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*Kristian Bankov,
Paul Cobley (Eds.)*

SEMIOTICS AND ITS MASTERS

VOLUME 1

SEMIOTICS, COMMUNICATION AND COGNITION

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Kristian Bankov and Paul Cobley (Eds.)
Semiotics and its Masters

Semiotics, Communication and Cognition



Edited by
Paul Cobley and Kalevi Kull

Volume 18

Semiotics and its Masters



Volume 1

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Preface

This volume gathers the papers of 18 of the most distinguished semioticians worldwide. Their contributions were presented as a series of lectures, entitled “Semiotics and Its Masters” during the 12th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS) held in Sofia, Bulgaria. Following the promise of the title of the congress – ‘New Semiotics. Between Tradition and Innovation’ – the conference organisers proposed this series of lectures as an innovative substitute for the “conventional” plenaries. The main rationale was *quality* and *quantity*. With the well-known form of plenaries we could have had a maximum of 10 such papers, whereas with just a quick look at the list of the regular participants of World Congresses we saw at least 40 scholars who had made significant and internationally recognized contributions in semiotics during the last few years. Finally 27 such “master lectures” were presented in Sofia, 18 of which are published here.

Thus, “Semiotics and Its Masters” was conceived to represent the current frontline research by leading semioticians. There were no requirements for the topics of the lectures to fit the overall Congress theme. Rather, we encouraged eclecticism: each of our authors was invited to share what s/he considers among her/his research as the most relevant for the discipline. The collection is representative for the most cutting-edge work in semiotics, but it projects as well the developments in the near future of the field.

Semiotics, humanities and culture at large are in a phase of accelerating change. New rules – of the market, efficiency and public image – have started to dominate every collective action, scientific research included. The institutional survival of many research disciplines which are not completely consonant with the rules of the new global economy is in danger. Semiotics is among these disciplines and its survival will have to rely more and more on the solidity of our community, on the network of people who identify as semioticians, who visit the world semiotic congresses, publish in semiotic journals, teach semiotic courses and follow the news on the IASS/AIS website (<http://iass-ais.org>). “Semiotics and Its Masters” is a tribune for the best of our community, those who can open new research horizons, inspire others, attract young researchers and thus strengthen the sense of our belonging. Our auspice is that this is the first volume from a series of masters’ lectures that will be published after each world congress of the IASS/AIS and with it the agenda of semiotics will be always reset.

The present collection of texts fulfilled and surpassed our expectations in respect of variety. There are representatives of all major schools and paradigms. For many of them it is the first time to be together in one volume. It was quite difficult to group the texts in Sections but at the end we are happy with our choices

as far as they represent already an interpretative key for the state of the art of semiotics.

We open the book with a section of three papers, dedicated to the academic, institutional, and ethical role of semiotics – Section 1 *Semiotics in the world and academia*. With his paper **Paul Cobley** introduces us to an ongoing debate on the role of humanities in present day Western academic institutions. A debate which is rich in ideas on the side of the advocates for humanities, but poor in facts and policies in their favour. According to Cobley's analysis of the debate, on one side it has been useful because it revealed the ideology of the neo-liberal construction of the so-called "real world", "inhabited exclusively by hard-faced robots who devote themselves single-mindedly to the task of making money" (Cobley, quoting Collini 2012: 144–145). On the other hand the standard advocacy (or "PR" in the words of the author) in favor of the humanities relies very much on a standard humanistic vision which puts the individual in the centre of the debate. Thus the "rule of the game" stays on the liberal side, and the apparent opposition of values of the two sides always ends with the use-value of humanities where they are predestined to lose. Here Cobley introduces the semiotic perspective as an anti-humanist doctrine, inspired among many other by such anti-humanist thinkers as Peirce, Sebeok, Hoffmeyer and Deely. The pleasure of reading this text lies in the variety of arguments that transfer the debate on the role of humanities to a much more fundamental level. Such input from semiotics is its inherent *interdisciplinarity*, which questions the very opposition and conventional hierarchies between humanities and the other sciences. But most crucially it is the perspective of *Agency* and *Umwelt* which gives the continuity (rather than opposition) between the natural and cultural worlds that makes the difference in Cobley's defense of the humanities. *Agency* and *Umwelt* introduce the debate in an evolutionary perspective and it's quite clear to see by analogy with the other species regarding how certain arrangements and behaviors might seem apparently counterproductive for a short term individualistic survival logic (like play and aesthetic acts) whilst in the long run they are evidently at the origin of enrichment of the living world, which gives more opportunities for survival as a species. Thus, the deep ethical foundation of humanities resides in the responsibility of our species not only for the enrichment of our own living world, but also for the life on the entire planet.

But these conclusions already bring us to the doctrine of **Susan Petrilli** and **Augusto Ponzio** on semioethics, quoted by Cobley. The two scholars from Bari participate in this book with an essential contribution which reflects and summarizes an important part of their research in the last two decades. Their paper "Semioethics as a Vocation of Semiotics. In the Wake of Welby, Morris, Sebeok, Rossi-Landi" begins with the outline of the famous notion of "semiotic animal",

which embodies the doctrine of semioethics and postulates the essential difference from “conventional” ethics. Such difference is revealed also in the Saussurean notion of sign contrasted with the sign in the Global Semiotics project of Thomas Sebeok. Saussure, following some dominant ideas of the marginal economics of his time, sees communication as an equilibrium-oriented exchange of signs, which presupposes the equivalence between the sign constituents – the signifier and the signified. In semioethics such abstraction is unacceptable as far as its model of sign is based on the inevitable relation between meaning and value, in the same way as behind any market exchange there are social relations of production. The authors refer also to the critique of Bakhtin-Voloshinov of Saussure’s model of sign, a critique which introduces one of the most important notions for semioethics – *otherness*. But the radical critique inherent in semioethics comes when the notion of otherness is augmented through Sebeok’s axiom that semiosis and life coincide. Thus semioethics goes beyond the social and cultural, and helps to conceive a new form of humanism – *humanism of otherness*, which is opposed to the dominating Western humanism of the self, of identity, the humanism of human rights, which sacrifices the rights of the other.

The third contribution on the role of semiotics in the world and academia is by the Chinese scholar **Youzheng Li**. Entitled “General Semiotics” as the all-round interdisciplinary organizer – General Semiotics (GS) vs. Philosophical Fundamentalism” – Li’s paper investigates the possibility for semiotics to be the leading force for the necessary renewal of the human sciences towards a *new type of empirical-inductive-practical type of rationality*. The academic reality that has inspired the author is the one dominated by a kind of dogmatic and old style philosophical fundamentalism, which fits well to the present-day system of institutionalized professional competition and is where carrier strategies and quantitative calculation of the research block the way of inquiry and raise barriers among disciplines. The project for the new type of empirical-inductive-practical humanities does not imply any theoretical foundation, but can be pragmatically supported by the inherent interdisciplinarity of semiotics. An important part of Li’s contribution is to pose the question of *the modernization of the non-western traditional humanities*, where again the role of semiotics is important in neutralizing the metaphysical, western-centric premises of philosophical fundamentalism.

Section 2 of the book is dedicated to the relation between *Semiotics, experimental science and maths*. Both the papers of Marcel Danesi and Göran Soneson investigate the semiotic mechanisms of scientific inquiry – a field of semiotic interest which is not very much developed, although within the present day project-oriented organization of science it is exactly this side of semiotics which can be mostly valorized.

In his paper ‘Semiotics as a metalanguage for the sciences’, **Marcel Danesi** starts from the obvious fact that both mathematics and the hard sciences use a variety of symbolic resources in carrying out representation for their purposes. But are those symbolic resources neutral in respect of representation? This is what people engaged in the hard sciences and maths usually believe, but what the semiotic examination reveals is that the belief is false. In the first part of the paper, Danesi gives a large number of examples which prove that the notational devices of mathematics have, from ancient times, been subject to creative optimizations, and as a consequence many important mathematical discoveries derived directly from the formal order of the new notational devices. In the second part of the paper Danesi transfers these considerations in the field of *scientific discoveries*. As far as science is the referential domain of mathematics, there are obvious correlations between the advancement of mathematics as a metalanguage for the sciences and real scientific discoveries. Danesi calls this principle “osmosis”.

In the second paper of the section – ‘Mastering Phenomenological Semiotics with Husserl and Peirce’ – **Göran Sonesson** strongly advocates making semiotics an empirical and experimental science. Again, the main interest in the paper is about the semiotic mechanism of scientific cognition, but this time the focus is not so much on the notational devices as on the necessity of phenomenological awareness in the approach to scientific experiments. Sonesson opens new bridges between Peirce and Husserl, quoting an ignored passage from the late writings of the American pragmatist where he finally acknowledges that the notion of sign is too reductive and suggests substituting it with *medium*. This second notion is more akin to Husserlian phenomenology and opens a fruitful perspective in the examination of the pre-predicative level of the lifeworld experience. Combining insights from both great phenomenologists, Sonesson states that semiotic resources are enacted already at the level of perception. The *attention* towards something, the *gaze* and the act of *pointing* are interesting from that point of view. Far from the verbal statement, they are nevertheless *organizing devices* which filter reality into our *Umwelt*, narrowing in a meaningful way the perceptual focus.

Section 3 entitled *Society, text and social semiotics* gathers contributions which put the core of semiotic phenomena in the social tissue, in the socio-cultural configuration of any given society. But although they have identical premises the two papers suggest a different vision of the method of semiotic research and a different critical stance towards the examined phenomena. In ‘Farewell to representation: Text and Society’, **Gianfranco Marrone** proposes a radical approach to the notions of *text* and *textuality*. They are found coextensive with any meaningful manifestation of human, social, cultural and historical reality. But in order to transform the text in such a core theoretical device Marrone decon-

constructs two dogmas of conventional semiotics – one: the opposition text-context; and the other: representation. Such deconstruction goes together with a new understanding of the text not as an empirical thing to be analyzed, but as something which is recognized and invented at the same time when the semiotician is called to make a critique (in the Kantian sense) of socioculture. This is what sociosemiotics does and it is made possible (but also demonstrated in an impressive number of books published by the Italian semiologist in recent years) thanks to a strict methodological criteria, listed in the second part of the text. In the second article of this section, **Alexandros Lagopoulos** and **Karin Boklund** offer a detailed review of a large number of linguistic and semiotic approaches which treat in different degree the articulation of semiotic phenomena with the social. The paper is explicitly critical of such semiotic projects as the Global Semiotics of Thomas Sebeok (with the already mentioned axiom that semiosis and life coincide) and cognitive semiotics, the former focusing on the biological foundations of semiotics and the latter on the neurophysiological properties of the brain, both reductionist in neglecting the sociological foundation of examined reality. Lagopoulos and Boklund suggest the name of *social semiotics* (after Kress and Hodge) for their approach, leaving *sociosemiotics* for the conventional doctrines, led by the pursuit of semiotic relevance (or immanence). Social semiotics is rooted in material society, it denies the possibility for a language and culture as autonomous systems – they are the ideological projection of much deeper social relations of economy and politics. Social semiotics is consonant with the Marxist understanding of society and ideology; in this formulation, it is *the political economy of semiosis*

Section 4 is dedicated to an important trend in semiotic research from the last decades – *Semiotics and media*. Both papers included in it face the challenge of modelling and reflecting the complexity of the present day mediascape, although the point made in them for the relation between “old” and new media is different. In the paper of **François Jost** “What relationship to time do the media promise us?” an interesting model of temporality is presented, inspired by the classical Peircean trichotomy of signs. The notions of indexical time, iconic time and symbolic time are projected on a variety of TV formats. The value of the *indexical temporality* derives from the lack of intentionality in the media content, thus valorizing its authenticity, its capturing of a trace of reality which is typical for live broadcasts. The value of *iconic temporality* in media contents comes from the arbitrary nature of narrative – even when the latter is constructed with documentary footage – insofar as it represents an intentionally constructed space and time. *Symbolic temporality* refers to accomplished works (*œuvre*), where every single detail is elaborated and on the side of the observer these details are perceived as necessary and require a different quality of involvement, compared

to the other forms of temporality. Then Jost demonstrates the model, analyzing various curious and contradictory cases of narrative tension to which our spectators' habits create expectations. In conclusion, Jost analyses the formats of a news website and video on demand, where, according to him, there cannot be direct competition with television since interactivity relies on a different structure of narrative tension.

In his paper *Semiotics and interstitial mediatizations* **José Luis Fernández** is interested in the structural changes in mediatization after the advent of social media networking. He chooses as an example the case of sound media and the way they change in the age of *postbroadcasting*. A lot of classical distinctions from the broadcast age are questioned today (even the boundary between production and reception) which requires on the side of semiotic theory new conceptual frames, but also expansion of methodologies, which according to the Argentinian scholar should combine ethnographic studies with complex statistical analysis of big data.

In Section 5, entitled *Semiotics for moral questions*, are grouped two papers of a quite different nature, but both revealing the potential of semiotic theory to treat questions of traumatic experiences and injustice. **Patrizia Violi's** 'Spaces of memory and trauma: a cultural semiotic perspective' represents a critique of the naturalistic view of trauma, assumed by the mainstream of trauma studies. The semiotic approach here introduces the *constructivist perspective* which sees the consequences of the traumatic event not as something objective like a traceable mental wound, but as a socially and culturally conditioned memory, whose meaning is a result of complex and ongoing processes of interpretation. Such an approach does not diminish the gravity of the traumatic experience, but opens a completely new vision of the treatment of the affected subjects. Thus, the second part of the paper extends the semiotic approach to the sociocultural dimension of the same phenomena, as represented in emblematic trauma sites such as museums, memorials, monuments, etc. Here the construction of the meaning of trauma, from the semiotic point of view, is based on the relation of indexicality between the historic place of trauma and the present day exhibit. As in the case with the temporal indexicality from the previous section, the spatial indexicality creates the value of *authenticity* and Violi outlines various strategies of construction of the indexical link of authenticity in the places of trauma memory. In her essay in this section, **Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril** analyses the representation through digital media in Columbia of a kind of traumatic process from the recent past – the forceful dispossessing of the land of poor people. Actually, in the paper 'Media coverage of the voices of Colombia's victims of dispossession' the analysis focuses on a recent initiative involving creation of video testimonials of this land dispossession. The analysis shows that the new technics of journalistic narration

offer a better chance for a disruptive effect in the public opinion of the voices of the victims, compared to the media representation of the same voices in the past when they were functionalized by powerful political groups.

In Section 6 – *Questioning the logic of semiotics* – we have gathered two papers which treat quite unusual subjects that seem to be beyond conventional semiotic logic until we read them. After reading them we see that behind the marginal appearance is a core issue for understanding important sides of our *Umwelt*. In ‘Sense beyond communication’, **Ugo Volli** introduces the reader to a series of cases of signification which nevertheless escape the standard semiotic logic of sign-text-communication. According to the author they are self-effective (or performative); they are not enacted by communicative intention, but nevertheless reveal the sender’s identity, they can serve as an invitation for particular treatment or recognition of standing. Volli calls them *markings*. They are the prerequisite for the significance of the (human) world, but because of their particular status of non-intentionally communicated entities they fit to the *Umwelt* model of every living species – a filter which selects only the essential elements of the environment as a prerequisite of inhabiting it. Markings are very poor in cognitive content and very much context-dependent. The way we are as a meaningful appearance to others and vice versa is made of markings, the way the material world appears as a tangible carrier of the social, religious and all other institutions is also made of markings. The second paper, ‘Semiotic Paradoxes: Antinomies and Ironies in a Transmodern World’, addresses topics even more directly unusual for semiotics. **Farouk Seif** cogently treats the topic of paradox in a paradoxical way, making his point quite difficult to summarize without betraying it. As in the previous paper here, also the general framework of the inquiry is the difficulty in giving a conventional semiotic account of the way we inhabit in a meaningful way our contemporary world. Seif uses the term *transmodern world* and thus stresses how the abundant number of existing postmodern accounts are not applicable anymore. In transmodernity the fundamental nature of life itself is paradoxical, and human existence feeds on these contradictory relations. Antinomies and ironies are inherent in the human condition and innate forces in cultural semiotics. To exist in transmodernity means to develop *uncommon sense*, the opposite of the common sense of modernity.

Section 7 bears an important title – *Manifestoes for semiotics*. Here the reader can find contributions from two of the most popular and well-known semioticians today. These papers are much longer than the others in the collection and although as titles they treat particular topics, in fact they contain a concise version of the basic theoretical assumptions which can be traced in most of the other works of the two authors. In ‘Semiosis and human understanding’, **John Deely** puts together in systematic order some of the “classical” topics of his

work. There is the ontological semiotic definition of *relation*, enriched this time with an extension over temporality and evolution; then within this framework the explanation of the species specific human *Umwelt* in continuation (and not opposition) with the *Umwelt* of other species, the historical overview of philosophy with emphasis on the way modern philosophy distorted the way of inquiry and turned its back on the achievement of Latin philosophers such as Poinset and others; plus the way Peirce restored inquiry to the right track after modernity; and, finally, how only in the fame of human understanding does Semiosis become Metasemiosis which is *Semiotics*. In ‘Culture and Transcendence – The Concept of Transcendence Through the Ages’, **Eero Tarasti** presents the most important notions of his doctrine of *existential semiotics* in order to demonstrate the efficacy of his method in analyzing different cultures and epochs. The reader is helped by way of a three-fold typology of the species of *transcendence*: empirical, existential and radical. In identifying them, Tarasti gives an existential semiotic account of Plato’s dialogues, sufi mysticism, the philosophy of Ibn-Arabi and Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas and Dante. The second part of the paper is dedicated to an overview of the notion of transcendence in the major philosophers of the Western tradition such as Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Jaspers and the pragmatists.

Finally in Section 8 – *Masters on past masters* – we gathered three papers in which the main accent is on the great figures of the past, both semiotics and philosophy. **Dinda Gorlée** draws an interesting and deep parallel between Peirce and one of the most important philosophers of language of the twentieth century – Ludwig Wittgenstein. In her paper ‘From Peirce’s Pragmatic Maxim to Wittgenstein’s Language-Games’, the author is aware of the difficulty of the task, both of her subjects being thinkers among the most controversial figures of their times, with unusual styles of writing and frequently changing their ideas. Nevertheless Gorlée finds sufficient arguments for the parallel on a *pragmalinguistic* level, where the major accent is on the use of language. Both authors struggled with their contemporaries on the practical standards of making good “use” of language. They both shared similar ethics of terminology and they wrote fragmentary paragraphs.

What, then, of the critical tradition in semiotics? With the expansion of communication and media today, giving rise to a new digital culture, there has been an exponential growth in semiotic explorations of everyday life, but also a seeming loss in relevance of the semiotic approach. In ‘Semiotics as a Critical Discourse: Roland Barthes’ Mythologies’, **Isabella Pezzini** develops a position which valorizes the glorious years when Roland Barthes was founding, with semiology, a new kind of social criticism whose reception was more than enthusiastic and predetermined the success of the semiotic adventure. Our society today needs no less semiotic critical alert than the burgeoning consumer society from the fifties

and she argues that the lessons of the great past master are as relevant as they were five decades ago. In 'Ricoeur, a disciple of Greimas? A case of paradoxical maieutic', **Anne Hénault** analyses the complex relation between the other two great figures in European intellectual history. With the great advantage of being witness to some of the narrated debates between Greimas and Ricoeur, Anne Hénault offers a distinctive reading of the influences operating between the major voices of French Hermeneutics and Semiotics. The reading is unusual because the fame of Ricoeur sometimes prevents common opinion to acknowledge that he was influenced by semiotics, rather than being one of its major critics. So, in the paper of Hénault is traced out, step by step, the conversion of Ricoeur from a his open critique of structuralism from 1963 to his constructive collaboration with Greimas in the late eighties, when he acknowledged and even prized the semiotic rationality of the latter and the importance of his school of thought.

This volume thus ends with a meditation on the heritage of masters of semiotics and how this might be available to future masters.

Kristian Bankov
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27 June 2016

Section 1:

Semiotics in the world and academia

Paul Cobley

What the humanities are for – a semiotic perspective

Abstract: In the wake of both 9/11 and the financial crisis of 2008, the humanities have been offered as constituents of higher education which, if more prominent and more strenuously promoted, might have prevented both events. At the same time, the humanities have undergone an assault from governments in the West, with massively reduced or wholly cut funding as part of an attempt to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in universities. The response from parts of the humanities to these government initiatives has been strident, insisting that a thriving humanities or liberal arts curriculum is crucial to democracy, ethics and citizenship, and that the humanities should be an essential ingredient of science and business education. Contemporary semiotics' deployment of the concept of *Umwelt* demonstrates that the contribution the humanities might make to theory, practice and social life remains indispensable. Yet this contribution is of a rather different character to that portrayed in the traditional defence of 'humanistic' study. Indeed, the example of semiotics reveals that the humanities themselves are regularly misconceived.

