight devises other sensations for itself for cognizing objects. Hearing is thus the most important sense [*der wichtigste Sinn*] in the acquisition of cognition, but in regard to use of the world, sight is the most important.³⁸

Kant's conviction of the essential role of hearing in cognitive processes brings him to claim that those who have never heard, and therefore cannot reproduce the sounds of articulate speech, are hindered in the use of reason. According to his lectures on anthropology of 1782:

Which one of the two senses, hearing and sight, is the most important and the most necessary [*wichtigste und notwendigste*]? The sense of hearing because without hearing we would not have concepts. It is difficult to teach people that are deaf from birth to speak, and they never reach concepts such as those of people capable of hearing, although there are educational institutions for deaf-mute people.³⁹

Again, in lectures dating from 1784-1785 hearing is declared to be "much more important" than sight:

³⁶ See M. Capozzi, "Kant on Logic, Language and Thought", in D. Buzzetti-M. Ferriani (eds), *Speculative Grammar, Universal Grammar, and Philosophical Analysis of Language*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1987, p. 97-147.

³⁷ J. Trabant, *Traditionen Humboldts*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1990, p. 175 ff. See also Id., "Herder's Discovery of the Ear", in K. Mueller-Vollmer (eds), *Herder Today*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1990, p. 345-366.

³⁸ *Anthropology Friedlander*, in I. Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, ed. by A. W. Wood and R. B. Loudon, trans. by R. R. Clewis, R. B. Loudon, G. F. Munzel, and A. W. Wood, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, AA 25, p. 498.

³⁹ *Menschenkunde*, in Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, AA 25, p. 916.

With hearing the object does not have an effect on me immediately, but only through the air, and I do not have an effect on it at all. It is the sense that is best suited to communicating thoughts, [and is] much more important [*weit wichtiger*] than the sense of sight, for without it we cannot receive any representations or ideas; the sense of sight is the most dispensable of all the senses.⁴⁰

What makes deafness a worse deprivation than blindness is that, according to McCance, for Kant “sign language would be [...] mimicry, something that cannot be mixed with philosophy’s tongue”.⁴¹ Now, in lectures, dating from the middle to the late 1780s, Kant mentions a school for the deaf in Saxony:

Language is a necessary and essential part of the use of the understanding. For by such signs, I put myself in the condition to distinguish the representations of the understanding. The art of teaching people born deaf and mute to speak is recently much cultivated and in Saxony there is a teacher who already has taught many.

*Die Sprache ist ein nothwendiges und wesentliches Stuck des Gebrauchs des Verstandes. Denn durch solche Zeichen setz ich mich in den Stand die Vorstellungen des Verstandes zu unterscheiden. Die Kunst Taub und Stumm gebornen sprechen zu lehren ist neuerlich sehr cultivirt und man hat in Sachsen einen solchen Lehrer der schon viele Unterrichtet hat.*⁴²

The teacher of the school for the deaf in Saxony is Samuel Heinicke (1727-1790), who did not teach the language of signs but used the oral method.⁴³ Kant must have appreciated the advantages of this method, which enables students to speak and to understand other people by lip reading, but he seems doubtful as to the efficacy of making students feel their throats as an effective means to obtain general concepts. In his opinion, a person that learns to speak by this method:

⁴⁰ *Anthropology Mrongovius*, *ibid.*, AA 25, p. 1243.

⁴¹ D. McCance, *Medusa’s Ear: University Foundings from Kant to Chora L.*, New York, SUNY Press, 2004, p. 33.

⁴² *Anthropology Dingelstaedt*, AA 25, p. 1560.

⁴³ See J. Gessinger, *Auge und Ohr. Studien zur Erforschung der Sprache am Menschen, 1700-1850*, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 1994, p. 273-74, 286-91, 298-331. C. G. Schütz mentions Heinicke in a letter to Kant of May 20 1785, AA 10, p. 409; the name of Heinicke is mentioned by Kant in *Reflexion* 1510, AA 15, p. 829 (1780-1784).

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must convert the sounds, which have been coaxed from him by instruction, into a feeling of the movement of his own speech muscles. But he never arrives at real concepts in this way, because the signs that he needs are not capable of universality.⁴⁴

The texts we have examined provide additional evidence against Forster's thesis because they show that there is not a conversion of Kant to Herder's point of view from 1790, but, at most, an increase of a long lasting interest for such matters in his later years. At the same time, this evidence makes us wonder why in his comment of Soemmerring's essay Kant kept silent on the importance of hearing, so conspicuous in that essay.

My suggestion is that Kant did not express what would have certainly been his agreement with the theses concerning the primacy of hearing and the problem of deafness expressed by Soemmerring and, through Soemmerring's quotations, by Heinse, because Soemmerring had connected the idea of the brain-water, so central in Kant's scientific comment, to another of Heines's novels, indeed his most famous one, *Ardinghella* (1787).⁴⁵ In this novel Heinse had put forward a theory that water could be the common principle of both the cosmos and (in Soemmerring's words) the organ of the soul, and, what is more, had highlighted once again the centrality of sound through an etymological connection of the words 'water' and 'music'.⁴⁶ We can imagine that this kind of phantasy was not acceptable to the author of the *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* who had recently been working again on cosmology taking into account new astronomical and chemical data.⁴⁷

What is certain is that Kant could find nothing to object to the words contained in Soemmerring's letter: hearing is the most important sense. Indeed he can possibly have used them as a *silent* new support to his bold assertion in his *Opus posthumum*: "thinking is speaking and this is hearing [*das Denken ist ein Sprechen und dieses ein Hören*]"⁴⁸ It is therefore a

⁴⁴ *Anthropology from a Pragmatic point of View*, in Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, AA 7, p. 159.

⁴⁵ W. Heinse, *Ardinghella und die glückseligen Inseln* (1787), ed. by M. L. Baeumer, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1975.

⁴⁶ See Stollberg, *Ohr und Auge*, p. 100.

⁴⁷ See M. Capozzi, "La sfera infinita dell'universo nella *Naturgeschichte* di Kant", in P. Totaro-L. Valente (eds), *Sphaera. Forma, immagine e metafora tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Firenze, Olschki & CNR Edizioni, 2012, p. 363-410.

⁴⁸ I. Kant, *Opus posthumum*, trans. by E. Förster and M. Rose, ed. by E. Förster, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, AA 21, p. 103. See M. Capozzi, "Pensare,

plausible hypothesis that, if we have to find a source for Kant's late reinforcement of his conviction of the necessity of a bond between thought, language and hearing, this source, so far ignored, could be Soemmerring.

ABBREVIATIONS:

AA (followed by volume and page number): *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by the Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (and successors), (Reimer, Berlin), De Gruyter, Berlin-New York, 1900-.

When citing from English translations of Kant's writings that indicate the AA edition, I give only that pagination. All the remaining translations are mine.

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