Keywords: humanities, semiotics, ethics, humanism, umwelt

1 Introduction

A personal story illustrates one of the main points in what follows. When I was about 10 years old, I was standing outside the surgery of the local general practitioner, looking at the plaque near the front door. I turned to my dad, asking why doctors need to have so many qualifications, why they have to leave school with a range of exams passed rather than simply focusing on the practice of medicine as their one and only subject. My dad, described on my birth certificate as a "wheel turner" for the Ford Motor Company, someone who had left school at 14 and was placed as one of the most lowly functionaries of late capitalism, was able to reply with a degree of insight which, unfortunately, seems to be beyond that of many senior managers in universities, education policymakers and powerbrokers. His

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reply to my questions was that it is necessary for doctors to demonstrate that their minds are active in other subject areas than just medicine so that their specialism is not merely a matter of niched competence, that it is informed from without and also because they need to be able to carry out the great many diverse tasks involved in their job.

In light of this, it is interesting to recall that one accusation frequently lodged at semiotics, both from within and outside the academy, is that it is insufficiently specialised. Semiotics does not always fit into disciplinary compounds or institutional enclaves, both of which latter are reified, although often of only recent vintage. In contrast to subjects in the humanities, semiotics has not become institutionalised. Some think it is synonymous with linguistics; others think semiotics' home is in visual culture and the study of the non-linguistic; yet others see it as a literary 'method'. Much of this is a hangover from the fashionable moment of semiotics from the period of, roughly, the 1960s to the 1980s, when semiotics seemed to many to be like a kind of magical decoding device. The one benefit for semiotics that lingers from that period is that semiotics, despite massive change and development in the last three decades, is still largely associated with the power of utility (*pace* the tedious arguments about 'audiences' meanings' – see Cannizzaro and Cobley 2015). The humanities, by contrast, are currently under assault for their perceived lack of utility. As will be seen, the humanities are found wanting in the face of the putative utility of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and they are increasingly called upon to demonstrate direct economic use-value. Subject areas such as medieval history are seen by critics of the humanities as being arcane, over-specialised and divorced from the brute economic realities which are supposedly paramount in contemporary life.

Without wishing to draw too facile a distinction, semiotics is accused of being over-generalised despite having some of the flavour of practicality that is imputed to the sciences; the humanities are accused of being over-specialised and without demonstrable utility. Although the intent here is not to rely on this distinction, it does serve as a starting point to discuss the pratfalls of a knee-jerk defence of the humanities, and to suggest that a more nuanced response to the assault on liberal arts education in general – a response which might be decisively informed by semiotics – could be put centre stage in common understandings of what the humanities are for. That a more convincing response to the assault is desperately needed is demonstrated by the fact that the squeezing of the humanities, and the universities that house them, has accelerated even in the face of two key events in the last fifteen years.

First, in the wake of 9/11 there was a commonly-held view that the terrorists used education in a purely instrumental fashion; *The 9/11 Commission Report* assiduously lists the university affiliations of the main conspirators, all of whom

studied science and technology, apart from Hani Hanjour who sojourned in the United States to study English and later took flying lessons. Indeed, some have pointed to the prevalence of ex-engineering students in terrorist attacks (Popper 2009, Gambetta and Herzog 2007), ultimately leading to the question “Is there something in an engineering education, such as that of 9/11 attacker Mohamed Atta, that, due to a lack of a component of humanities study, could lead to a lack of compassion for others?” (Bryson 2010).

Secondly, the financial crisis of 2008 brought to the fore much hand wringing that had been already fomenting in business schools (see Ghoshal 2005), centred on the dehumanizing process of business education. As the full extent of the catastrophe of subprime lending at the turn of the twenty-first century was becoming clear, many called for a renewal of the humanities and an infusion of liberal arts into business schools (for example, Colby et al 2011).

Yet such considerations have cut no ice with governments. In the UK, for example, a key plank of the post-2010 Tory government’s policy has been to cut all funding to humanities in universities through raising fees for all humanities subjects.

That the humanities as a whole is failing to articulate its worth in contributing to the activity of the mind in the current climate is cause for concern. Addressing this from the standpoint of semiotics, the following topics will be considered: ‘The humanities’ own public relations’; ‘The “other” humanities’, ‘Transdisciplinarity’, ‘Ethics’, ‘Anti-humanism’, ‘Agency and Umwelt’. Finally, I will attempt to formulate ‘What the humanities are for’.

2 The humanities’ own public relations

The ‘rise’ of the humanities can be traced back to Cicero’s concept of *humanitas* – being good – and its development in Western education, particularly the *trivium* and *quadrivium* of medieval philosophy faculties, embracing humanities and natural sciences alike, as against the professions (medicine, law, theology). Closer to our time, though, the humanities in their most familiar form are a product of nineteenth-century Western education: they developed in tandem with the forging of a liberal hegemony in industrial society of that period and contributed to the reproduction, through instruction – in what is civilized and ‘good’ – of the bourgeois class in their mercantile and civic incarnations. Again, the philosophical faculty contained humanities as well as sciences (as is still the case in the Liberal Arts programmes in the US), while the natural sciences only became autonomous in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The *decline* of the

humanities has arguably occurred steadily through the same period in the face of the rise of the natural sciences (Kagan 2009), but most rapidly with Western governments' promotion of STEM in the academy during recent decades, managed through a crisis of funding.

As far as business schools have been concerned, the putative humanizing value of the humanities has been asserted repeatedly at crisis points in late capitalism. During the Cold War, McAllister's quasi-ethnographic study *Business Executives and the Humanities* (1951) gave voice to numerous managers who valued, above all, a liberal arts/humanities background for their recruits. These aspirations or requirements were echoed later in the decade by the Carnegie Foundation study (Pierson 1959) and the Ford Foundation study (Gordon and Howell 1959), each concerned with business and higher education. In the Reagan era, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business report (Porter and McKibbin 1988) made similar noises, followed in turn by the report of the American Council of Learned Societies (1988). By the early twenty-first century, a full-blown crisis in business schools seemed to have developed globally, with numerous critics calling for the re-humanization of business education, usually by way of compulsory humanities modules. Ghoshal (2005) has already been mentioned; preceding him, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) and Mintzberg (2004) could be added, along with, later, Bennis and O'Toole (2005), Starkey and Tempest (2006), Starkey and Tiratsoo (2007) and Morsing and Rovira (2011) and those reporting inept practice by business school graduates (Feldman 2005; Blasco 2009). A recent milestone in this train of thought is the Carnegie Report, which concluded (Colby et al 2011: 5): "Like all undergraduates, business students need the ability to grasp the pluralism in ways of thinking and acting that is so salient a characteristic of the contemporary world". That pluralism, which the report suggests is fostered by the humanities, is assumed to be lacking in business graduates but also, it might be said, among religious fundamentalists, *particularly* those who would inflict terror.

If the situation was not sufficiently overdetermined already, the last decade also saw a major crisis in Western universities as a whole. In another ethnography, lightly 'fictionalized', Tuchman (2009) pithily illustrated some of the nodal points of the crisis, witnessing the adversarial pitting of a management class against an intellectual class and the 'deprofessionalization' that has beset university professors in similar ways to its infliction on lawyers and doctors. With managers in the ascendant, along with context-free accountants scouring university spreadsheets (no doubt following an education in business that the authorities in the previous paragraph would deplore), it was unsurprising that questions began to be raised by apparent ingénues about what universities are for. In addition to asking whether it is really worth employing certain professors

and buying certain equipment for universities, accountants' questions about the contribution of certain subject areas to direct economic growth become inevitable. As Collini (2012: 144–5) notes,

[I]t's usually at this point in the argument that an appearance is made by one of the more bizarre and exotic products of the human imagination, a wholly fictive place called 'the real world'. This sumptuously improbable fantasy is quite unlike the actual world you and I live in. In the actual world that we're familiar with, there are all kinds of different people doing all kinds of different things – sometimes taking pleasure in their work, sometimes expressing themselves aesthetically, sometimes falling in love, sometimes telling themselves that if they didn't laugh they'd cry, sometimes wondering what it all means, and so on. But this invented entity called 'the real world' is inhabited exclusively by hard-faced robots who devote themselves single-mindedly to the task of making money. They work and then they die. Actually, in the fictional accounts of 'the real world' that I've read, they don't ever seem to mention dying, perhaps because they're afraid that if they did it might cause the robots to stop working for a bit and to start expressing themselves, falling in love, wondering what it all means, and so on, and once that happened, of course, 'the real world' wouldn't seem so special anymore, but would just be like the ordinary old world we're used to. Personally, I've never been able to take this so-called 'real world' very seriously. It's obviously the brainchild of cloistered businessmen, living in their ivory factories and out of touch with the kinds of things that matter to ordinary people like you and me. They should get out more.

He is not wrong. Indeed, Collini's characteristically witty observation should serve as the standard riposte to any blinkered imbecile who dares to hide behind the myth of the economically hard-nosed 'real world'. However, as will be argued, Collini's eloquent defence of the humanities as worthwhile amidst the university crisis – because they are "inherently" good or interesting – is not tenable on its own.

In response to the more recent attacks, the defence of the humanities has been undertaken by numerous of its representatives besides Collini in the last few years, often re-hashing jaded ideas from the very liberal hegemony which has lately sought to condemn the humanities to, at best, marginal status in society and, at worst, oblivion. Thus, the humanities have been cast by their defenders as the repository of 'values' (McDonald 2011) or, even more pointedly, 'good' values as opposed to "our current values and their devastating consequences on a precarious world" (O'Gorman 2011: 281). The humanities, it has been claimed, teach people how to live their lives (Andrews 1994: 163), they condense collective experience (Bate 2011: 66) and they preserve both democracy (Nussbaum 2010) and civilization (Watt 2011: 205). A further confection on liberal protestations in favour of saving the humanities is located at the intersection of national languages, ethics, and multiculturalism. Other languages, the argument goes, enrich our culture (Kelly 2011; Freeman 1994) and allow knowledge of 'the other' in a

fashion that, at the very least, provides the platform for an ethical standpoint. The humanities are seen as crucial to promoting diversity – teaching students to work with others who are not like them (Tuchman 2009: 208) – because, unlike approaches in some business schools, for example, the humanities are putatively opposed, in their very existence, to de-humanization. Echoing psychologists such as Zimbardo and Milgram, as well as prominent critics of business education from *within* business schools, such as Ghoshal (2005) and De George (1994), Nussbaum (2010: 23) insists that “It is easier to treat people as objects to be manipulated if you have never learned any other way to see them”. The acme of such humanist hyperbole regarding the humanities is where such arguments reveal their fragile basis and give way to the ridiculous; the words of the broadcaster and academic, Mary Beard (2001: 26), on the preservation of classics because it “is a subject at which the British do very well indeed”, reflected by Parker Pearson (2011) on archaeology and Howard (2011) on British academia in general, lie in this domain.

By contrast, there is a sublime position growing out of the definition of the humanities as fostering harmony or standing against de-humanization. Here, the discussion of the immediate use-value of the humanities is repudiated in favour of a subtle formulation of inherent worth. Bate (2011) shows that the ‘value’ of the humanities cannot be calculated in the immediate way that many translations of scientific developments into technological advance can. In the wake of 9/11 and resurgent Islamic fundamentalism, he writes (2011: 2), “it was perhaps unfortunate that the swingeing funding cuts to higher education in the early 1980s fell with particular severity on supposedly marginal areas of the humanities, such as ‘Islamic Studies’”. More emphatic, still, is Fish’s (2008: 14) refusal to rise to the challenge:

To the question ‘of what use are the humanities?’, the only honest answer is none whatsoever. And it is an answer that brings honor to its subject. Justification, after all, confers value on an activity from a perspective outside its performance. An activity that cannot be justified is an activity that refuses to regard itself as instrumental to some larger good. The humanities are their own good. There is nothing more to say, and anything that is said . . . diminishes the object of its supposed praise.

Fish, here, is responding in particular to those who would attempt to furnish the humanities with ‘effects’ or ‘results’ in the manner of some areas of the sciences and business. Nevertheless, it is a view broadly shared with some other contemporary commentators (cf. Collini 2012) on the threatened demolition of universities.

There is a need to be clear about the terminus of such arguments about the humanities. Fish and others seem to be converging on that well-known shibbo-

leth, common to discussions in many degree review and validation processes in universities: ‘knowledge for its own sake’. While it is a worthy aspiration, it is strictly an intellectual version of the Land of Cockaigne, the preserve of those with private incomes. Likewise, the notion of the humanities as a civilizing tool, a less trenchant view but one nevertheless similarly drawing on individualist and humanist roots like ‘knowledge for its own sake’, is ultimately self-defeating. Tuchman (2009: 208) sees the humanities as promoting diversity and teaching students to work with others who are not like them; O’Brien (2010: ix) and Nussbaum (2010: 7) insist they are essential for democracy; and Pugès (2011: 61) claims they are instrumental in understanding other cultures and experiences, enabling people to keep an open mind. All of these arguments, however, are functionalist: they see the humanities as social tools, rather than necessary extensions of humans’ cognitive bearing as a species. Thus, the obvious example of ‘intercultural communication’, a laudable area of investigation in communication sciences, was swiftly co-opted as a management tool, in much the same way as ‘ethics’ and ‘diversity’ are now (Nelson, Poms and Wolf 2012). It is difficult to escape the conclusion that “The humanities is an often overindulged and oversold commodity, especially in the hands of liberal arts college presidents and some recent secretaries of education” (Solomon 1994: 48). It is also clear that the version of the humanities that is oversold is not necessarily familiar to those who teach and publish in the discipline.

3 The ‘other’ humanities

In his excoriation of business school practice, Ghoshal asks (2005: 83–84):

why does the pessimistic model of people as purely self-interested beings still so dominate management-related theories? The answer lies not in evidence but in ideology . . . The roots of the ideology lie in the philosophy of radical individualism articulated, among others, by Hume, Bentham, and Locke.

As is also argued in the current essay, Ghoshal is pointing out that if one wishes to address ideology – including that ideology which has culminated in an attempt to banish the humanities – then the last people one would want to consult are humanists. The project of de-humanization which is integral to the subordination of people to the so-called ‘real world’ is a logical outgrowth of the ideology in which humans are compelled to realise themselves as individuals – *at all costs*. Althusser (1969) made this point, in compelling fashion, many years ago. However, it has not curtailed the assumption, on the part of those outside the

humanities, that the humanities is predicated on, and begets, both humanism and individualism.

Nevertheless, the simple point can be asserted: the humanities are not necessarily humanist. Indeed, the virtues that the humanists have found to be universal and enriching have been repeatedly repudiated as oppressive by such fields as postcolonialism. The subject area in which I have spent most of my time, institutionally – communications, media and cultural studies – has consistently, implicitly and explicitly, challenged such humanist edifices as the canon and authorship of the ‘best’, while introducing questions to do with the fragmentation of contemporary identity. Semiotics has done the same – but more systematically, with commitment to transdisciplinarity and without automatic disdain for science. When one considers such features of the modern humanities landscape which are not entrenched in a humanist liberal arts paradigm, then many other approaches and fields start to add their names: social constructionism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, posthumanism, systems theory, radical constructivism and, again, postcolonialism. In their most productive guises, what has characterised all of the above has been a commitment to transdisciplinarity.

4 Transdisciplinarity

Although semiotics traces its genealogy back to the Hippocratic Corpus of symptoms, its presence in the academy as a formal pursuit owes much to what might be called ‘the synchronic moment’ in the twentieth century (cf. Deely 2010). That moment, when analysis of the products of human endeavour gradually started to replace valorization of discrete cultural artefacts, was also key to the inauguration of transdisciplinarity. It was represented by the work of Saussure in Switzerland; Propp and the Formalists in Russia; Ogden, Richards, Empson and Leavis in Britain; the New Criticism, Innis, McLuhan and Frye in North America; the structuralists in France; the Prague Linguistic Circle in Czechoslovakia; so-called ‘Soviet semiotics’; the Copenhagen School in Denmark; systems theory and cybernetics in Europe and the Americas. Thus, the synchronic moment, where close reading or analysis came to the fore, witnesses a significant change in some of the key disciplines of the humanities in the second part of the twentieth century. Linguistics became less concerned with teaching foreign languages and more dedicated to the workings of language in general, drawing, especially, on semiotics’ separation of linguistics into ‘syntactics’, ‘semantics’ and ‘pragmatics’. A good proportion of contemporary literary study became devoted to analysis of the workings of literariness rather than trying to wheedle out what is ‘the

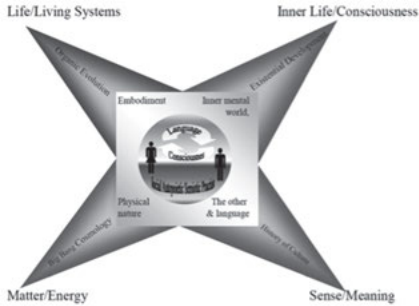
best' that has been thought and written. An indication of how far literary studies has come through reinventing itself in the last thirty years is offered by some of the innovative work emanating from the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts. In the Fine Arts which, by virtue partly of their name, are still somewhat wedded to notions of the sublime, there has nevertheless been a move away from pure aesthetics to greater consideration of the concept of design. In philosophy, the elusive 'good life' has been superseded by a focus on analysis, criticality and unpredictability.

The prime mover in the majority of these instances has been the emergence of the idea of the *text*, developed, of course, by semiotics but with a remit and reach that has not only facilitated transdisciplinary approaches but also made text's predicates part of common parlance in the humanities. In the early writings on the topic, by the idea's simultaneous but unconnected originators, Barthes (1977) and Lotman (1982), it is possible to discern the struggle to make the concept emerge (cf. Marrone 2014). Despite this struggle, the testimony to the text's fecundity is in how quickly the concept was taken up by other scholars in the wake of the synchronic moment. Such scholars were bearers of a transdisciplinary perspective on their subject areas, demonstrating by reference to 'text' how manifestations of art, literature, philosophy, and verbal language are not instances of magic but specific exemplifications of a more general textuality. Clearly, the notion of text was instrumental in closing the 'great divide' (Huysen 1986) between high and low culture. This is something I recognized early in my career in higher education as I began teaching popular narrative, with an emphasis on close reading, to cabinet makers in a General Studies (liberal arts) department. This soon metamorphosed into the teaching of communication theory, particularly the theoretical underpinnings to conducting close analysis. Central to the movement away from appreciating 'quality' to analysis of texts is the dimension of social class. The concept of the text betokens 'neutrality' or, at the very least, the attempt to shelve the ephemeral forces that may valorize or render a text in a particular way such that it is read in a fashion that is 'self-evident', 'common sense', or 'obvious' (cf. Copley 2000). Therefore, the purpose of analysing a text is to find out how it works and, by extension, to help accumulate a sense of how all texts might work. Academic engagement with the text in this frame is decidedly *not* an exercise in 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) geared to the inculcation of good 'breeding' or 'taste'. It is more of a technical skill potentially accessible to all, as befits a democratic society.

The transformation wrought by the concept of 'text', shifting the focus from the 'good' to the 'analytic', is the defining feature of contemporary humanities, although one would not know it if the only evidence on offer was that of the humanities' humanist defenders. Yet, while the insights attendant on the concept

of ‘text’ suffuse the humanities, there is one corollary of transdisciplinarity that the academy is slower to accept: that science and the humanities are not irrevocably divided. The space afforded here is insufficient to discuss the fortunes of the ‘two cultures’; however, it is possible to briefly outline two areas where semiotics has contributed to the closing of the division. The first is relatively straightforward: it derives from the idea that if the humanities can be read as text, then there is absolutely no reason why the practices of science cannot be read as text also. Indeed, semiotics has given birth to one of the foremost exemplars of the understanding of nature with reference to textual and semiotic principles: biosemiotics. In identifying the semiotic basis of natural processes, biosemiotics has fundamentally challenged the mechanist worldview that is routinely promulgated by school teaching’s reliance on a Newtonian model of science.

Second, there is the more complicated critique, at the level of philosophy of science, whereby the arts and humanities are placed alongside the sciences in a sometimes non-hierarchical relationship between different kinds of knowledge of the universe. Cybersemiotics (Brier 2008), comprising much of biosemiotics, compels a vision of life, consciousness and cultural meaning as constituted by the continuities of nature and evolution. In this, it does not differ from general semiotics in the contemporary period; however, cybersemiotics specifically addresses life/consciousness/cultural meaning with reference to the qualities of experience each renders. It challenges physicalist science, with its ideal of third person knowledge, replacing it with an imperative to consider first person embodied consciousness. This is not to be underestimated: bourgeois humanism, by default, has connected well with common sense because it has always been predicated on its own, instrumental version of the first person: individualism. Yet, unlike much contemporary cultural analysis or constructivism which sees knowledge as constructions and plays of language and power, cybersemiotics is predicated on the *embodiment* of first person consciousness, which thus puts consciousness in relation to nature as continuous over plant and animal existence. Organism, environment, cognition, signs and reality – none of these are issues to be settled by one discipline. For this reason, cybersemiotics is transdisciplinary, tracking those areas in the humanities and the sciences where there have traditionally been materialist, organismic orientations in understanding phenomena and where there have been semiotic, cognitive orientations, also seemingly dictated by the phenomena with which they have been most concerned. This is summed up by Brier’s (2010: 1907–11) “cybersemiotic star”:



The four areas of knowledge that cybersemiotics identifies obviously demand transdisciplinarity. Moreover, as Brier argues, they also demand a theory of the observer. Physics, he notes (2010: 1911), relies on the notion of an observer of physical ‘events’ but

it does not have a theory of what the observer is that goes further than computation and information . . . Meaning, experience, qualia and will are still outside that paradigmatic foundation of physics which, through chemistry, leads into general cell and body physiology

One might easily add to this that the humanities need a theory of the observer. The ‘other’ humanities, particularly through semiotics, have been diligent in questioning the role of agents in the world. The humanists, on the other hand, have seemed to fall back on the assumption of an absolute, universal human agency, even as that agency is being nullified in the dismantling of the humanities. For this reason, I believe that the convincing articulation of what the humanities are for depends on a stance that is anti-humanist.

5 Anti-humanism

The humanism that has often been taken as synonymous with the humanities can be summed up as “in short, bringing out what is best in us” (Solomon 1994: 50). This ideology is clearly evident in so many of the protestations against the assault on the humanities that have been quoted so far. One can understand the knee-jerk response: Churchwell for example (2014: 29), is strident:

The politicians and corporations telling us that the humanities do not matter are, by no coincidence, the same people who think of us only as workers and consumers, not as citizens or individuals, and who strip away our human rights, one by one. It is the wealthy who

insist that we should seek only to work: we don't need the humanities, they tell us, all we need is to labour in the marketplace that will enrich them, not us.

What is left out here is that 'they' very much believe in the individual; it is precisely why 'they' want to limit the opportunities open to others. The only collectivity 'they' can envisage without fear is the one that 'they' seek to impose. Clearly, the fundamental terms of the argument need to change from their individualistic/humanistic co-ordinates that are so tied up with the right to self-determination and enrichment. From the side of the humanities, such arguments are of a piece with the idea that the task of the humanities is to exalt "The best that has been thought and said". However much the proponents of humanist humanities may think they have left such views behind by teaching about women writers, black artists, Navajo verbal expression, and Lao Tzu, their defence of the humanities in terms of breeding and the 'good' resuscitates the ghosts of Matthew Arnold, F. R. Leavis, Mortimer Adler, Robert Hutchins and Lionel Trilling. In putting a notion of 'the human' at the centre of existence, the plight of the guardians of the 'good' is the "theoretical unevenness" that Althusser (1969: 223) discerned in 'socialist humanism'. Amidst the legacy of the terror and totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, many Marxists (including inside the Soviet Union) found themselves in a dilemma in denouncing this most prominent embodiment of supposed socialism. Althusser (1969: 236) suggests that socialist humanists fall back on a simplistic couplet, 'human/inhuman':

When, in the relations between Marxists and everyone else, the former lay stress on a socialist personal humanism, they are simply demonstrating their will to bridge the gap that separates them from possible allies, and they are simply anticipating the movement trusting to future history the task of providing the old words with a new content.

Bourgeois humanism, Althusser shows (1969: 247), made 'man' the principle of all theory, with a shadowy concept of 'inhumanity' acting somewhere as 'man's' obverse. In this way, humanism can have some purchase as a practical, ideological slogan, rooting out instances of 'inhumanity'. Humanism, additionally, may have some value as a "practical index" (1969: 247) – in the case of humanist protestations against cuts in the humanities, perhaps as 'propaganda' – but it is only "an imaginary treatment of real problems" (*ibid.* 247); it has no theoretical value.

Thus, anti-humanist thinkers – including those who have informed my thinking, such as Peirce, Sebeok, Hoffmeyer, Brier, Petrilli, Luhmann, Althusser, Agamben, Badiou and Deely – do not put the individualized human at the centre of existence. Nor do they trade in essences such as 'self-interest' or apply universal categories to people. They certainly do not take the tack of the arch-humanist,

Condillac, in formulating *ethics* as a matter of self-interest. The anti-humanism in semiotics, in particular, envisages humans within semiosis and within Umwelt. Human agency is not a matter of standing outside semiosis and administering signs like an air traffic controller, as humanist understandings of the humanities would have it. Human agency is the Umwelt; we are within the products of semiosis that make up the objects of the humanities.

6 Agency and Umwelt

One could say, broadly, from a semiotic perspective, that there are two kinds of agency. The first might be called ‘sociosemiotic’, deriving from humans’ situation vis-à-vis semiosis in cultural formations. Since this is the topic of my essay, ‘To be *means* to communicate’ (Cobley 2014a), I would direct readers to that essay’s provision of an attempt at an overview. The other kind of agency is ‘biosemiotic’, in the realm of semiosis which is putatively not subject to the vagaries of cultural or socio-political forces.

This distinction, of course, is problematic for three main reasons. First, all semiosis is ‘social’ in character in that it involves more parties than just one (Cobley and Randviir 2009); secondly, culture, as Sebeok repeatedly emphasized, is just one small compartment of nature; thirdly, as Agamben (1998) and others attest, semiosis ‘in nature’ is more frequently subject to the vagaries of socio-political forces than we often acknowledge. Nevertheless, agency has become a central theme in biosemiotics (Tønnessen 2014) and is instructive for the question of what the humanities are for. Biosemiotics has identified agency at very lowly biological levels, in the most rudimentary of organisms. For Hoffmeyer (1998), it is possible to identify agency in any organism that develops ‘semiotic competence’ in the semiosphere – that is, in any realm in which signification or communication may take place. Biosemiotics has been at pains to demonstrate the occurrence of semiotic competence in places that have not hitherto been considered for their agency. As far as the humanities are concerned, this is an important point because it not only indicates some measure of continuity across some components of humans and other organisms, but it also suggests the ways in which agency is ‘inhabited’. However, there is need for caution, because agency, as has been seen, is clearly taken for granted in the humanities (cf. Cobley 2010). Nevertheless, the concept of ‘inhabiting’ is crucial.

‘Inhabiting’ might be said to be what organisms do in their Umwelt. They also ‘create’ their Umwelt through circulating signs – semiosis. Introduced by Jakob von Uexküll (1936, 1937), the idea of Umwelt is pivotal in biosemiotics. For some

it is the ‘world’ of signs which an animal *creates/inhabits* according to the sensorium it possesses. As delineated by Sebeok, especially after 1979, the Umwelt can be understood as a ‘model’ of its world that any organism might harbour; it allows that organism to survive, to navigate, to avoid predation, to seek out comfort and nourishment. It is the ‘objective’ world in Deely’s sense (2009), because the animal encounters phenomena that can only be ‘objects’ – not independent phenomena in the complete fullness of their awareness-independent physical “reality” – dosed with the experience that the animal’s sensorium affords. A moth, observes Hoffmeyer (2008: 200),

is equipped with a totally silent Umwelt, apart from the narrow chink that is kept open for registering the bat’s fateful frequencies of approximately 20,000 Hz. When the bat is far away, the moth naturally veers away from the sounds, but when the bat comes up close, the moth instead makes sudden and unpredictable movements. The moth, in other words, displays Umwelt-controlled behaviour.

The human Umwelt clearly does not afford humans the ability to detect the presence of bats with such a high degree of accuracy. However, it does allow humans a staggering capacity to differentiate objects in the world, supplemented with an ability to imagine new objects, including fictional ones, and to recognize the difference between “things” as things and objects as things in relation to some finite mind. In this, the human Umwelt is aligned with one of its main components: verbal language’s potential to produce an infinite number of sentences.

The enhanced ability to imagine and the possibility of projecting that is inherent in the human Umwelt gives rise inevitably to ethics. Ethics requires both the ability to envisage another world more ethical than the present situation. Still, it is important to avoid the assumption that ethics implies agency in the form of will (Cobley 2007). The humanist defenders of the humanities seem to be suggesting that humanities subjects cultivate agency in the direction of ethical projects. This, of course, is a gross over-simplification of both structural/agentive interaction and ethics.

7 Ethics

Again, semiotics offers a corrective to the individualist accounts of human agency which subtend humanist defence of the humanities. The central insight of ethics as semioethics is that ethical imperatives cannot spring from individual predispositions. Petrilli has developed this with respect to the over-arching requirement of ‘responsibility’ and with reference to the work of Victoria Welby, Mikhail Bakhtin,

Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and Thomas A. Sebeok. ‘Responsibility’ gives rise to ethics firstly because dialogue is not something to which one may subscribe; rather it is imposed on humans. While the individual human may choose to disregard the call of the other, that call does not cease. Thus, Petrilli (also in her work with Ponzio; see also Deely 2010b: 107–125) developed the concept of semioethics to play out the imperatives attendant on this call, in contrast to willed ethics. “A global and detotalizing perspective on life and interpersonal relations”, writes Petrilli (2014: 330),

demands a high degree of otherness, readiness to listen to the other, a capacity for opening to the other and for dialogic interconnection with the other. According to this approach, the tendency toward dialogic detotalization prevails over totalization. Otherness opens the totality to infinity or to ‘infinite semiosis’. Such an orientation necessarily leads to the ethical order and investigates the condition of unconditional implication with the other beyond any specific ideological orientation.

Semioethics thus implicates the human *qua* human. As the animal which is distinguished by its ability to recognize that there are such things as *signs* rather than simply responding to signs, Deely, Petrilli and Ponzio (2005) hold that the human is compelled to care for semiosis or, by association, all life on the planet. What circumstances are needed for this to be universally realized is not clear; however, the displacement of human uniqueness to the domain of semiosis from the essence that is beloved of the humanists constitutes a significant step.

Semioethics has not been alone in questioning whether ethics represents the pinnacle of a human essence. Posthumanism, zoosemiotics and animal studies have been prominent in dispelling essentialism. Furthermore, they have also been instrumental in asking whether there is some pattern in nature at large whence ethics arises (see, for example, De Waal 1996). If there is such a pattern, humanism’s already low stock is further depleted and the defence of humanities needs to look for more rigorous arguments. If the humanities are not the repository of good ‘values’, if they do not teach people how to live their lives, if they do not directly guarantee the preservation of both democracy and civilization or promote diversity, if they are not inherently ‘good’, if they do not prevent dehumanization, if they do not exist to shoulder these social roles, then what are the humanities for?

other

8 What the Λ humanities are for

Despite the fact that it is unsupported by a source and noted as apocryphal, Churchwell (2014: 29) nevertheless ‘quotes’ Richard Dawkins – fanatical promoter of science, arch-mechanist, militant atheist, and the emotional punchbag of all manner of people, from fundamentalist Christians to vitalists – as saying, on exiting an art gallery in Florence, “But what’s all this art *for*?” She argues that this question articulates “a widely held view among the instrumentalists and technocrats who decide our society’s priorities”. Clearly, she does not believe that this is a fair and valid query.

However, I am compelled to disagree – it is not a question particularly well put, but it is fair to ask it in general terms for the simple reason that the arts and humanities themselves have always been instrumental. They cannot be defended by humanists as the repository of values one minute and then be pronounced to be value-free the next. Typically, the humanities have been particularly instrumental when they have been denying their instrumentality: at moments of crisis such as the one they are experiencing now, or at moments of triumph when they have served the purposes of colonialism through intellectually subjugating non-Western people. The criticality which exposes such denial is a discourse on instrumentality, as is the meta-criticality which humanists eschew. Furthermore, criticality sees such denial also outside the colonial moment strictly defined; even in the humanities’ social tasks, lauded by the humanists, of upholding diversity, multiculturalism, tolerance and gaining local knowledge, there lies instrumentalism and even aggression (Alibhai-Brown 2000).

A distinct difference characterizes the ‘other’ humanities, a difference which humanist public relations neglects to mention. Many of the ‘other’ humanities, without bracketing social issues, have introduced, in varying degrees, questions of cognition and evolution. Diversity, for example, is conceived in the ‘other’ humanities as a matter of learning the multifarious ways in which the world can be modelled. It is not a matter of discovering the many artefacts accruing to different cultures around the globe and fitting them into a Western definition of universal values. Rather, in posthumanism and animal studies, to take two related instances, diversity entails considering how animality traverses human and non-human worlds and where the human gradually gives way to the machine. Such perspectives would seem to offer much more mileage regarding the question of what the humanities are for than either the affronted response of humanists that the question is indecorous, or the unsustainable assertions that the human-

ities guarantee the growth of a fictional human essence and the establishment of a utopian ‘good’ society.

Semiotics’ perspective on the humanities is best exemplified by the conclusions from Sebeok’s essay, ‘Prefigurements of art’ (1979a). Written as a literature review of the extant work on ‘aesthetic behaviour’ in animals, the essay also draws illustrative conclusions about human modelling (for a fuller discussion, see Copley 2014a). It does so by stressing that humans are unique in possessing a faculty for both verbal and nonverbal communication and that human brain functioning associated with these areas is such that there are certain limited continuities of the nonverbal between humans and non-human animals. Surveying the nest decoration of the satinbird, dancing gorillas, painting chimps, ‘musical’ whales and others, Sebeok ultimately concludes that animals’ aesthetic behaviour is implicated in enhancing survival by not enhancing survival. Much, if not all, of the use-value of aesthetic behaviour consists in not appearing to possess use-value; nevertheless, it serves a long-term purpose for the animal, a purpose which consists of enhancing, extending, and embellishing the animal’s Umwelt, offering more variation and differentiation of the world and thereby potentially allowing the animal to more efficiently negotiate its environment to avoid predation and more efficaciously seek out sustenance. For non-human animals, classifying and differentiating in this way is obviously of paramount importance. For humans, the act of classifying involved in aesthetic behaviour, as well as its survival purpose, has become buried by layers of pleasure; aesthetic acts are not seen as a struggle for continued existence. But neither, anymore, are most sex acts. The very ‘uselessness’ of classifying, then, may be what will help humans to solve problems that are present or lying in wait for us.

What ‘Prefigurements’ demonstrates, ineluctably, is that ‘Knowledge is for something’. Knowledge was always for something. Knowledge will always be for something. It has a ‘scaffolding’ dimension for humans (see Copley and Stjernfelt 2015); it has other, more direct, functions, too, whether that knowledge is ‘scientific’ (based on putative ‘third-person experience’) or whether it is knowledge of a different stamp, rooted in ‘first-person experience’. In light of Sebeok’s essay, knowledge could never exist for its own sake, although its layering over might give that impression. As such, aesthetic behaviour is survival and it is so because of its contribution to the Umwelt of the animal engaged in such behaviour. Research in arts and humanities is to be conceived as a survey of what is being (or has been) explored in the human Umwelt, how that has taken place, how the human Umwelt is furnished and embellished, and also (where it is possible to discern) what contributions the arts and humanities are making to the survival of the species. *This* is what the humanities are for. They have a cognitive bearing that does not occlude their social bearing. The act of ‘aesthetic classifica-

tion' discussed by Sebeok is the stock-in-trade of the arts. The work of 'aesthetic classification' is central, also, to the humanities in its close relation to the arts.

Like many other teachers in higher education, I have observed the way in which students feel that they have undergone a transformation following schooling in as relatively modest a practice as close reading. In the terms of semiotics, that transformation amounts to an augmented Umwelt, a firmer grasp on the richness of the world that humans inhabit. That grasp cannot be turned to instant economic advantage, even if such was desirable, although it might have some social uses. Like much culture, it is not without 'use-value', but the majority of its use-value consists in not appearing to possess use-value. The yahoos and philistines of economic instrumentality will not cease their questions in response to a demand that they simply accept this paradox.

To preserve the humanities there is a need to be assured of what the humanities are for – that is, not to enable the saccharine sweet appreciation of a human essence but, in sum: to enhance survival chances in an Umwelt that is threatened by despoliation, to do so through principally cognitive rather than social means, to understand the limits of human agency and its continuity with the agency of other organisms on the planet, to grasp the relationship of responsibility entailed in the semioethics of this continuity and, as a product of the only animal that can recognize that there are such things as signs, not to allow overspecialization to become an obstacle to presiding, in a Hippocratic manner which does no harm, over the diversity of semiosis.

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Susan Petrilli/Augusto Ponzio

Semioethics as a vocation of semiotics. In the wake of Welby, Morris, Sebeok, Rossi- Landi

Abstract: From semiotics to semioethics describes a line of research that develops the inevitable conjunction between signs and values in a global semiotic framework. Though such a focus has been a constant characteristic of twentieth century sign studies as represented specifically by such scholars as Welby, Morris, Rossi-Landi, and evidently in the background Bakhtin and Peirce, it has not been a mainstream interest. But today, in a globalized world, the focus on signs and values is ever more urgent. Semioethics is not intended as a discipline in its own right, but as an orientation in the study of signs. By “semioethics” is understood the propensity in semiotics to recover its ancient vocation as “semeiotics” (or symptomatology) with its interest in symptoms. A major issue for semioethics is “care for life” in global perspective according to which semiosis and life converge, as postulated by Thomas A. Sebeok. A global perspective is ever more necessary in the present day and age in the face of growing interference in planetary communication between the historical-social sphere and the biological sphere, the cultural sphere and the natural sphere, between the semiosphere and the biosphere.

Keywords: Semiotics, biosemiotics, semioethics, signification, responsibility

1 Semiotics, biosemiotics, semioethics

The founder of biosemiotics, the Estonian born, German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944), made an extraordinary contribution to research on signs and meaning, communication and understanding in the human world. He conducted his research in biology in dialogue with the sign sciences and evidenced the species-specific character of human modelling – which precedes and is the condition for human communication through verbal and nonverbal signs. According to Thomas A. Sebeok (1921–2001), Uexküll’s work has carried out a crucial role in

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renewing the sign science itself, or “doctrine of signs” (Sebeok 1986), especially when it elects such issues as its object of research, in terms of “biosemiotics,” a relatively new branch of semiotics (which includes zoosemiotics and anthroposemiotics) and is also a foundational dimension of general semiotics (Favareau 2010; Petrilli 1998: 3–14, 29–37, and 2014a).

According to Uexküll, every organism enacts different inward and outward modelling processes for the construction of its *Umwelt*, its species-specific world (Kull 2010: 43–56 and 348–349). *Umwelt*, a characteristic endowment of each living organism of any species, concerns the species in general, whether human or nonhuman. But while in nonhuman living beings *Umwelt* is stable, in human beings it allows for change and involves each individual in its singularity. In other words, a species-specific feature of human *Umwelt* and modelling is the capacity for creativity (Kull 2001, 2010: 347–348).

All this led Uexküll, the biologist specialized in such areas as zoology, physiology, ethology, to move beyond the strictly specialized field of biology and the life sciences to focus on problems of an ethical-political order in the human world. As he explicitly stated – e.g. towards the conclusion in *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren and Menschen* (1934) – the human *Umwelt* is a prerogative that endows humans with an advantage by comparison with other living beings. However, it also puts humanity at risk and in danger, for not only is our species-specific *Umwelt* the condition for collaboration in its different forms, but also for competition and conflict, even to the point of programming war. The biologist Uexküll published a book entitled *Staatsbiologie. (Anatomie-Physiologie-Pathologie des Staates)* as early as 1920 (2nd ed. 1933).

What emerges in the light of a semiotic theory of modelling is that semiotics referred to human behaviour and environments (human *Umwelten*) cannot avoid taking a turn in the direction of ethics understood in a broad sense.

“Ethics understood in a broad sense” means to include all that which concerns human social behaviour according to models, projects and programs, that is, according to social planning, in this sense according to ideologies (Rossi-Landi 1972: 203–204; Ponzio 2008c), therefore with reference to ethics, religion, politics, etc. The meaning of the word “ethics” as we are using it here is explained with the interpretant “responsibility”.

The open character of human modelling favours deferral from one individual to another and inevitably involves the question of choice, taking a standpoint, and of taking responsibility for that standpoint. “Responsibility” is understood in the sense of responding to and of answering to/for – oneself and others. We have introduced the expression “semioethics” for what we consider to be an inevitable turn in semiotic studies today in relation to the human world (more exactly, the

multiple human worlds, real and possible, that characterize anthroposemiosis) (see Ponzio and Petrilli 2007a, 2007b, 2014a, b, 2016; Petrilli, 20014c, 2014d).

In our response to the question why each human being must be responsible for semiosis or life over the whole planet, which is pivotal in semioethics, we distinguish between ethics and semioethics: in fact, while this question does not necessarily require an answer in ethics, given that to be responsible for life on the planet is a moral principle, a categorical imperative, it does require an answer in semioethics. Unlike ethics, semioethics concerns scientific research, argumentation and interpretation and formulates a definition of the human being as a “semiotic animal” which also implies a “semioethical animal” (Ponzio and Petrilli 2003, 2005, 2010).

Thanks to the human modelling capacity and its species-specific characteristic or syntactics:

[...] the human being is described as a “semiotic animal” [Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio, 2005] – an animal capable not only of semiosis, but also of *semiotics*, that is, of using signs to reflect on signs, therefore capable of being fully aware, of acting in full awareness. [...] the expression “semiotics” refers both to the *specificity of human semiosis* and to the general *science of signs*. According to the first meaning, semiotics relates to the specific human capacity for *metasemiosis*. In the world of life which converges with semiosis, human semiosis is characterized as *metasemiosis* – that is, as the possibility of reflecting on signs. We can approach signs as objects of interpretation undistinguished from our response to them. But we can also approach signs in such a way as to suspend our responses to them laying the conditions for deliberation. Human semiosis, anthroposemiosis, presents itself as *semiotic*. That the *homo* is a rational animal means that s/he is a semiotic animal. This implies that the human being is a unique animal, that is, an animal capable of responsibility for the health of semiosis, for life, over the entire planet.

As *semiotic animals* human beings are capable of a global view on life and communication: consequently, the question is “What is our responsibility towards life and the universe in its globality?” (Ponzio and Petrilli 2010: 157)

The semioethical turn proceeds from ongoing confrontation with different trends in semiotic inquiry, in dialogue with different figures as they have emerged on the semiotic scene. This orientation cannot be anything but critical, not simply towards orientations in the history of semiotics, but also towards itself.

A whole philosophical tradition can be evoked here, beginning from Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), in relation to whose studies “critique” takes on a special value, what can be indicated as “ethical” as described above, that is, in the sense of the obligation to “answer to/for self”, even before, or at least simultaneously to the request for reasons and justifications from others.

Other key authors take their place in this particular tradition of philosophical thought on the concept of “critique”: Authors like Karl Marx with his “critique

of political economy”, an expression in the subtitle of most of his basic texts; Mikhail Bakhtin who in his early writings takes up a decidedly critical position in his confrontation of neokantism as developed by the Marburg School (headed by Hermann Cohen, and counting such prominent representatives as Ernst Cassirer, Paul Natorp); Victoria Welby and her Significs; Charles S. Peirce with his return to Kantism and critique of Cartesian dogmatism (see “On a New List of Categories,” 1867).

The approach we are outlining relates signs and values, semiotics and axiology, signification and significance, meaning and sense, semantics and pragmatics. It calls for a detailed study of the concept of model and structure, and therefore of the relation between modelling systems theory and different positions that have gone under the name of “structuralism”. This inevitably involves confrontation between so-called “global semiotics” as introduced by Thomas Sebeok (2001) and semiotics as practiced under the denomination of “semiology” at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Petrilli 2014b, 2016). Semiology interrupted the connection not only with semiotics as conceived by John Locke, but also with much earlier roots, the origins as traced by Sebeok in ancient medical semeiotics (symptomatology) with the work of Hippocrates of Cos (c. 460 BC – c. 370 BC) and Galen of Pergamon (c. 129 AD – c. 200 AD).

2 The sign science and its developments

After various phases in the development of semiotics, commonly tagged “code semiotics” (or “decodification semiotics”) and “interpretation semiotics”, the boundaries of this science are now expanding to include studies that focus more closely upon the relation between signs and values. In truth, this relation is inscribed in the make-up of semiotics and in its very history. To concentrate on the relations of signs and values is important for a better understanding of expression, interpretation and communication.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) founded his sign theory on the theory of exchange value adapted from marginalist economics. Instead, Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914) breaks with the equilibrium of equal exchange logic thanks to a sign model based on the concept of infinite semiosis (or, if we prefer, infinite deferral from one sign to the next). This approach is oriented by the logic of otherness. It allows for opening towards the other and for the concept of signifying surplus. Charles Morris (1901–1979) emphasized the need to address the relation between signs and values explicitly, and oriented a large part of his own research in this direction. However, official semiotics has largely emerged as a theoretistic or gno-

seological science, as a descriptive science with claims to neutrality. We propose to recover and develop that special slant in semiotics which is open to questions of an axiological order and is more focused on a global understanding of humanity and its signs.

The term “semioethics” captures the sense of this orientation (Ponzio and Petrilli 2003, 2010). Semioethics focuses on the relation between signs and sense and, therefore, on the question of significance as value. However, if we go back to the nineteenth century we soon discover that Victoria Lady Welby (1837–1912), had already introduced the term “significs” for the same purpose, marking her distance from what was commonly understood at the time by both “semantics” and “semiotics”. In addition to the renowned classics just mentioned – Saussure, Peirce and Morris –, Welby too deserves a place in the reconstruction of the history of semiotics for her invaluable contribution to furthering our understanding of signs and meaning not only from a historico-chronological perspective, but also in theoretical terms (Petrilli 2009, 2015b; Welby 1983, 1985). And, in fact, she is now emerging as the mother-founder of modern semiotics alongside Peirce, recognized as the father-founder (Ponzio and Petrilli 2005: 35–79, 80–137).

2.1 From “decodification semiotics” to “interpretation semiotics”

When considering the philosophical question of “communication” with reference to semiotics, presentday theorizers think less and less in terms of “sender”, “message”, “code”, “channel”, and “receiver”, while practitioners of the popular version of the sign science still tend to cling to such concepts. This particular way of presenting the communication process mainly derives from the semiological approach to “sign studies,” thus tagged given its prevalently Saussurean matrix. This approach is commonly identified with such expressions as “code semiotics”, “decodification semiotics”, “code and message semiotics” (Bonfantini 1981), or “equal exchange” (Ponzio 1973, 1977). It was amply criticized by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921–1985) as early as the 1960s with his groundbreaking monograph, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*, 1968 (Eng. trans. 1983).

This orientation is now counteracted by “interpretation semiotics”, thanks in particular to the recovery of Charles S. Peirce (1931–1958) and his writings, therefore of such concepts as “infinite semiosis” and the dialogic relation between signs and interpretation. The interpretive approach describes interpretation as a phenomenon that results from the dialogic interrelation among “interpretants”, or, more precisely, among “interpreted signs” and “interpretant signs” (Ponzio 1990a: 15–62). Meaning is not preestablished outside sign processes, but rather

is identified in the “interpretant”, that is, in another sign that takes the place of the preceding sign. The interpretant, as a sign, subsists uniquely by virtue of another interpretant, and so forth, in an open chain of deferrals. This movement represents semiosis as an open process dependent on the potential creativity of the interpretant in the dialectic-dialogic relation with the interpretive “habit”, convention, or “encyclopedia” of a given social community (Eco 1990; Eco *et al.* 1992). Unlike decodification, or code and message, or equal exchange semiotics, in interpretation semiotics sign activity is not guaranteed by a code. The code only comes into play as a part of the interpretive process, as a result of interpretive practice, and is susceptible to revision and substitution. However, in terms of commitment to a global understanding of humanity and its signs, to the totality of human relations to itself, to the world and to others, interpretation semiotics has its limits. Semiotics characteristically tends to concentrate on the gnoseological aspect of signs, and neglect the problem of the relation between signs and values which cannot be reduced to the cognitive problem of “truth” merely in a gnoseological sense. From this point of view, semiotics has often presented itself in terms of theoretism, adopting a unilaterally and abstractly gnoseological approach to the life of signs, which implies neglect of those aspects that concern values different from truth value.

2.2 The relation between sign theory and value theory

Irrespective of the philosophical importance of dealing with the relation between signs and values, there are at least another two reasons – the first historical, the second theoretical – for treating the question of values in the context of sign theory: (1) research in this direction has already been inaugurated (especially by Peirceans); (2) an adequate critique of decodification semiotics calls for close study of the value theory that subtends it.

Sign theory as elaborated by Saussure in his *Cours de Linguistique générale* (1916), the “official Saussure,” but actually written by a handful of students on the course, is based on the theory of equal exchange value formulated by the School of Lausanne with such representatives as Leon Walras and Vilfredo Pareto and marginalist economics (Ponzio 1986, 1990: 117–118). Saussure associates language with the market in an ideal state of equilibrium. Language is analyzed using the same categories developed by “pure economics” which studies the laws that regulate the market leaving aside the social relations of production, what Rossi-Landi (1968, 1975a, 1992) calls “social linguistic work” and its social structures. This approach orients the Saussurean sign model in the direction of equal exchange logic, establishing a relation of equivalence between *signifiant* and *sig-*

nifié and between communicative intention, on the one hand, and interpretation understood as decodification, on the other.

This particular sign model and the value theory it implies had already been critiqued by Rossi-Landi by the mid-1960s. In the light of historico-dialectical materialism he evidenced the limits of language theories that, instead, ground linguistic value in equal exchange logic. He applied theoretical instruments originally developed in the context of the Marxian critique of exchange value in relation to questions of a more strictly socio-economic order to the analysis of language (Rossi-Landi 1972, 1985). However, his critique can be traced back even further to his monograph, *Comunicazione, significato, e parlare comune*, 1961, where he discusses what he calls (with ironic overtones) the “postal package theory”. This expression underlined the inadequacy of those approaches that describe signs, language and communication as messages that, like a postal package, are sent off from one post office and received by another. With this metaphor, Rossi-Landi critiqued communication analyzed in terms of univocal intentionality, as though formed from pieces of communicative intention neatly assembled by the sender and just as neatly identified by the receiver (Petrilli, ed. 1987; 2014b: Ch. 14).

Rossi-Landi translated Morris onto the scene of semiotic studies in Italy. He inaugurated his commitment to semiotic inquiry with an early monograph on Morris, 1953, followed the year after with his translation of Morris’s *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938). *Signs, Language and Behavior* (1946) had already appeared in Italy in 1949, translated by Silvio Ceccato. But despite such input, as Rossi-Landi recounts in a paper of 1988, “A fragment in the history of semiotics” (in Rossi-Landi 1992), in Italy the times were not ripe for Morris and his work was not as well received as he had hoped for. Since then Morris’s research has proven to be nothing short of seminal for semiotic inquiry internationally. In 1975 Rossi-Landi’s monograph on Morris appeared in a new enlarged edition with Feltrinelli (Milan), at last receiving the attention it deserved. Reflecting on the conditions that make for successful cultural communication, Rossi-Landi explains like this:

For cultural communication to obtain, the codes and subcodes must be sufficiently similar *already*; and noise and disturbance must be relatively low. Alternatively, an enormous redundancy is required. To make clearer what I mean: if one wants to be properly understood, one has to repeat the same things in a high number of different occasions, through a high number of different channels. Cultural communication must become a sort of propaganda. Each author is then compelled to choose between concentrating on the production of ideas and waging a sort of warfare for conquering an audience. Here, again, we can see how inextricably fortuitous the tangle of theoretical and practical factors can be. And, as Caesar put it, “*multum cum in omnibus rebus, tum in re militari potest fortuna*”. (Rossi-Landi 1992: 14–15)

Rossi-Landi's work can also be related to Mikhail M. Bakhtin's (1895–1975) research. Bakhtin's name is commonly associated with a monograph *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, published in 1929, by Valentin N. Voloshinov (1895–1936), his friend and collaborator. In this book, but even earlier, in 1927 with *Freudianism. A Critical Sketch* (Voloshinov 1927), Bakhtin and Voloshinov critique Saussure's *Cours*, illustrating how it does not account for real interpretation processes, for the specificity of human communicative interaction, that is, for phenomena that qualify human communication as such. The phenomena alluded to include, for example, the capacity for plurilingualism or heteroglossia, plurivocality, ambiguity, polysemy, dialogism, and otherness (Bakhtin e il suo Circolo 2014; Ponzio 2003, 2008a, b). Bakhtin-Voloshinov maintain that the complex life of language is not contained between two poles, the “unitary language system” and “individual speaking,” that the signifier and the signified do not relate to each other on a one-to-one basis, that the sign is not at the service of meaning pre-established outside the signifying process (Voloshinov 1929: Part II, Chs. II, III).

In this perspective, “linguistic work” (Rossi-Landi 1968; Ponzio 1988, 2008), which is “interpretive work” (Bakhtin, Voloshinov) is not limited to decodification, to the mechanical substitution of an interpreted sign with an interpretant sign; in other words, interpretation is not merely a question of recognizing the interpreted sign. In contrast, interpretive work develops through complex processes which may be described in terms of “infinite semiosis” (Peirce) and “unending deferral” (Derrida 1967) (on the difference between these two concepts, see Eco 1990), of “renvoi” (Jakobson 1963) from one sign to another, activated in the dialectic-dialogic relation among signs (cf. Petrilli 2014a, b, 2015a).

Bakhtin-Voloshinov place the sign in the context of dialogism, responsive understanding, and otherness, thereby describing interpretive work in terms of dialogic responsiveness among the parts in communication. Thus analyzed, interpretive work is articulated through the action of deferral, in this sense translation, constitutive of sign activity or semiosis. In such a framework, the focus is on interpretation/translation viewed in terms of signifying excess with regard to communicative intention, that is, in terms of the generation of signifying surplus value in the dialectic-dialogic relation between the interpreted sign and the interpretant sign (Petrilli 2012c; Ponzio and Petrilli 2007a, b, 2016).

Bakhtin already saw in the 1920s what interpretation semiotics recognizes today: in real signifying processes the sign does not function in a state of equilibrium or on the basis of equal exchange between the signified and the signifier. Interpretation semiotics proposes a sign model that is far broader, more flexible, and inseparable from its pragmatic and valuative components; and that with its analyses of sense, signification, and significance is able to better account for the

specificity of human signifying processes and communicative interaction (Petrilli 2012a, b; Ponzio and Petrilli 2016).

2.3 Significance as a lead for signifiacs and semioethics

The title of Morris's 1964 book, *Signification and Significance. A Study of the Relations of Signs to Values* is significant in itself. In it he draws attention to the relation between signs and values as anticipated by the subtitle. Morris dealt with values almost as much as he dealt with signs and opposed the idea that the mere fact of describing signs would give an insight into values (Rossi-Landi 1953,1975²; 1992: Chs. 2, 3; Petrilli 1992: 1–36). Morris devoted a large part of his research to the problem of ethical and aesthetic value: after his *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938) and *Signs, Language and Behavior* (1946), he concentrated specifically on value theory in his book *Varieties of Human Value* (1956).

He opens *Signification and Significance* describing two senses according to which the expression “to have meaning” can be understood: as having value, of being significant, on the one hand, and as having a given linguistic meaning, a given signification, on the other. Morris uses the term “meaning” to indicate a global concept analyzable into “signification” and “significance.” He aimed to recover the semiotic consistency of signifying processes in the human world as testified by the ambiguity of the term “meaning”. Meaning understood as signification is the object of semiotics, while significance is the object of axiology. An important aspect of the relation of signs to values is that it calls for recognition of the inevitable relation of semiotics to axiology. Though working from different perspectives, these disciplines converge in their object of study, namely human behavioural processes. Morris was intent upon rediscovering the semiotic consistency of the signifying process to which the ambiguity of the term itself “meaning” testifies. As he explains in the Preface to the volume in question:

That there are close relations between the terms “signification” and “significance” is evident. In many languages there is a term like the English term “meaning” which has two poles: that which something signifies and the value or significance of what is signified. Thus if we ask what is the meaning of life, we may be asking a question about the value or significance of living or both. The fact that such terms as “meaning” are so widespread in many languages (with the polarity mentioned) suggests that there is a basic relation between what we shall distinguish as *signification* and *significance*. (Morris 1964: vii)

Keeping account of considerations like this one, as well as similar comments traceable in other authors, above all Welby, that special bent in semiotics indicated with the expression “semioethics” becomes ever more significant. This

expression was introduced by Augusto Ponzio and myself to describe an approach to the study of signs that contrasts with approaches that tend toward abstract theoretism characteristic of so-called “official semiotics.” “Semioethics” signals the direction we believe contemporary semiotics is called to follow more decisively. Strictly speaking, the term “semiotics” – understood as the global science of signs, hence as covering the domains of both signification and significance in Morris’s sense relative to semiosis in the human world – should suffice. Nonetheless, “semioethics” alludes to an approach to sign studies that is not purely descriptive with claims to neutrality, but rather extends beyond abstract logico-epistemological boundaries of sign processes to concentrate on problems of an axiological order, that is, on problems pertaining to values, to ethics and aesthetics and to ideology theory.

Indications in this sense can be traced in Peirce who, coherently with his pragmatism, developed a cognitive approach to semiotics in close relation to the study of the social behaviour of human beings and the totality of their interests. From a Peircean perspective, it follows that the problem of knowledge necessarily involves considerations of a valuational and pragmatical order. In addition to his *Collected Papers*, here we shall simply recall the telling title of his posthumous collection of essays, which is indicative of his orientation: *Chance, Love and Logic* (1923). In the final phase of his production (which overall spans approximately from 1887 to 1914) – what Gérard Deledalle in his 1987 monograph on Peirce calls the Arisbe period (the name Peirce gave to his home in Milford, Pennsylvania, where he lived to the end of his days) – Peirce specifically turned his attention to the normative sciences: in addition to logic these include aesthetics and ethics and hence the question of ultimate ends or of the *summum bonum*.

Peirce identified the latter neither in individual pleasure (hedonism), nor in the good of society (Utilitarianism), but rather in a principle regulating the evolutionary development of the universe, what he calls “reasonableness” (CP 5.4). In Peirce’s view, the ultimate value of the concept of *summum bonum* is reason and the development of reason, that is, reason understood as an open, dialectic process, as unprejudiced research, or as Bakhtin would say, as an ongoing dialectical-dialogical process, a movement oriented by the logic of otherness. This process is never complete or finished, but rather is rooted in the principle of continuity or synechism (CP 1.172). Therefore Peirce himself transcended the limits of a merely gnoseological semiotics working in the direction of what can be described as an ethical-pragmatic or valuative-operative approach to the study of signs and human behaviour.

From this perspective, another significant figure is Peirce’s contemporary, the English scholar Victoria Welby, mainly remembered because of her correspondence with him (Hardwick 1977), though nowadays appreciated more and more

as a scholar in her own right (Welby 1983, 1985a; Petrilli 2009). Welby envisaged a theory of meaning called “significs” with which she proposed a broader view of semiotics than had been theorized up to then, evidencing *significance* as her ultimate object of study.

The term “significance” designates the *disposition towards valuation*. Reference is to the value we confer upon something, the *relevance, import, and value* of meaning itself, the *condition of being significant*. This is determined by the involvement of human beings in the life of signs at the theoretical, emotional, ethical and pragmatic levels together. Welby oriented a large part of her own research in the sense of the relation of signs to values, what we have indicated as “semioethics” as a development on “global semiotics”. Rather than “semiotics” and other similar expressions such as “semantics” (Bréal 1897), “semasiology” (Reisig 1839), “sematology” (Smart 1831, 1837) etc., which circulated at the time for the study of sign and meaning, Welby privileged the term “significs” to underline the direction of her own approach.

Welby distinguished between three levels of meaning and expression value which she labelled “sense,” “meaning” and “significance,” present throughout the different spheres of human language, thought and behaviour. “Sense” corresponds to the most primitive level of pre-rational life, that of one’s immediate response to the environment, it concerns the use of signs and emerges as a necessary condition for all experience; “meaning” concerns rational life, the intentional, volitional aspects of signification; “significance” implies both sense and meaning and extends beyond these to concern the “import” and “value” that signs have for each one of us. As such, this notion can be associated with Morris’s own interpretation of the concept of “significance” (Welby 1983 [1903]: 5–6, in Petrilli 2009: 264, see also pp. 265–272; and cf. 7.3]). According to Welby, “sense,” “meaning” and “significance” indicate three simultaneous and interacting dimensions in the development of expressiveness, interpretive capacity and operative force (cf. Heijerman and Schmitz 1991; Schmitz 1985, 1990).

In a letter to Welby dated the 14 March 1909 (in Hardwick 1977: 108–130), Peirce established a correspondence between Welby’s triad, “sense,” “meaning” and “significance” and his own that distinguishes between “immediate interpretant,” “dynamical interpretant” and “final interpretant.” Peirce’s “immediate interpretant” concerns meaning as it is normally used by the interpreter. As Welby says in relation to sense, it concerns the interpreter’s immediate response to signs. The “dynamical interpretant” concerns the sign’s signification in a specific context. So, as Welby claims in relation to meaning, it is used according to a specific intention. But even more interesting is the connection established by Peirce between his concept of “final interpretant” and Welby’s “significance” (Petrilli 2009a: 288–293). According to Peirce, the final interpretant concerns the

sign at the extreme limits of its interpretive possibilities. In other words, it concerns all possible responses to a sign in a potentially unlimited sequence of interpretants. As attested by the correspondence to Welby's "significance," the "final interpretant" also alludes to signifying potential, to the capacity for creativity and critique and is fundamentally concerned with valuational attitudes.

As Welby claimed in a letter of 18 November 1903 to Peirce (in which she mentions her intellectual solidarity with the Italian philosopher and mathematician Giovanni Vailati, 1863–1909), "significs" is a "practical extension" of semiotics: "Prof. G. Vailati,...shares your view of the importance of that – may I call it, practical extension? – of the office and field of Logic proper, which I have called Significs" (in Hardwick 1977: 5–8; see also Vailati 1971, 1987). Though this specification may seem superfluous given that the pragmatic dimension is inscribed in Peirce's approach to semiotics, that the ethical-valuational aspects of signifying processes are closely interrelated with the operative-pragmatic is important to underline.

In the Preface to her monograph *Significs and Language* (1911), Welby describes significs as "the study of the nature of Significance in all its forms and relations, and thus of its workings in every possible sphere of human interest and purpose"; and the interpretive function as "that which naturally precedes and is the very condition of human intercourse, as of man's mastery of his world" (Welby 1985a: vii). In *Significs and Language*, as in all her writings, the problem of analysing signifying processes is also the problem of investigating the processes of the production of values as a structural part of the production of meaning in human sign activity. The epistemological, ethical and pragmatic dimension of signifying processes finds expression in unconsciously philosophical questions asked by the "man in the street", as Welby says, in everyday language: "What do you mean by ...?", "What does it signify?", "What is the meaning of...", etc. In what may be described as her most complete published work on the problem of signs and meaning, *What is Meaning?* (1903), Welby observes that

Man questions and an answer is waiting for him. ... He must discover, observe, analyse, appraise, first the sense of all that he senses through touch, hearing, sight, and realize its interest, what it practically signifies for him; then the meaning – the intention – of action, the motive of conduct, the cause of each effect. Thus at last he will see the Significance, the ultimate hearing, the central value, the vital implication – of what? of all experience, all knowledge, all fact, and all thought. (Welby 1983: 5–6)

Further on in the same volume she specifies that "significs in a special sense aims at the concentration of intellectual activities on that which we tacitly assume to be the main value of all study, and vaguely call 'meaning'" (Welby 1983: 83). Therefore, in the face of accumulating knowledge and experience, the so-called

“significian”, whether scientist, philosopher, or everyday person, is urged to ask such questions as: “What is the sense of ...?”, “What do we intend by ...?”, “What is the meaning of ...?”, “Why do we take an interest in such things as beauty, truth, goodness?”, “Why do we give value to experience?”, “What is the expression value of a certain experience?”. In Welby’s view, such questions and their responses concern the sense of science and philosophy, and are at the basis of all controversies concerning aesthetics, ethics, and religion. Consequently, significs is relevant to all spheres of life not because it claims semiotic omniscience, but because it turns its attention to interpretation and meaning value as the condition of experience and understanding.

As the study of significance, significs advocates an approach to everyday life and to science that is oriented by the capacity for critique and creativity, release from dogmatism, dialectic-dialogic answerability, by the capacity for listening and responsibility. Significs results from relating the study of signs and sense to ethics. Ethics not only constitutes the object of study, but is also the perspective. The measure itself of the semantico-pragmatical validity of all human knowledge and experience is ethical insofar as they produce sense and value.

2.4 *Humani nihil a me alienum*

Thinkers such as those mentioned can be considered as the representatives of a theoretical tendency which focuses on the relationship between social signs, values, and human behaviour in general, by contrast with philosophical analyses conducted exclusively in abstract epistemological terms divorced from social practice.

If, in agreement with Peirce we can say that the human being is a sign, a direct consequence is that with respect to signs, *humani nihil a me alienum puto* (*nothing human is alien to me*). An important implication of this statement is that signs in the human world should not be studied separately from valuative orientations, nor should the focus be exclusively on truth value and its conditions. Instead, a general sign theory that is truly general should be capable of accounting for all aspects of human life and for all values, not just truth value. Signs are the material out of which the self is modeled and developed, just as they are the material of values. While signs can exist without values, values cannot exist without signs (Petrilli 2010: 137–158). From the point of view of human social life, to evidence the *sign* nature of the human person has a counterpart (particularly on a practical level) in asserting the *human*, the *properly human* nature of signs (Petrilli 2013; Ponzio 2010, 2013).

To work in this direction leads to the possibility of identifying a new form of humanism which critiques the reification and hypostatization of signs and values and, instead, investigates the processes that produce them. The relation between signifying processes and values subtends the human capacity for establishing relations with the world, with the self and with others, and as such requires the critical work of demystification. In this framework, signs and values emerge as the live expression of historically specified human operations. With respect to social signs, this means to recover their sense and value for mankind, rather than accept them as naturally given. Ultimately this means to recover a project originally conceived by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) with his transcendental constitutive phenomenology.

However, all this is possible on a condition: that any claim to pure descriptiveness, to neutrality be left aside. Practiced in these terms, the general science of signs can contribute significantly to philosophical investigation for a better understanding of our relations to the world, to others, to the self. This means to recover our search as proposed by Husserl and his phenomenology for the sense of knowledge, experience, and practical action, and of the sciences that study them. It is well worth noting that Husserl authored an important essay entitled “Semiotik” and dealt extensively with signs and their typology in his *Logische Untersuchungen* (Husserl 1900–1901). Such a philosophical framework favours a more adequate understanding of the problem of communication, meaning, value and interpretation. And by working in this direction, the general science of signs or semiotics may operate more fully as a human science, where the “properly human” is a pivotal value (Petrilli 2010: 205–209).

Semioethics arises as a response and continuation of the critical approach to sign studies outlined in this paper. It is inevitably associated with the proposal of a new form of humanism. This new humanism is inscribed in the analysis, understanding and production of values in signifying processes and is qualified as the “humanism of otherness.”

In fact semioethics may be considered as an orientation in semiotics working towards the development of a new form of humanism inseparable from the question of otherness. This also emerges from the commitment of semioethics to pragmatics, from its focus on the relation between signs, values and behaviour. Another important aspect is its commitment to transcending separatism among the sciences by insisting on the interrelation between the human sciences, the historico-social sciences and the natural, logico-mathematical sciences. Semioethics evidences the condition of interconnection between the problem of humanism and the question of otherness (or alterity).

The new form of humanism we are proposing is the humanism of otherness, as prospected in particular by Emmanuel Levinas in all his writings and espe-

cially in *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (1972). So far the claim to human rights has been mostly oriented by the logic of identity, leaving aside the rights of the other. Said differently, the expression “human rights” has by tradition been oriented in the direction of the humanism of identity. Therefore, it tends to refer to one’s own rights, the rights of identity, of self, forgetting the rights of the other. In other words, the concept itself of “human rights” has mostly left aside the rights of the other. In contrast, from the perspective of concern for life over the whole planet, human and nonhuman life, of concern for the health of semiosis generally, for the development of communication not only in strictly cultural terms but also in broader biosemiosical terms, this tendency must be quickly counteracted by the humanism of otherness, where the rights of the other are the first to be recognized. With this statement we are not only alluding to the rights of the other *beyond self*, but also to the self’s very own other, to the other *of self*. Indeed, the self characteristically removes, suffocates, and segregates otherness, revealing a tendency to sacrifice otherness to the cause of identity. But thus conceived identity is fictitious, and all efforts to maintain or recover identity in such terms are destined to fail.

Semiotics can contribute to the humanism of otherness by evidencing the extension and consistency of the sign network that connects every human being to every other on both a synchronic and diachronic level. The world-wide spread of the communication network means to say that the global communication system is developing on a planetary level. As such this phenomenon is susceptible to analysis in synchronic terms. Furthermore, all human beings, whether individual identities or collective identities, are implied in the same destiny, their behaviour, their decisions, including those made by the single individual, are implied in the same destiny from its remotest to its most recent and closest manifestations, the past and the evolutionary future, on both the biological and the historical-social levels, and vice-versa. Consequently, diachronic investigations (staggering to say the least for diversity) are also just as necessary.

The sign network concerns the semiosphere as constructed by humankind, a sphere that includes culture, its signs, symbols, artifacts, etc. But, if we accept Sebeok’s axiom that semiosis and life coincide, global semiotics teaches us that the semiosphere extends far beyond the sphere of human culture to coincide with the great biosphere. The semio(bio)sphere forms the habitat of humanity, the matrix whence we sprang and the stage upon which we are destined to act.

Semiotics has the merit of demonstrating that whatever is human involves signs. Indeed, it implies more than this: viewed from a global semiotic perspective, whatever is simply alive involves signs. And this is as far as cognitive semiotics and global semiotics go. However, semioethics pushes this awareness even further by evidencing the relation between semiosis and values and focusing on

the question of responsibility – radical, inescapable responsibility – inscribed in our very own bodies insofar as we are “semiotic animals.” Semioethics insists on the human capacity for responsibility, therefore responsibility for life over the entire planet, reinterpreting the semiotic animal as the “semioethic animal.” Semioethics evidences the ethical dimension of the semiotic network, therefore the inescapability of responsibility at the most radical level (that of defining commitments and values). Our ethos, but more than this, the cosmos itself, fall within the scope of human responsibility.

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Youzheng Li

“General semiotics” as the all-round interdisciplinary organizer – general semiotics (GS) vs. philosophical fundamentalism

Abstract: This paper presents a crucial problem about identity and function of general semiotics. The latter is not only defined in terms of interdisciplinary-directed theoretical practice in comparison to the philosophic-fundamental-directed one, but also further redefined as an operative-functional organizer that does not necessarily imply fixed theoretical doctrines. General semiotics (GS) is described as a functional strategy for organizing all-round interdisciplinary-directed theoretical construction. In addition, the paper emphasizes that the interdisciplinary essence of semiotic theory is contrary to any philosophical fundamentalism and applied semiotics does not need any philosophical foundation either.

Keywords: general semiotics, functional organizer, philosophical fundamentalism, interdisciplinary strategy

1 What is the main challenge for contemporary semiotics?

Immediately before the Sofia Congress the author received a questionnaire from the Sofia Congress Committee asking *What is the main challenge for contemporary semiotics?* (2014–9-2). The author responded to it with 4 sentences that are included here with added short notes. The questions and answers given in the following can help explain the critical background of the thoughts presented in this paper.

- a. A commercialized utilitarian academic systems ensures that “professional success”, rather than “scientific truth”, is the genuine final aim of scholar’s practice. (Accordingly scholars tend to follow the established rules of schol-

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- arship that are determined by multiple external factors including the more powerful non-academic forces)
- b. Nihilist ontological rhetoric is used to weaken the interdisciplinary tendency of semiotics. (Accordingly scholars tend to search for any subjectively-invented rhetoric rather than objective validity as long as the former effectively works in the academic market)
 - c. In the global academic context, on the one hand, western scholarship is far from being familiar with non-western traditional scholarship/thinking, and on the other, contemporary non-western scholarship focused on its own traditional studies is far from being familiar with contemporary western human-scientific theories as well. (Accordingly the truly global semiotic mission can hardly be attained).
 - d. Commercialized cultural and academic circumstances lead to a general vulgarization of content, direction, practice of semiotic activities with the result that the term “semiotics” could be frequently misused as a “pop-cultural brand” to search for increases in propaganda, advertising effect and factional influence through manipulating internet media in academic-educational marketing. (Accordingly the term “semiotics” could be more arbitrarily used by a variety of applied semiotics just for competitive profitability with the result that semiotic practices are further disconnected from the general trends of theoretical advances in various disciplines in the humanities).

2 The basic points in connection with the above judgments

In light of the above basic judgments we further derive the following concise proposals:

- a. The urgent necessity in the intellectual mission of mankind today is to transform the less scientific “humanities” into the more scientific-directed “human sciences” in order to more rationally and systematically solve the crucial problems concerning conflicting faiths and dogmas among different peoples and their traditions in this world.
- b. For this goal an urgent related procedural necessity is to exclude the epistemological involvement of any philosophical fundamentalism in the above scientific-directed mission regarding general semiotics and human sciences.
- c. The above two significant demands lead to a new conception of general semiotics as a strategic operator concerning epistemological-functional designs

for realizing the interdisciplinary organizing tasks in respect of the humanities and theoretical semiotics.

- d. Philosophical history presents a constant, gradually developing process of academic-disciplinary splitting from which modern mathematics, natural science and social science respectively have separated; it is time now for the human sciences to follow the same academic-historical line.
- e. Fundamentalist philosophy consisting of certain kinds of classical metaphysics and ontology partly shares the similar non-empirical-scientific ways in thinking with those prevailing in religion and poetry. Also similar to the necessary segregation between religion and politics as well as to that between poetry and the natural sciences, historically shaped fundamentalist philosophy should be separated from the epistemological foundation of social sciences as well. All kinds of non-empirically-oriented intellectual activities can and should be the important object of semiotics and the human sciences, but they would hopefully no longer be the theoretical foundation of the latter.
- f. Accordingly a specially defined general semiotics called the ‘GS model’ can help promote multi-rational operative coherence with respect to various departments of semiotics as well as to the modernization of the human sciences.
- g. In addition, GS will also undertake a related major task: to organize an institutional-semiotic anatomy of constitution and the function of fundamentalist philosophy itself in terms of new epistemological-methodological perspectives derived from synthetically and coordinately advanced theoretical parts of the human sciences.

3 The necessity of general semiotics as an interdisciplinary-scientific organizer

The modern semiotic movement has not yet entered its stage of so-called global semiotics in the new century. The global movement of semiotics is mainly characterized by its three emerging consequences:

- the global expansion of the horizon of geographic-historic-cultural territory,
- the comprehensive widening of the scholarly-theoretical perspective from different semiotic traditions,
- and the deeper reexamination of the all-round relationship among society, culture, knowledge in the real world.

And all three tendencies can be relatively reflected on the relationship between modern semiotics and traditional philosophy; or, precisely, in the epistemological confrontation between something named as general semiotics and any type of philosophical fundamentalism. The fact is that a theoretically more productive conception of general semiotics urged by the human sciences in general and theoretical semiotics in particular has not yet been accepted widely today. This is especially due to the prevailing professional protectionism and scholarly conservatism based on academic compartmentalization and competitive individualism.

On the other hand, the academic-institutionally strengthened mechanism supported by the commercial-technological establishment is embodied in its solid control of the humanity-scientifically institutionalized system and therefore encourages educationally rigidified ways of doing scholarship in the humanities, fixing that scholarship in different segregated disciplines. The desirable approaches to modernization of the human sciences in the new era, by contrast, should lie in organizing horizontally comparative and extensively cross-disciplinary researches through breaking through academic boundaries. Accordingly there emerges the necessity of certain strategic goals to be guided by “general semiotics” taken as a functional-operative organizer with respect to the promotion of interdisciplinary interaction, not only between different departmental semiotic practices but also between various social-human sciences.

4 Philosophy and human knowledge

As is generally known, philosophy was the very source of all kinds of human knowledge in intellectual history. Yet, the existence of both developed mathematics/natural sciences and social sciences is the consequence of their respective independent developments owing to gradual segregations from their philosophical origins in history. This dialectic evolution finally brings about a clear differentiation between philosophy and sciences in general. Eventually the nature of science of all kinds is even characterized by excluding all philosophical elements from its constitution. The same tendency has been emerging in the humanities today, although the latter as an academic field still naturally includes philosophical parts as its constitutive contents. Logic, the very core of philosophy, has already become an independent discipline closely combined with mathematics; aesthetics, as the important branch in classical philosophy, has been widely and effectively replaced by the newly shaped independent disciplinary theories in connection with literature and arts. It is well known that the latter two have already

become the most important parts of contemporary departmental semiotics. Even one of the central parts of philosophy – ethics or moral philosophy, as I have stressed – is better disconnected from its philosophical frameworks and should be even further closely tied to the semiotic sciences in our new era. Finally, philosophy of history, another important part of modern philosophy, must be separated from any metaphysical-ontological doctrines as well from a scientific point of view; it should be included in the contemporary new discipline “historical theory”, which could be closely linked with a recently emerging new discipline “historical semiotics”. In contrast to the cases of the natural and social sciences, however, the last three independent disciplines of the humanities present themselves as a scholarly-disciplinary mixture containing the social/humanity-scientific and the remaining philosophical elements alike. On the other hand, philosophy, especially European-continental philosophy, as a current discipline also contains an amount of interdisciplinary-scientific elements, almost becoming a scholarly combination of traditional philosophical and modern scientific parts.

We may ask why human knowledge presents this changeable way of developing in history? Simply: it is due to a natural demand for the gradual deepening of human rational practices in historical evolution. Therefore the constitutively self-splitting change of the composition of philosophy as an entire discipline in history is a natural and necessary historical process. We can regard this scientific-oriented process as progressive and constructive in nature. The process actually brings about the multiply-advanced quality of reasoning expressed in the human’s capability of carrying out observation, description, analysis, generalization and even predication in understanding human affairs. Thus, eventually we see the new term “human sciences” has been reasonably created after the Second World War. This completely new intellectual phenomenon indicates a more obvious scientific-directed and de-philosophical-centralist tendency in our times. It is this general context that current semiotics has become more and more a methodological and epistemological guide in reconstructing contemporary human sciences. The situations has become further concretized and multiplied when the interdisciplinary nature of semiotics has impacted the field concerning the modernizing enterprise of the non-western traditional humanities. The recent development of the latter over the past decades further proves that a de-philosophical-centrist position for advancing the theoretical humanities becomes a necessity today if the modernization of non-western traditional heritages would be really scientifically conducted and be accordingly reformulated for carrying out true international academic dialogue concerning theoretical humanity.

5 Philosophy as a modern professional depository of specific knowledge and philosophy as a fundamentalism with its historically transmitted ideological implications

In spite of its philosophical and linguistic origins, the modern semiotic movement has been synthetically realized in different scholarly fields and disciplines, including both traditional and modern fields. The remarkable involvement of semiotic practices in the human sciences is due to the steady strengthening of interdisciplinary or horizontal interaction between different scholarly disciplines. And this general academic development has been obviously caused by the general progress of respective scientific-theoretical practices in various academic branches. No doubt this semiotic turn in the humanities also represents a scientific turn in modernization of the humanities. In addition, this semiotic-scientific turn exactly amounts to a de-philosophical-central turn. Yes, a lot of traditional philosophical content has been already conversed into modern scientific content, as we mentioned above. But there is indeed an essential basis of traditional philosophy that we may call generally metaphysics which keeps its historically unchanged fundamentalist-theoretical dogmas. Philosophy as a modern discipline has a right to keep any kind of constitutive contents in its discipline as long as the traditional topics are still interesting to academia. However, besides being an academic unit as an accumulating site of historical thoughts, philosophy has also implicitly reserved a historically unique privilege for organizing theoretical activities in both the historically and contemporarily institutionalized humanities. This academic-institutional-ideological power silently possessed by fundamentalist philosophy today is still quite influential on different aspects of theoretical constitution of the humanities. Owing to the traditional academic-institutional background, which is encouraged by contemporary technology-oriented social-cultural mechanisms, this philosophical-fundamentalist ideological power would continue exercising its dogmatic epistemological domination over the theoretical direction and practical ways in the entire humanities, even giving a hint that the theoretical elaboration of the humanities still needs such a fundamentalist leadership as the “first philosophy”. This tendency, no doubt, is also directly impacting the ways of theoretical reconstruction in our semiotic world, including its departmental and general parts alike. Naturally, if semiotics, as an innovative or revolutionary tool in stimulating theoretical modernization of the humanities, accepts, implicitly or explicitly, this theoretical position of philosophical fundamentalism, a cognitive self-contradiction will occur within

semiotics like this: general semiotics based on any philosophical-central theoretical framework becomes immediately contrary to the interdisciplinary essence of semiotic science as such. Therefore any philosophical-central reductionism of semiotic theories could indicate a regressive movement against the modern semiotic spirit. This philosophical preference for the theoretical construction of general semiotics is mainly caused by the exacerbating tendency of the present-day system of institutionalized professional competition in current social-human scientific academia which presses scholars to more profitably calculate the cost of their research investment and competitive advantage during the process of searching for their profit-seeking professional aims (Li 2013). If so, a more convenient and profitable way for them is to appeal to this traditional privileged potential or an implicit theoretical-domineering power of certain dogmatic-philosophical fundamentalism in order to save or put aside some more painstaking and more complicated efforts for learning from various specialized theoretical experiences of other related disciplines.

Yet, we should here immediately distinguish between two different relations between semiotics and philosophy. One exists between interdisciplinary-directed semiotics and philosophy also as a discipline containing its various valuable materials. In this case semiotic theory always needs to learn from philosophy and to pertinently absorb as much as possible the related philosophical-theoretical elements into semiotic-theoretical constructions, just as all other disciplines of the humanities should do the same in their interactional relationship with philosophy. Meanwhile the reciprocal process is also desirable: philosophical thinking should also pay more and more attentions to the theoretical fruits of other humanities in order to enrich or reform its own structure with respect to the theoretical perspective of the entire humanities in which philosophy has been always engaged in history. For example, we see the book *Main Trends in Philosophy* edited by Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1977) and the French *Philosophy Encyclopedia* edited by A. Jacob (Jacob 1989–2000) present truly interdisciplinary horizons and perspectives.

The other exists in the relationship between semiotics and philosophy that is taken as an exclusively self-enclosed speculative corps guided by philosophical centralism or fundamentalism and which is also implicitly supported by the academic-institutional establishment with its historical-conservative ideology. This historically unchanged philosophical fundamentalism is mainly displayed in its abstrusely elaborated metaphysics and metaphysical ontology, insisting in its ever-lasting fixed system of absolute values and logical-central dogmas embodied in various “first principles” which can be originally traced back to philosophical sources in remote ancient times.

We certainly recognize that fundamentalist philosophy as such is very important in human intellectual history, just like religion, and should keep its independent academic status in our intellectual world. On the other hand, nevertheless, we also maintain that there is no scientific reason for theoretical semiotics to accept its habitually taken-for-granted authoritative intervention in theoretical constructions of other empirical-scientific scholarship related to the empirical historical world. Consider: just because of this kind of irrelevant engagement in causal thinking and ethical judging about historical-empirical human affairs, so many contemporary fundamentalist philosophers, both western and eastern, have brought a seriously misleading interpretations and wrong conclusions in contemporary political history. The main reason for this sad development really lies in the fact that there exist no reasonable links between a metaphysical-ontological way of thinking and all other empirical-scientific ways of thinking in social and human sciences. The ambiguous idea about the two ways of conducting theorization is in fact caused by an epistemological misunderstanding in human history. Accordingly abstruse philosophical fundamentalism has a special negative influence on empirical-scientific scholarship in connection with history, society, morality and politics in our actual anthropological world. Nowadays we attempt to state that fundamentalist philosophy plays, in some sense, a speculative-imaginative role like poetry, if not really like religion. Both imaginative-spiritual kinds of activity are of course justified in their preferred ways of organizing their thinking but should not be allowed to improperly apply their speculative or imaginary rhetoric in theoretical practices demanding genuinely empirical-scientific reasoning. Even “science” as a modern term should be separated from its less strictly defined formation in remote antiquity; however the same term is still used in various modern fundamentalist philosophies.

6 General semiotics as a strategic designed for reorganizing interdisciplinary-directed theoretical progress of the human sciences

It is evident that the humanities or even human-social sciences, rather than the entirety of human knowledge, should be completely readjusted or reorganized in our new century. But the point is that the theoretically readjusting process within a semiotic framework shouldn't be organized at a substantial level; instead it should be designed and performed at multiply structural-functional-relational level. Traditional systematic philosophy, some modern philosophy attempting

to reconstruct unified sciences, modern all-embracing theoretical sociology, contemporary universal historiography and philosophy of history – all of them have tried to provide such a synthetically processing ground for reorganizing and recombining the entirety of human knowledge at a substantial level. As is generally known, all such efforts in modern and contemporary history, despite their respective theoretical achievements, can hardly attain their goals. One of the reasons for this is their commonly shared simplistic strategy for reaching respective discipline-centralist unifications. In fact, the truly reasonable theorizing mode for integrating and harmonizing human and social sciences cannot be understood as carrying out any disciplinary-central reductionism or as realizing a new expanded syncretism of human knowledge. The acceptable conception of the unification of the contemporary human sciences can only reasonably refer to the advancing and widening of a coordinating and coherent relationship among empirically verifiable fruits of different disciplines, each of which must also firstly carry out their respective interdisciplinary-directed empirical-scientific practices separately. This principle is just what general semiotics attempts to follow.

For the past decades, besides adopting some quasi-philosophical modes of general theorization the idea of general semiotics was also considered as a new type of encyclopedia of the entire interconnected knowledge of mankind. The editing guidance of different projects in the field indeed reflects a comprehensive point of view of semiotic science taken as something including and integrating human knowledge as extensively as possible. Nevertheless, all these efforts to systematically collect together the entirety of scholarly-informational materials merely amount to presenting certain co-exhibitions of different collections of more or less sign-related knowledge in the existing disciplines while theoretical interconnections among them remain undeveloped. In other words, this kind of project only completes the job of presenting huge collections of knowledge without really attempting to further organize interdisciplinary-theoretical studies among them (Posner, Robering, Sebeok 1998). It is obvious that the remarkable achievements of current semiotics are mostly realized and displayed in a variety of departmental or applied semiotics with respective to their interdisciplinary practices performed at the epistemological-methodological level. Furthermore, we also have to note that the actual creative vigour of semiotics lies only in various disciplinary and interdisciplinary practices of the entire humanities. Therefore far from being a mere single discipline, semiotics must keep its progressive steps synchronistic with those of human sciences. At present we are faced with a serious challenge regarding how to relevantly and effectively develop interdisciplinary strategies in the entire field of the human sciences. Concretely, the current theoretical retardation evident in both general semiotic practices and the entire human sciences could be mainly due to the fact that the moderniza-

tion of the humanities – with their richly accumulated traditional heritages, positive and negative, western and eastern – requires, first of all, a deeper and wider interdisciplinary-directed epistemological breaking-through. Or, what we request especially at present is something related to the general interdisciplinary strategy overarching all disciplines in the human sciences. In terms of this interpretation we could reach a more suitable conception of general semiotics which, far from being a semiotic type of philosophy, should be involved in creating such a theoretically more suitable functional-operative organizer. What I presented with regard to the concept “institutional semiotics” (Li 2014), for example, is a related attempt that is made by dint of exercising such an all-round analytic-synthetic scientific anatomy of the profession and scholarship of semiotics. Let us call this type of general semiotics ‘GS’, so that it can be taken as a universal semantic-anatomical organizer at the academic-strategic level with respect to the entirety of the human sciences in general and semiotics in particular.

Furthermore, differently from the idea of a semiotic philosophy, GS does not need to be a fixed system of theoretical propositions representing an alternative new type of theoretical foundation, intending to methodologically unify various concrete practices performed in different disciplines; instead most semiotic practices should be firstly implemented in the existing individual disciplines by means of their various interdisciplinary tactics. What GS is and does lie in analyzing, synthesizing, readjusting and reorganizing the results of theoretical interactions among all related disciplines. Rather than being a solidified system of theories, we prefer to say GS can be regarded first of all as a set of epistemological directions, methodological procedures, a scholarly-ethical attitude and a scientific-intellectual consciousness. And the concrete methodological-operative tools used by GS come from scientific experiences of the various departmental semiotics. The main purpose of GS is to promote or restructure the interdisciplinary interaction in the world of human sciences so as to more closely strengthen scientific-practical ties between semiotics and the human sciences. Or, more precisely, GS deals with the relational issues of both departmental and general interdisciplinary practices, regarding the interdisciplinary-theoretical relationship as the operative centre for promoting the progress of human sciences in general and semiotics in particular in order to realize an important task about the systematic anatomy of the humanities in the new century. Besides, differently from the deductive-logical-theoretical type of rationality used by philosophical fundamentalism, GS adopts an empirical-inductive-practical type of rationality. The scientific orientation of semiotics should be settled in reference to historical, social, cultural and academic real experiences in this anthropological world.

7 The GS-model and modernization of the non-western traditional humanities

Let us turn to a more complicated challenge concerning cross-cultural semiotics and humanities in the current global cultural context. As I explained many times before, with the sharp constitutional divergence between the western and non-western historical-cultural-intellectual-academic traditions, the much more elaborated western metaphysics cannot be suitably employed for interpreting or helping modernize the latter at a theoretical level (Li 2008, 2011). As regards this problem western semiotic theories have been experienced to be the much more relevant and desirable alternatives. In essence, so-called cross-cultural semiotics is only a special type of interdisciplinary semiotics that requests scholars to obtain knowledge of both western theory and non-western history at the same time. The problems of theoretical modernization of non-western traditional humanities are not only related to advancement of the scientific level of the latter but also to a more realistic intellectual challenge that the non-scientific, non-western traditional humanities, including their quasi-counterparts in the west (namely, western studies of non-western cultural traditions such as Sinology), under the contemporary situation of a universal weakening of the educational conditions of the humanities, could much easily be manipulated to continue playing its less-scientific/more-ideological roles within their respective circumstances with the result of the stagnation of scientific development of the non-western humanities in general. On the other hand, all non-western scholarly traditions, especially those with rich historical heritages, provide highly valuable collections of historical material and experiences that are extremely useful for promoting cross-cultural development of the global human sciences. Based on this understanding, the global expansion of semiotic movement can be understood by us to be extremely significant for our global semiotic mission, also requesting us to double our efforts to carry out semiotic-interdisciplinary boundary-breaking.

8 The GS-model as an interdisciplinary organizer for synthetically anatomizing philosophy as an institutionalized discipline with a logical-centralist dogmatism

Generally speaking, there exists still a pressing task for us to promote an active, creative interaction between semiotic theory and philosophy. To be sure, philosophy remains the number one important theoretical source for the scientific theorization of the humanities, even from the point-view of interdisciplinary semiotics (Li 2013: 32). Semiotics at its general and individual levels always needs to intensify its theoretical strength through learning from philosophy. For the sake of advancing the quality of theoretical studies in the human sciences, first of all, we need an especially desirable preparative project of institutional-semiotic anatomy of philosophy as a traditional discipline. A very significant task in present-day semiotic practice is to more scientifically penetrate into the mechanism and functions of this historically shaped and continuously transmitted philosophical discipline. This project is especially referred to ontology, metaphysics, and some other related rhetorically sophisticated ways of thinking (even including derived or related nihilism and extreme relativism). In a word, this GS project will make philosophy itself an object of a theoretical semiotic analysis. In handling this project, the GS model as a total synthetic strategic guidance will make use of all related human knowledge, social-cultural conditions and even historical experiences as its methodological weapon and epistemological frame of reference. Based on the remarkable progress of human knowledge in the 20th century, all scientific capability available could be hopefully converged on anatomizing this most powerful, taken-for-granted theoretical mechanism in intellectual history. Nevertheless, this challenging mission will play reciprocal roles in practice. Therefore we may conclusively say that the project of GS will be a double-directed theoretical interaction between philosophy as a single discipline and semiotics as an interdisciplinary scholarly assemblage functioning at the operative level. The latter always needs to enrich its theoretical potential through learning from the former. In return the former as a theoretical-institutionalized system should be also the analyzed object of scholarly practices based on the GS model, together with different theoretical achievements of various departmental semiotics. And the consequences of this two-way scholarly interaction would push forward the unifying progress of the human sciences at a multi-rationally operative level.

In my last paper published in *Semiotica* (Li 2014), I treated general semiotics as a tool for institutional analysis with a focus on internal and external institutionalized objects and contexts; in this paper I treat general semiotics as an all-round functional organizer by emphasizing a focus on epistemological-methodological relationship between semiotic approaches and reorganized humanities knowledge. Both aspects of the identity and function of general semiotics exclude any theoretical involvement of philosophical fundamentalism that is traditionally taken as some absolute or authoritative theoretical foundation. Such a historically and habitually accepted relationship between philosophy and knowledge can no longer be valid; and fundamentalist philosophy as a conception of “first theory” should disappear forever in our new century. Conversely, philosophy as a professional discipline should become the object and material of theoretical-semiotic analysis based on the GS-model. From this point of view we can understand either the GS-model or institutional semiotics implies an extremely profound significance for effectively advancing the theoretical level of human sciences.

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Section 2:

Semiotics, experimental science and maths

Marcel Danesi

Semiotics as a metalanguage for the sciences

Abstract: Semiotics has been applied to innumerable domains of human intellectual, symbolic, and expressive activities. It has also been developed broadly in terms of its epistemology and theoretical ramifications by many semioticians over the years. However, rarely has it been considered to be a metalanguage for mathematics and the physical sciences, even though these use semiotic resources unconsciously, including annotation in mathematics, equation formulation of phenomena in physics, and so on. The purpose of this paper is to consider semiotics in terms of its value as a metalanguage for the sciences since it allows the scientist and mathematician to reflect consciously on the nature of the symbolic resources used in carrying out representation within their disciplines. For example, set theory logic in mathematics, as Peirce clearly understood, was an attempt by mathematicians to develop a metalanguage of their own for the study of mathematics. As it turns out, and as Peirce persuasively showed, set theory is itself a manifestation of semiotic principles that define its metalinguistic structure. The modern concept of metalanguage can be traced to Russell and Whitehead's (1913) construction of a set of principles that were free of logical circularity and inconsistency for mathematics, logic, and thus the sciences. As it turned out, that set contained a "flaw" – a proposition that could not be shown to be true or false – leading to the notion of indeterminacy in logic (Gödel 1931). A semiotic metalanguage, on the other hand, would show the structural and signifying characteristics of such constructions, not present them as monolithic frameworks.

Keywords: Semiotic theory, metalanguages, science, logic, mathematics

1 Introduction

Semiotics is fundamentally a metalanguage, that is, a theory of how signs are used and how they function in all domains of human intellectual and aesthetic production. It is thus a theory of how we interpret the world around us – the *Umwelt* – and imprint it into internal models of that world (sign forms) – the

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Innenwelt (Von Uexküll 1909). The view of semiotics as a metalanguage has, of course, received considerable attention by semioticians and linguists. I mention just a handful here, including Kristeva 1969; Lotman 1991; McCannell 1996; Lee 1997; and Harman 2011. The gist of their work has been to examine the pitfalls of a self-reflexive use of sign theory. Aware of the logically circular nature of this approach, Hjelmslev (1970) differentiated between *semiology* as the metalanguage of semiotic systems and *metasemiology* as the language of the various scientific methodologies. As Nöth (1990: 5) has aptly pointed out, metasemiology is nonetheless itself a form of self-reflexive inquiry because it involves “the theory of signs as a language of its own and thus a system of signs itself.” While all this is basically true, it is also true that semiotics can still have great value as a metalanguage to understand the sign systems used in mathematics and the physical sciences. In addition to Hjelmslev, Charles Morris (1938) also realized the critical importance of semiotics as a metalanguage for the sciences – a suggestion later emphasized as well by Jakobson but never really explored by him in any depth (see Holenstein 1976).

The use of semiotics as a metalanguage for the study and examination of biological communication systems has, of course, born fruit in the ever-expanding domain of biosemiotics, revealing how semiosis unfolds across species in parallel and differential ways. Its use in the social sciences has also received considerable attention – a tradition which need not be broached here. It has also been used recently to great advantage in computer science, since at least the 1980s and 1990s. The thrust of the research in this domain inheres in evaluating computer programming models in terms of semiotic theory (Bogh Andersen 1997; De Souza 2005; O’Neill 2008; Tanaka-Ishii 2010). The work of Danish semiotician Søren Brier (2007), which he calls *cybersemiotics*, has extended the computational-semiotic paradigm by showing how semiotic theory can help understand cybernetic processes, or the patterns of regulation and control in animals (including humans), organizations, and machines. As these recent developments have shown, metasemiology, as Hjelmslev called it, does indeed have a role to play in the advancement of knowledge. The purpose of this essay is, in fact, to revisit Hjelmslev’s and Morris’s claim by examining mathematical and scientific representation from a semiotic standpoint. Needless to say, this paper will only skim the surface of this topic. As indicated elsewhere (Danesi 2013, Bockarova, Danesi, and Núñez 2013, Danesi and Bockarova 2014) this hermeneutic use of semiotics can lead to a firmer grasp of how invention and discovery in mathematics and the physical sciences unfolds. Over the last few decades, mathematicians and scientists have, not surprisingly, become keenly interested in what semiotics has to offer to them as an investigative tool for understanding their own intellectual activities. Some of this interest is a consequence of work in the neurosciences

that has been suggesting that mathematics and language may emanate from the same neural systems. By studying brain-damaged patients who had lost control of number concepts, Stanislas Dehaene (1997), for instance, traced the sense of number to the inferior parietal cortex, an area where various signals involved in language processing (auditory, visual, tactile) converge. This type of finding strongly implies that mathematics and natural language may indeed be intertwined semiotically, so that one can be used to understand the other by a form of intellectual proxy.

George Lakoff and Rafael Núñez (2000) have also argued persuasively that language and mathematics share neural processes, which convert bodily experiences into sign-based systems of knowledge. We prefer number systems based on ten because the human body has ten fingers, which we use instinctively to count. Lakoff and Núñez trace these representational tendencies to “linking metaphors,” or mental states that transform bodily processes into abstractions. Whether or not such neuroscientific theories can be proven empirically, the point is that they are plausible and highly interesting and, thus, need to be explored seriously if we are ever to come to an understanding of what language and mathematics are and why both are used by us as complementary models of knowledge of the world. Although it is defined as an interdisciplinary science, semiotics has hardly ever been adopted by the sciences as a metalanguage. Parallels are drawn between the disciplines, but true theoretical interaction has seldom occurred, outside of sporadic attempts by individuals working within semiotics.

2 Metalanguages

Before tackling the question of semiotics as a metalanguage for mathematics and the physical sciences, it is useful to revisit the notion of metalanguage itself within logic and mathematics. In philosophy, Russell and Whitehead (1913) were probably the first to tackle the question of a system of representation that would be free of self-reference (known as the Liar Paradox). But it became transparently obvious right after publication of their work that self-reference could not be easily avoided in this way. To solve the dilemma, Russell consequently assumed the existence of increasingly abstract levels of representation. But, each higher (abstract) level always seemed to produce its own self-referential structure. The hierarchy of levels thus turned out to be infinite and, hence, impracticable. So, Russell introduced the theory of “types,” whereby certain types of propositions only would be classified into different levels (more and more abstract) and thus considered separately from other types. This seemed to avoid the problem

of self-reference – for a while anyhow. The Polish mathematician Alfred Tarski (1933) developed Russell’s idea of types further by naming each increasingly level of abstract statements a metalanguage. A metalanguage, Tarski showed, is essentially a statement about another statement. At the bottom of the hierarchy are straightforward statements about things such as “Earth has one moon.” Now, if we say “The statement that Earth has one moon is true,” we are using a different type of language, because it constitutes a statement about a previous statement. It is a metalanguage. The problem with this whole approach is, of course, that more and more abstract metalanguages are needed to evaluate lower-level statements. And this can go on ad infinitum. In effect, Tarski’s system only postpones making final decisions about “what is what.” Also, Kurt Gödel (1931) had showed a few years earlier in his widely-known article that there will always be some statement in a set of statements that can neither be proved to be true or false. In other words, there can be no complete and consistent metalanguage.

This notwithstanding, it is clearly practical to have metalanguages. Most fields have one – literature has literary criticism, music has musicology, and so on. Mathematics also has one – *set theory* (Chaitin 2006). Set theory constitutes an abstract system for describing numbers and their relations without resorting to natural language (so-called sentential logic) to do so. Given its general nature, set theory has migrated as a metalanguage to other disciplines, including philosophy and linguistics. Actually, the use of diagrams to examine mathematics can be found in the writings of Charles Peirce (1938–1956), to which we will return below. Some mathematicians and semioticians have also explored the nature of the metalanguage used to describe mathematics, finding many fascinating things about the synergy established between the two (for example, Marcus 1975, 1980, 2003, 2010; Thom 1975, 2010; Rotman 1988, 1993; Otte 1997; Radford, Schubring, and Seeger 2008; Alexander 2012; Danesi and Bockarova 2014).

Mathematics and language constitute intersemiotic systems, that is, one could be used to describe the other, as has been done at various times and in cognate disciplinary domains (as for, example, in computational linguistics). When alphabets appeared on the scene around 1000 BCE, they were used to represent numbers, because it made representation very practical. The order of the Greek and Roman alphabets is based on that early practice, where A once stood for the number 1, B for the number 2, and so on. The Greeks started a true intellectual revolution, in effect, by inventing notational and heuristic devices as they discovered new facts, often through the intellectual manipulation of their devices.

This brings up the question of whether mathematics describes what is out there (the Platonic view) or else is constructed by humans to understand reality in terms of their own intellectual resources. For Plato, mathematics springs from

an innate faculty that helps us discover the world; for the influential contemporary philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1921), on the other hand, it is an invention that we use to map or encode (our version of) reality. Since Gödel's demonstration that mathematical-logical systems are ultimately undecidable the Wittgensteinian view has come to the forefront, giving ground to the so-called constructivist view (Hersh 1997), which sees mathematics as a human creation, akin to literature or art, not a language of scientific discovery. But given how discoveries are often made serendipitously, Plato's view cannot be so easily dismissed, at least at face value. A classic example is the theory of exponents, where the simple notation used became itself a source of discovery. Exponential notation was devised initially to be an abbreviation strategy so as to facilitate the cumbersomeness of repeated multiplication – such as $7 \times 7 \times 7 \times 7 \times 7 \times 7 = 7^6$. The use of 6 in superscript form, which stands for the times a number is to be used as a factor, greatly simplifies such tasks, by saving space and reducing the time and cognitive energy required to process the given information. But that simple notational device did much more than just make multiplication less effortful – exponents were introduced in the Renaissance period. Right after its introduction it took on a life of its own. Right after its invention mathematicians started to play with the notation in creative ways, discovering new facts about numbers in the process. For example, they discovered that $n^0 = 1$, thus enucleating a property of zero that was previously unknown. It also led to an “arithmetic of exponents,” with its own laws and properties. And it ultimately led to the theory of logarithms, which also started out as a means of representing numbers efficiently and economically. In sum, a simple notational device invented to make a certain type of multiplication easier to read was the source of these discoveries, directly or indirectly. The history of mathematics is characterized by such notational creations that have led serendipitously to mathematical discoveries. The debate between notation and discovery, and thus, between representation and reality, can be rephrased as follows: Is natural structure inherent in the world for us to discover and encode, or is a product of the human mind doubling back on itself as it experiences the natural world? René Thom (2010: 494) has offered a critique of the two positions by pointing out their inability to really get at the essence of the phenomenon of mathematics, concluding that “quite likely, it is not possible to decide the ontological nature mathematical entities without taking into account the way mathematical constructions may be inserted into the concrete reality of the world surrounding us.” Thom is suggesting that there is an interplay between the two positions.

The problem may be that mathematicians have confused logic (the assumed metalanguage or metastructure of mathematics) with mathematics. As Charles Peirce argued eloquently, the two are ontologically different. This is what he wrote circa 1906 (in Kiryushchenko 2012: 69):

The distinction between the two conflicting aims [of logic and mathematics] results from this, that the mathematical demonstrator seeks nothing but the solution of his problem; and, of course, desires to reach that goal in the smallest possible number of steps; while what the logician wishes to ascertain is what are the distinctly different elementary steps into which every necessary reasoning can be broken up. In short, the mathematician wants a pair of seven-league boots, so as to get over the ground as expeditiously as possible. The logician has no purpose of getting over the ground: he regards an offered demonstration as a bridge over a canyon, and himself as the inspector who must narrowly examine every element of the truss because the whole is in danger unless every tie and every strut is not only correct in theory, but also flawless in execution. But hold! Where am I going? Metaphors are treacherous – far more so than bridges.

Metalanguages are fraught with logical loopholes, as the Russell-Whitehead-Tarski-Gödel episode showed. The origin of the debate on logic as a metalanguage, actually, goes back to Euclid and other early Greek mathematicians, although they did not call it a metalanguage (of course). They developed the method of proof as a logical way of demonstrating some idea or concept as being valid or invalid through reasoning. The validity of an argument depended on the logical consistency of the argument, not on the truth or falsity of its premises. This view of logic was mirrored in what Aristotle called the categorical syllogism, which is based on connecting premises, such as the following, to each other:

- (1) All mammals are warm-blooded.
- (2) All cats are mammals.
- (3) Therefore, all cats are warm-blooded.

This syllogism is valid because the premises are connected logically. Each is composed of *categorical* terms (terms that denote categories such as mammals, cats, and so on). Each of the premises has one term in common leading to the conclusion: the major term (1) which forms the predicate of the conclusion (3), and the minor term (2), which forms the subject of the conclusion (3). The categorical term in common in the premises is called the middle term. Above it is *mammals*. The skeletal structure of the categorical logic of the above syllogism can be shown as follows:

- (1) All A are B.
- (2) All C are A.
- (3) Therefore, all C are B.

One does not need to use symbolism to accept this as true, though. Common sense tells us that this is so. However, common sense does not show us the validity of the logic behind the argumentation. Such a method of proof brings about a sense of certainty about observed phenomena. One could measure the angles in a

triangle ad infinitum and they would always add up to 180° , with some minor variation for human error in the measuring process. But when it was demonstrated that this is so by logical proof then the observation became a proposition that needed no further exploration, thus eliminating the need to keep on measuring triangles.

It was George Boole (1854) who used the idea of sets to unite logic and mathematics into a general metalanguage, although, again, it was not named as such. To test an argument, Boole converted statements into symbols, in order to show their logical structure, independently of their meanings or, more accurately, referents and senses. Then, through rules of derivation he showed that it is possible to determine what new formulas may be inferred from the original premises. Boole's primary objective was to break down the logic of proof into its bare structure by replacing words and sentences (which bear contextual or categorical meaning) with symbols (which do not). This, he claimed, would enucleate the essence of mathematical proof. He reduced symbolism to its bare oppositional structure – using the 1 of the binary system to stand for *true* and the 0 for *false*. Instead of addition, multiplication and the other operations of arithmetic (which bear historical meanings) he used the conjunction (\wedge), disjunction (\vee), and complement or negation (\neg), in order to divest operations from any kind of external-contextualized information they may bring to bear on the logic used. These operations can be expressed either with truth tables or Venn diagrams, which show how they relate to sets of x and y , which, in turn are varying groups of 1s and 0s.

The Boolean metalanguage gave a concrete slant to the question of what is mathematics and what its relation to logic is. Moreover, it forced mathematicians to reconsider their definitions, axioms, and assumptions from the perspective of logical entailment, taking nothing for granted. This was Giuseppe Peano's aim in 1889 (Peano 1973), who wanted to formalize the operations of arithmetic, by breaking them down into their simple logical components, recalling Euclid's axioms for geometry. His nine axioms start by establishing the first natural number (no matter what numeral system is used to represent it), which is zero. The other axioms are *successor* ones showing that they apply to every successive natural number. For example, the second axiom states that for every natural number x , $x = x$; the third one, then, follows with the statement that, for all natural numbers x and y , if $x = y$ then $y = x$; and the fourth then states that, for all natural numbers x , y and z , if $x = y$ and $y = z$, then $x = z$; and so on. The last axiom is exactly equivalent to the syllogism above, but it is stated here as an axiom, not as a deduction.

Peano's axioms may seem like self-evident concepts, but the goal of all metalanguages is to make the obvious, obvious. If one were to program a machine to carry out arithmetical operations, it would need to have these axioms built into

its appropriate algorithm. On the other hand, while the axioms are of course valid logically, they do not tell the whole story of mathematics and especially of how we come to devise such metalanguages in the first place. They are useful, not revelatory. As Stewart (2013: 313) observes, the use of the term *exist* in any logical treatment of mathematics raises several issues, the most obvious one being the definition of *exist* itself:

The deep question here is the meaning of ‘exist’ in mathematics. In the real world, something exists if you can observe it, or, failing that, infer its necessary presence from things that can be observed. We know that gravity exists because we can observe its effects, even though no one can see gravity. However, the number two is not like that. It is not a thing, but a conceptual construct.

The irrational numbers and the imaginary ones did not “exist” until they cropped up in the solution of two specific equations made possible by the Pythagorean theorem and the concept of quadratic equation respectively. So, where were they before? Were they waiting to be discovered? This question is clearly at the core of the nature of discovery in mathematics. The same story can be told over and over within the field – transfinite numbers, graph theory, and so on. These did not “exist” until they crystallized in the conduct of mathematics, through ingenious notational modifications, diagrammatic insights, ludic explorations with mathematical forms, and so on. In other words, many discoveries came about not through the modeling of external information (the *Umwelt*), but through a “play” with semiotic metalanguages (signs, symbols, diagrams, texts, and so on).

A basic conundrum associated with the foregoing discussion is the question of meaning. Aware of this problem, Gottlob Frege (1879) introduced the distinction between *sense* and *referent*, as is well known. The latter is the object named, whereas the former involves a mode of presentation. Frege’s distinction introduced the notion that two terms, whose senses were already fixed so that they might refer to different objects, actually refer to the same object. Frege’s work was ultimately rejected by Bertrand Russell, but it was taken up by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922), who saw sentences as propositions about simple world facts, that is, as representations of the world in the same way that pictures represented the same world. This seemed to solve the question of reference in mathematical representations. But Wittgenstein himself had serious misgivings about his own theory. In his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), he was perplexed by the fact that language could do much more than just allow us to construct propositions about the world. So, he introduced the idea of “language games” (describing, reporting, guessing riddles, making jokes, and so on) that went beyond simple Fregean semantics or direct representation of the world. Wittgenstein was convinced that ordinary language was too problematic because

of use and needed to be reformed, if it was ever to be used as a metalanguage to describe mathematics. Unlike Russell, he did not wish to imbue it with rigid formalism. He ended up simply wanting to ensure its careful, accurate, and prudent use.

Russell was well aware of the inbuilt pitfalls of axiomatic logic and natural language, asking the question of whether any part of mathematics can actually be proven (Russell and Whitehead 1913), and if so, what kind of metalanguage, other than words and statements, could be used. How, for example, can we prove that $1 + 1 = 2$, even if we articulate this to be an axiomatic derivation from previous axioms? Russell was determined to put mathematics on a solid logical footing. Using connective symbols, Russell did indeed prove that $1 + 1 = 2$, in a way that at first seemed to be non-tautological. But, shortly thereafter, Gödel showed that any formal theory of basic mathematical truths and their formal provability is inconsistent if it includes a statement of its own consistency. In other words, when mathematicians attempt to lay a logical basis to their craft, or try to show that logic and mathematics are one and the same, they are playing a mind game that is bound to come to a halt, as Alan Turing (1936) also argued a few years later. He asked if there is a general procedure to decide if a self-contained computer program will eventually come to a halt. But one cannot decide if the program will stop when it runs with a given input. Turing started with the assumption that the halting problem was decidable and then constructed an algorithm that halts if and only if it does not halt, which is a contradiction. In their 1986 book, *The Liar*, mathematician Jon Barwise and philosopher John Etchemendy adopted a practical view of the metalanguage problem. As they assert, self-reference and undecidability arise only because we allow them to arise. The meaning of a statement can only be determined by assessing the context in which it is uttered along with our reasons for constructing it. Once such factors are determined, no paradoxes arise.

Aware of the inconsistencies of natural language as a tool for understanding the world, the late Thomas A. Sebeok initiated a project, which he called the *global semiotic movement* (Sebeok 2001), to make semiotics the main tool for investigating reality. The monumental four-volume handbook of semiotic theories and practices, *A Handbook on the Sign-Theoretic Foundations of Nature and Culture*, which Sebeok instigated and helped to bring to fruition (Posner, Robering, and Sebeok, 1997–2004), was one of the products of his movement. By understanding the nature of modeling with sign forms, mathematicians and scientists would derive relevant insights into the relation between representation and reality, and thus how their theories are interconnected with their crafts of representation (Sebeok and Danesi 2000). In other words, semiotic practices are transportable to all kinds of representational systems, despite the slippery nature

of the sign forms used. In this way, the study of raw information and the study of meaning can be seen as two sides of the same coin. The focus of true semiotics should be the study of the modeling capacities of the brain, which Sebeok characterized as a “semiotic organ.”

3 Mathematics, science, and reality

Mathematics involves the recruitment of everyday cognitive mechanisms that give signifying form to the human imagination, such as metaphors and various other conceptual blends (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). As mentioned, it was Morris and then Jakobson who entreated semioticians and mathematicians to study mathematics from the semiotic-linguistic perspective, and thus in terms of the cognitive structures (such as metaphors) that signs manifest. The questions that such an approach would elicit are rather profound. For example: Does group theory have any real value or meaning other than as a means of representing algebraic structures with convenient symbols and related rules? As it has turned out it, group theory has provided an accurate language for describing many natural phenomena, as Mackenzie (2012: 121) indicates:

Chemists now use group theory to describe the symmetries of a crystal. Physicists use it to describe the symmetries of subatomic particles. In 1961, when Murray Gell-Mann proposed his Nobel Prize-winning theory of quarks, the most important mathematical ingredient was an eight-dimensional group called $SU_{(3)}$, which determines how many subatomic particles have spin $\frac{1}{2}$ (like the neutron and proton). He whimsically called his theory “The Eightfold Way.” But it is no joke to say that when theoretical physicists want to write down a new field theory, they start by writing down its group of symmetries.

Discoveries within mathematical systems, such as this, are often unexpected. The Pythagoreans unwittingly discovered irrational numbers, and were so surprised and distressed by it that they decided to keep it secret, mainly because it went against their idea of harmony. This may well argue in favor of Platonism, with notation simply being a suggestive, rather than exploratory, strategy. As neuroscientist Pierre Changeux (2013: 13) muses, Plato’s trinity of the Good (the aspects of reality that serve human needs), the True (what reality is), and the Beautiful (the aspects of reality that we see as pleasing) is actually consistent with the notions of modern-day neuroscience:

So, we shall take a neurobiological approach to our discussion of the three universal questions of the natural world, as defined by Plato and by Socrates through him in his *Dialogues*. He saw the Good, the True, and the Beautiful as independent, celestial essences of Ideas,

but so intertwined as to be inseparable...within the characteristic features of the human brain's neuronal organization.

Basically, this means that our brain is predisposed to look for reality, but what the above line of argumentation seems to skirt over is that it might be a reality of our making – that is, we discover what we are capable of discovering as a species, not reality in any objective sense. Moreover, Plato's trinity means that we will never find faults within our systems of knowledge, for then it would mean that the brain is faulty. As it turns out, and as already discussed, this is what Gödel's undecidability theorem implied. But then, if mathematics is faulty, why does it lead to demonstrable discoveries, both within and outside of itself? René Thom (1975) referred to discoveries in mathematics as “catastrophes” in the sense of events that subvert or overturn existing knowledge. Thom named the process of discovery as “semiogenesis” or the emergence of “pregnant” (suggestive) forms within symbol systems themselves. These emerge by happenstance through contemplation and manipulation of the systems. As this goes on, every once in a while, a catastrophe occurs that leads to new insights, disrupting the previous system. Now, while this provides a description of what happens – discovery is indeed catastrophic – it does not tell us why the brain produces catastrophes in the first place. Perhaps the connection between the brain, the body, and the world will always remain a mystery, since the brain cannot really study itself. Actually, Thom's ideas laid the foundation for what has come to be known as *catastrophe theory*, which examines how small changes in circumstances can produce sudden and large shifts in systems.

It is useful to reiterate here Thom's (2010: 494) analysis of the three main approaches to the nature of mathematics as follows:

- (1) *The Formalist Position*. Formalists claim that the meanings of mathematical objects are derivations of symbol systems in the brain that cohere logically. This was the stance taken by Russell and Whitehead.
- (2) *The Platonic Position*. Platonists claim that mathematical objects have an autonomous existence; the mathematician does not create them; he or she discovers them like an explorer might an unknown territory.
- (3) *The Constructivist Approach*. Constructivists claim that the mathematician builds complex mathematical forms from simpler ones and then applies them within and outside mathematics. The use of mathematics to do things is a practical outcome of this.

The discussion of how mathematics unfolds constitutes a semiotic argument, connecting sign forms and their referents. This goes beyond just “thinking about math,” since it involves, as in all semiotic practices, looking at the relationship of

mathematics to other human faculties and how it connects to the outside world. The semiotics-mathematics interface lays the groundwork for formulating specific hermeneutical questions and conceptualizations about the nature of mathematics and its abstract structure. Psychology enters the hermeneutical terrain by shedding light on what happens in the brain as this structure is manipulated in some way. Anthropology then helps the mathematician grasp the details of contextual conditioning in the constitution, use, and development of mathematics.

In the biosemiotic movement, the question of species-specific abilities often comes up. Dehaene (1997) has brought forth persuasive experimental evidence to suggest that the human brain and that of some chimps come with a wired-in aptitude for mathematics. The difference in the case of chimps is, apparently, an inability to formalize this knowledge and then use it for invention and discovery. Within neuroscience a subfield, called *numerical cognition*, has emerged to seek answers to the species-specificity debate. Brain-scanning experiments have shown that certain areas of the human brain are uniquely predisposed to process numerical patterns. Whatever the truth, it is clear that numerical cognition is an area of relevance to semiotics. It has been found, for example, that proof and mathematical discoveries in general seem to be located in the same neural circuitry that sustains ordinary language and other cognitive and expressive systems (Lakoff and Núñez 2000). It is this circuitry that allows us to interpret meaningless formal logical expressions as talking about themselves. And, it has become clear that as in other domains of human representation, mathematical forms cannot be tied down to a specific meaning, even if they emerge in a particular context. They can be applied constantly to all kinds of referential domains, known and unknown. We do not know the meaning of the form until it is contextualized.

The issue of representation and reality really comes to the surface in the physical sciences, mainly because these use mathematics as a metalanguage, thus bringing to the whole process of science the various problems associated with metalanguages. But this is not unexpected. Unlike popular conceptions, science is not a theory of certifiable phenomena; it is based on guesses, models, and probable outcomes. To make their hunches useable or practicable, scientists express them in mathematical language, which gives them a shape that can be seen, modified, and tested. In some ways, science is the referential domain of mathematics. Take the well-known and often discussed example of quantum physics as a case-in-point. It was in the early 1900s when scientists became dissatisfied with classical Newtonian physics, discovering inconsistencies within it, and thus looking for new interpretations of observed events. The reason was that the observations and the mathematical equations were out of kilter. Max Planck published a new mathematical model of energy transfer in 1900 to explain the spectrum of light

emitted by certain heated objects, claiming that energy is not given off continuously, but in the form of individual units that he called *quanta*. Planck came to this notion after discovering an equation that explained the results of these tests. The equation is $E = Nh\nu$, with E = energy, N = integer, h = constant, ν = frequency. In constructing this equation, Planck used the constant (h), which is now known as Planck's constant. The truly remarkable part of Planck's discovery was that energy, which appears to be emitted in wavelengths, is actually discharged in small packets (*quanta*). The new theory of energy revolutionized physics and opened the way for the theory of relativity.

In 1905, Einstein, suggested that a new particle, later called the *photon*, was the carrier of electromagnetic energy, indicating that light, in spite of its wave nature, must be composed of these energy particles, which are the quanta of electromagnetic radiation. Although he accepted the validity of Maxwell's computations, Einstein claimed that many anomalous experiments could be explained if the energy of a Maxwellian light wave were localized into point-like quanta that moved independently of one another, even if the wave itself is spread continuously over space. In 1909 and 1916, he then showed that, if Planck's law of radiation is accepted, the energy quanta must also carry momentum, making them full-fledged particles. In 1924, Louis de Broglie, demonstrated that electrons could also exhibit wave properties. A little later, Erwin Schrödinger and Werner Heisenberg, devised separate, but equivalent, systems for organizing the emerging theories of quanta into a framework, and thus a new physics. The relevant point to be made is that these new models were all expressed in mathematical language and it was this language that led to the establishment of quantum physics.

The view that atoms have an internal structure prompted physicists to probe this idea experimentally. In 1911, Ernest Rutherford developed a model of the atom consisting of a spherical core called the nucleus, made up of a dense positive charge, with electrons rotating around this nucleus. Niels Bohr's proposal was a modification of this model. In 1932, James Chadwick then suggested that the nucleus was composed of two kinds of particles: positively charged protons and neutral neutrons. In 1935, Hideki Yukawa proposed that other particles, which he called mesons, also made up the nucleus. After that, the picture of the atom grew more complicated as physicists discovered the presence of more and more subatomic particles. In 1955, Owen Chamberlain and Emilio Segre discovered the antiproton (a negatively charged proton), and in 1964, Murray Gell-Mann and George Zweig, discovered so-called quarks as fundamental particles, claiming that protons and neutrons were essentially combinations of quarks. In 1979, gluons (a type of boson) were discovered as carrying a strong force, called the *strong interaction*, which binds the atomic nucleus together. In 1983, Carlo Rubbia

discovered two more subatomic particles – the W particle and the Z particle, suggesting that they are a source of the weak force, also called the *weak interaction*.

Today, physicists believe that six kinds of quarks exist and that there are three types of neutrinos, particles that interact with other particles by means of the weak nuclear interaction. There may be an underlying unity among three of the basic forces of the universe: the strong force, the weak force, and the electromagnetic force that holds electrons to the nucleus. It is remarkable that such discoveries dovetail perfectly with the rise of group theory, matrix theory, and other modern-day mathematical theories, forming the metalinguistic basis of quantum physics. The question of which came first, the physics or the mathematics, is a moot one. This suggests a principle that can be called the *osmosis principle*, which states that changes in metalanguages lead to real physical discoveries (Danesi 2013). In 1927, Heisenberg discovered a general characteristic of quantum mechanics, called the uncertainty principle, which encapsulates analogically the workings of the osmosis principle. Heisenberg found that it is impossible to precisely describe both the location and the momentum of a particle at the same instant. If we were able to describe a particle's location with great precision, we must at the same time compute its momentum in terms of a broad range of numbers. In effect, we are forcing the electron to absorb and then re-emit a photon so that a light detector can see the electron. We might thus know the precise location of both the photon source and the light detector, but the momentum spoils our attempt, because the absorption of a photon by the electron changes the momentum. The electron is therefore in a new direction when it re-emits the photon. Thus, our detection of the re-emitted photon does not allow us to compute where the electron was when it absorbed the initial photon.

Now, conundrums such as these are, remarkably, resolved with the language of *functional analysis*, which can model the values of physical observations such as energy and momentum, considered to be Eigen values, by adapting the mathematics of continua and the linear operators in Hilbert space. Functional analysis deals with functionals, or functions of functions. It is a veritable metalanguage, in the Tarskian sense. A functional allows mathematicians to express a relationship between objects, such as numbers, vectors, or functions. Groupings of such objects are called spaces. Differentiation is an example of a functional because it defines a relationship between a function and another function (its derivative). Integration is also a functional. Functional analysis and its osmosis with quantum mechanics shows how discoveries have always been made, by the analogical blending of previous ideas with new ones. As Hofstadter has argued cogently (Hofstadter 1979, Hofstadter and Sander 2013), analogy is a primary force in the generation of new ideas within mathematics and science.

Physicist Lee Smolin (2013) asks a simple but profound question related to the foregoing discussion: Can quantum and relativity laws account for the highly improbable set of conditions that triggered the Big Bang jump-starting the universe? The question Smolin (2013: 46) asks is, essentially, whether or not the mathematics is correct, but the science not.

Logic and mathematics capture aspects of nature, but never the whole of nature. There are aspects of the real universe that will never be representable in mathematics. One of them is that in the real world it is always some particular moment.

While this is certainly true, the fact remains that there is an osmosis between mathematics and scientific discovery and this, in turn, connects the two to the outside world. The problem is in determining if the connection leads to reality or our version of it. This is the sum and substance of the osmosis principle. As the discussion of quantum physics suggests, science does not progress in a linear fashion; it moves forward in shifts. As a previous model breaks down under the weight of new facts, it is discarded and replaced with a new one. This process is called *falsification*, a term used by philosopher Karl Popper (1935, 1963). As he put it (1963: 34): “Every genuine *test* of a theory is an attempt to falsify it, or to refute it. Testability is falsifiability; but there are degrees of testability: some theories are more testable, more exposed to refutation, than others; they take, as it were, greater risks.” In other words, it only takes one counter-observation to falsify an existing theoretical paradigm. Science progresses when a theory is shown to be wrong and a new theory is introduced which better explains the observed phenomena. That is what happened with quantum physics. A theory is scientific, then, if we can show what would possibly cause us to reject it.

It was Thomas Kuhn (1970) who coined the term “paradigm shift” to describe how progress in science occurs. Kuhn attacks the “development-by-accumulation” view of science, which holds that science progresses linearly by accumulation of theory-independent facts. In this paradigm, older theories give way successively to wider, more inclusive ones. Like Popper, he agrees that scientists have a worldview or paradigm that they bring to their observations. Paradigms shift all the time on the basis of new ideas. Scientists accept the dominant paradigm until anomalies appear, as they did for Max Planck. Then, they begin to question the basis of the paradigm, with new theories which challenge it. Eventually one of the new theories becomes accepted as the new paradigm.

In 1962, Max Black claimed that scientific models (theories, hypotheses, and so on) are really products of metaphorical thinking that are given diagrammatic form. Essentially there are no scientific theories expressed in pure language. Diagrams permeate mathematics and science, both as heuristic devices and

as models for illustrating theorems, conducting proofs, and so on. This is saliently evident in geometry where a diagram of a figure is itself an intrinsic part of a theorem or proof, guiding its logical demonstration and leading to further ideas and discoveries. Diagrammatic layouts such as the binomial expansion and the diagonal demonstrations by Georg Cantor, among others, are examples of diagrammatic models or proofs showing hidden structure that could not be envisioned or discovered in any other way. There is no mathematics or science without diagrams.

As neuroscientific research has shown, mental imagery and its expression in diagrammatic form is a more fundamental form of cognition than language, probably predating the advent of vocal language in the human species (Cummins 1996; Chandrasekaran et al. 1995). Yet, some mathematicians actually consider the use of diagrams as diminishing the power of logical reasoning, seeing diagrams as potentially interfering in the reasoning process (Shin 1994; Hammer 1995). But, as the work in computer modeling has shown, diagrammatic algorithms are part of knowledge modeling, constituting more powerful forms than sentences and statements. Charles Peirce clearly understood this, inventing a diagrammatic system of representation, called Existential Graphs (EGs), which he showed to be logically equivalent to predicate logic (CP4: 347–584, where CP = Charles Peirce 1931–1958 and the digit 4 refers to the volume number). Like Euler, Peirce saw a graph as anything showing how the parts correlated to each other. This was evident especially in the outline of the graph, which was, in effect, a trace to how the thought process unfolded. A graph is a pictorial manifestation of what goes on in the mind as it grapples with structural information. Graphs thus display the very process of thinking *in actu*, as Peirce put it (CP4: 6), showing how a given mathematical argument, proof, or problem unfolds in a schematic way (Parker 1998; Stjernfelt 2007; Roberts 2009). Graphs allow us to grasp something as a set of transitional states. Therefore, every graph conveys information and simultaneously explains how we understand it. It is a picture of cognitive processes in action. And it doubles back on the brain to suggest further information or ideas. The following citation encapsulates Peirce's notion of graph. In it, we see him discussing with a general why a map is used to conduct a campaign (CP4: 530):

But why do that [use maps] when the thought itself is present to us? Such, substantially, has been the interrogative objection raised by an eminent and glorious General. Recluse that I am, I was not ready with the counter-question, which should have run, "General, you make use of maps during a campaign, I believe. But why should you do so, when the country they represent is right there?" Thereupon, had he replied that he found details in the maps that were so far from being "right there," that they were within the enemy's lines, I ought to have pressed the question, "Am I right, then, in understanding that, if you were thoroughly and perfectly familiar with the country, no map of it would then be of the smallest use to you

in laying out your detailed plans?” No, I do not say that, since I might probably desire the maps to stick pins into, so as to mark each anticipated day’s change in the situations of the two armies.” “Well, General, that precisely corresponds to the advantages of a diagram of the course of a discussion. Namely, if I may try to state the matter after you, one can make exact experiments upon uniform diagrams; and when one does so, one must keep a bright lookout for unintended and unexpected changes thereby brought about in the relations of different significant parts of the diagram to one another. Such operations upon diagrams, whether external or imaginary, take the place of the experiments upon real things that one performs in chemical and physical research.

If one examines scientific theories and models more closely (Stjernfelt 2007, Roberts 2009), what becomes apparent is that EGs are used unconsciously in the pictorialization of physical phenomena. It is by observing the graphs or diagrams that ideas crystallize.

4 Concluding remarks

The present foray into mathematics and science through the lens of the role played by metalanguages (sign forms, diagrams, EGs, and so on) in discovery was meant to suggest that theory-making and scientific modeling are based on basic sign-making processes, which, like any sign system, both encode observed phenomena and then, in their very structure and form, suggest further exploration of the same phenomena. It is akin to the denotative-connotative process, whereby a sign form may capture something denotatively, but then, by its very nature start spreading to other domains of reference through connotation. Indeed, one can claim that all semiotic metalanguages are powerful because of the inbuilt tendency towards connotation of all sign systems. This shows the interaction between the *Umwelt* of experience and the *Innenwelt* of modeling, suggesting, in turn, a kind of connectivity between human brains and the world. Rather than constituting an explicit use of semiotics, the informal application of semiotic notions such as those discussed here would enhance the scientist’s grasp of the relation between representation and reality. Like a musical composer who knows how to utilize theoretical notions to enhance his or her musical creation, so too a scientist can use semiotic insights to enhance his or her theoretical creations. Already, there are many indications that this attitude is becoming more and more a two-way street, since many ideas developed within semiotics proper are now found scattered in scientific and mathematical research paradigms and, vice versa, semiotics is being influenced more and more by the fields into which it enters.

The *raison d'être* of semiotics is, arguably, to investigate whether or not reality can exist independently of the signs that human beings create to represent and think about it. When a mathematician solves or proves an intractable problem by essentially reducing it to a formula, an equation, or a text (a logical syllogism), the way in which it is done puts the brain's semiotic capacities on display. But this cannot explain the process. It can only illustrate it. The brain may, in fact, be a mirror organ, as some neuroscientists now suggest (Ramachandran 2011). Mirror neurons, discovered in the 1990s, may be the crux to resolving the brain-reality dilemma. A mirror neuron is a neuron that fires both when an animal acts and when it observes the same action performed by another. The neuron is thus said to mirror the behavior of the other, as though the observer were acting. In humans, brain activity consistent with that of mirror neurons has been found in the pre-motor cortex, the supplementary motor area, the primary somatosensory cortex and the inferior parietal cortex. This might mean that the brain is a veritable iconic device, translating the *Umwelt* into mirror (iconic) forms instinctively – hence the power of iconic modeling systems such as diagrams. In many ways, every mathematical device, notation, or symbol, is a mirror of something the brain picks up from the information it processes. This might explain why the mind may not at first understand all the implications that the represented information conceals. It is by unpacking that information that discovery and invention occur.

The semiotician-scientist would (or should) ask: How does information become knowledge? It is in the modeling of information through sign forms that we can get a glimpse into how this comes about. In effect, studying information in itself is useless unless we study also how we transform it into something meaningful to us. It is, as its etymology suggests – from Latin *information* “a sketch, an outline” – nothing more than encoded *form*. Deriving *content* from this form requires knowledge of how it has been modeled and how it has been used. Not only, but the relation between the modeling of information and the information itself is so intrinsic that it is often impossible to differentiate between the two.

But even semiotic thinking cannot penetrate the substance of the representation-reality enigma. Semiotics is a descriptive enterprise, after all, not an explanatory one. So we are left with the same kinds of questions with which we started off this article: Why does mathematics work as a model to explain the physical world? Why is the Pythagorean theorem, for instance, real, explaining a whole range of phenomena? As Clawson (1999: 284) has suggested, mathematics might even explain the laws of unknown universes: “Certain mathematical truths are the same beyond this particular universe and work for all potential universes.” In effect, all sign systems are “meta-theories” of reality, evaluating it in their own particular ways. Perhaps it is best to leave it at that and simply document the

osmosis between mathematics, science, nature, and reality in order to get, literally, a closer look not only at the nature of the universe but at ourselves as the producers of mathematics and science.

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Göran Sonesson

Mastering phenomenological semiotics with Husserl and Peirce

Abstract: Both Peirce and Husserl suggested that a community of scholars were needed to bring to fruition the work that they had initiated, and both (initially) termed their approach phenomenology, defining it in almost identical terms. The fact that Peirce imposed more constraints on the free variation in imagination, which is one of the principal operations of phenomenology, serves to suggest that Peircean phenomenology may be concerned with a limited domain of experience. Taking on the task both thinkers imposed on their scions, we suggest that what the late Peirce calls mediation is identical to what the Brentano tradition terms intentionality, and that Peirce's notion of categories may help in arriving at a deeper understanding of the field of consciousness, in relation to experienced reality. Since we are interested in making semiotics into an empirical, including experimental, science, we suggest that the "naturalization" of both phenomenologies is fundamental for the future of semiotics. This is why we also envisage the manner in which phenomenology may be translated into theories of evolution and child development.

Keywords: Semiotics, phenomenology, phaneroscopy, medium, intentionality

1 Similarities and differences between the Husserlian and the Peircean phenomenologies

Both Charles Sanders Peirce and Edmund Husserl assigned an important task to phenomenology in the elucidation of meaning. It does not matter that Peirce, always fond of changing his terms, later on decided to call this discipline phaneroscopy, because he did not change the way in which he characterized it. As Aron Gurwitsch (1964:176f) observes, perception carries meaning, but "in a more broad sense than is usually understood", which tends to be "confined to meanings of symbols", that is, our signs. Indeed, as Gurwitsch (1964: 262ff) goes on to suggest, meaning is already involved in the perception of something on the surface as being marks, which then serve as carriers of meanings found in words. Peirce,

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on the other hand, is famous for seeing signs everywhere. Nevertheless, in his later works, Peirce (MS 339, 1906, quoted in Parmentier 1985) observed that “all my notions are too narrow. Instead of ‘sign’, ought I not to say *Medium*?”, and he went on to claim that it was “injurious” to language to try to fit all the phenomena he was concerned with into the term “sign”, instead of which the terms “mediation” or “branching” should have been used (CP 4.3). It is a curious fact that this tardy contriteness on the part of Peirce is ignored by all his latter-day followers.

From our comparison of the Husserlian and the Peircean phenomenology, we will extract a positive result: the latter may be seen as a possible variant of the former, and it can thus be argued that it is an adequate phenomenology of a particular onto-epistemological domain. This domain, which Peirce calls mediation, is in fact the same domain that Husserl, and, in particular Gurwitsch, have described as the field of consciousness. By combining the insights of the two phenomenologies, we will get a fuller understanding of the domain which mediates between subjects and objects or, more exactly, between the subject and his/her environment (including other subjects). This can only be done at the price of overhauling parts of Peirce’s phenomenology.

1.1 An excursus on the utility of phenomenology

Before proceeding, however, we have to reflect on what use phenomenology can be to semiotics today, in particular after the latter has taken the cognitive turn, or, more specifically, has gone experimental (see Sonesson 2007a,b; 2012; 2013b). The advantage of a cognitive semiotic approach is not only that one can take experimental results from psychology, cognitive science, neurology, etc. into account in the study of semiotic phenomena, and that one can relate semiotic resources to other elements present to the mind; that has been done well before the term was invented (e.g. Sonesson 1989). What is new to cognitive semiotics, however, is the possibility to formulate and perform our own experiments, if possible inspired by those already accomplished within psychology, etc., but more specifically geared to answering questions of meaning. And this is where phenomenology is needed.

There are at least two ways in which it has recently been proposed that phenomenology and empirical studies may go together (see Gallagher & Zahavi 2008: 28 ff.). The first manner of “naturalizing phenomenology” is the one proposed by Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson, and realised by Antoine Lutz, which consists in training subjects to use phenomenological methods (i.e. the specific operations to which we turn below) and take account of the result using protocols and/or neuro-mirroring. The second approach, which is more akin to the present

proposal, is what Shaun Gallagher has called “front-loaded phenomenology” (though something like “phenomenologically loaded experiments” would seem to be a more adequate description), which consists in allowing insights from phenomenology to inform the experimental set-up. This can be taken further: phenomenological description is not only useful in preparing for experiments, but also, after the fact, to make sense of empirical findings, to relate them to the world of our experience (the Lifeworld), and, in a transdisciplinary approach such as cognitive semiotics, it is much needed to clarify concepts stemming from different traditions and carrying the heritage of these traditions with them.

There should also be a way of “phenomenologizing natural sciences”, or at least the human and social sciences. Although Husserl certainly thought that phenomenology had to insulate itself from the positive sciences, he in fact held a continuing dialogue with psychology and, in particular, Gestalt psychology, and close followers such as Aron Gurwitsch and Maurice Merleau-Ponty went much further in that direction. Thus, the phenomenologizing of the positive sciences started much earlier than the naturalizing of phenomenology, although it was curiously never (as far as I know) recognized as such, not even by Merleau-Ponty, who for several years lectured on (the phenomenology of) developmental psychology at the Sorbonne (see Merleau-Ponty 1964: 2001). The impressive result of the work of such phenomenologists as Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty goes to show that, not only does phenomenology need experimental science, but also experimental science needs phenomenology.

1.2 Phenomenological operations in Peirce and Husserl

Phenomenology, as Peirce defines it, is that part of science that “ascertains and studies the kinds of elements universally present in the phenomenon, meaning by the phenomenon whatever is present at any time to the mind in any way” (*EP* 2, 259). Style apart, this could very well be a definition of phenomenology as understood by Husserl. Representatives of both traditions have tended to deny this, ending up with admitting some similarities. On the Peircean side, Joseph Ransdell (1989) starts out with the pronouncement that Husserl and Peirce could not have anything in common because of their different attitude to Descartes and to science, but in the end he admits that both are phenomenologists, to the extent that this “means to consider phenomena as phenomenal only, notwithstanding such apparent ‘transcendence’ – both intrinsic and relational – as they may have or seem to have.” On the Husserlian side, Herbert Spiegelberg (1956: 166ff) dedicates much time to pinpointing several differences between the two phenomenologies, but also recognizes that the “reflectiveness” of Husserl’s approach is

also present in Peirce, as is the “purity” of Husserl’s method, manifested in the independence from empirical facts and the concern for general essences.

For Husserl, the basic phenomenological operation is based on the fundamental structure of consciousness. All consciousness is consciousness of something – and that thing is outside of consciousness. This is what, in the Brentano-Husserl-tradition, is known as “intentionality”: the contents of consciousness are immanent to consciousness precisely *as* being outside of consciousness. Thus, we may describe a particular phase in the stream of consciousness as being an act in which something outside of consciousness becomes the subject of our preoccupation. In accomplishing such an act, we are directed to something outside of consciousness. When we are doing phenomenology, however, we are turning our regard “inwards”: the theme is not the object outside, but the act of consciousness itself. This is what Husserl calls the phenomenological reduction. It certainly seems to be the same thing described by Peirce as “the direct observation” of the phenomena, later the phaneron, “in the sense of whatever is present at any time to the mind in any way” (CP 1.286).

There are several other methodological moments to Husserl’s phenomenology (which I will rehearse here just for the purpose of comparing them to Peirce’s description): the *epoché*, the suspension of belief whether the object to which the act studied is directed exists or not, which seems to be implied also by the phrase “direct observation of phaneron”, in conjunction with the definition given beforehand of phenomena/phaneron. The “eidetic reduction”, i.e. the directedness to the general structures, rather than the individual character, of each given act, is present in Peirce’s phrasing according to which phenomenology serves to “generaliz/e/ observations, signaliz/ing/ several broad classes of phaneron”, although, once again, Husserl is much more precise. For Husserl, in order to attain this level of generality, we have to go through free variations in the imagination, also known as “ideation,” by means of which we vary the different properties of the phenomenon in order to be able to determine which properties are necessary in the constellation, and which may be dispensed with. There are some hints of this idea also in Peirce’s remark according to which phenomenology “describes the features of each /phenomenon/; shows that although /these phenomena/ are so inextricably mixed that no one can be isolated, yet it is manifest that their characters are quite disparate” (CP 1.286).

The difference between the Husserlian and the Peircean phenomenologies, nevertheless, becomes manifest in the final task assigned by Peirce to this discipline: “then /it/ proves, beyond question, that a certain very short list comprises all of these broadest categories of phaneron there are; and finally proceeds to the laborious and difficult task of enumerating the principal subdivisions of those categories” (CP 1.286). Husserl, of course, would also expect some very broad

categories to be established by this method. Nevertheless, it seems incompatible with his whole view of phenomenology to claim beforehand that “a short list” of such broad categories could be established. Phenomenology, Husserl stated over and over again, should be free from any prior presuppositions.¹ Peirce may seem to take for granted that we have to arrive at a small list of categories. Indeed, as Ransdell (1989) reminds us, Peirce described phenomenology as “the doctrine of categories,” or even “categorics.” To be more precise, Peirce even seems to anticipate which these categories are going to be. Peirce’s “short list” is in fact made up of triads comprising other triads, as well as some dyads and a few single terms. This is not all, for as I have shown elsewhere (Sonesson 2009; 2013a), Peirce even takes for granted the nature of these three categories, Firstness being something independent, Secondness bringing this first together with something else, and Thirdness bridging it all together. A case in point is, of course, the often quoted definition of the sign, as consisting of the “representamen,” which is Firstness lacking subdivisions, the “object,” which is Secondness, being divided into dyads, and the “interpretant,” which is Thirdness, being analysed into different kinds of triads.

Adapting Husserl to Peirce would mean imposing restrictions on the operation of ideation. Adapting Peirce to Husserl only requires such restrictions to be valid in some domains. In the latter case, Peirce’s phenomenology would be a member of the class of possible Husserlian phenomenologies, namely one which arrives at the result that everything comes by threes, comparable in that respect to Roman Jakobson’s work, which, at least according to Elmar Holenstein (1975, 1976), should be seen as a binary phenomenology. In Husserlian phenomenology, a distinction is made between the application of the method to different orders, or domains, of existence, such as physical objects, persons, and so on. According to Gurwitsch (1964: 382), orders of existence are

the ‘natural groupings’ in which things present themselves in pre-scientific and pre-theoretical experience as well as the explanatory systems constructed in the several sciences for the sake of a rational explanation of the world, material, historical, and social. [...] To every order of existence belong *specific relevancy-principles* constitutive of that order and by virtue of which the order is constituted

Thus, we could try out the idea that Peircean phenomenology is really adequate to some such domain of existence, which, following Peirce’s own later suggestion, could be something like mediation. But in order to find the specific relevance

¹ Already Spiegelberg (1956) noted that, unlike Husserl, Peirce did not explicitly claim his phenomenology to be free of presuppositions.

principle of this order of existence, we need to know what kind of mediation is involved. It is clear, from the context, that Peirce is thinking of something like the mediation between the subject and the world (see Sonesson 2013a). However paradoxical this may seem, both because Peirce has insisted on the continuity between mind and matter, and because, more specifically, he has repeatedly suggested that the kind of mind which his construal of the “sign” (i.e. the mediation) necessarily involves should be conceived as a “quasi-mind” (whatever this means), it is worthwhile to put this proposal to a test, all the time being aware of the fact that this can never be a question of finding out “what Peirce really meant”.

1.3 The phenomenological domain of mediation

There is yet another idea that was shared by Husserl and Peirce: that phenomenological analysis is fallible, and thus needs to be done over and over again, and ideally by a whole league of phenomenologists. The fact that different phenomenologists arrive at different results using the act of ideation, and that Husserl himself all the time modified his description of phenomena after repeating the analysis, does not show that the results of phenomenological analyses can vary arbitrarily, as is often said about “subjective” approaches. On the contrary, all who have practiced phenomenology agree on the basic structures of phenomenological experience, as is easily corroborated when comparing different approaches to the study of consciousness – excepting those which are self-contradictory, as Husserl (1913) observed, well before the likes of Daniel Dennett (1991) entered daringly into this space. And when there is no agreement, that may be because the task has not been fully accomplished, as it will actually never be. Repleteness (*Erfüllung*) is an intentional concept, just as Peirce’s final interpretant: something we will ever be striving for. Husserl repeatedly invokes the necessity of a community of phenomenologists that would be able to corroborate, or revise, existing phenomenological analyses. Peirce similarly refers to the community of researchers, needed to accomplish this work. In this sense, both Husserl and Peirce have been unlucky as far as their posterity is concerned, Husserl less so, because, in spite of the apostasy of Heidegger, Fink, Gadamer, Derrida, and others, the Husserlian kind of phenomenology has been diligently pursued by, among others, Gurwitsch, Schütz, Merleau-Ponty, Patočka, Sokolowski, Marbach, and Drummond, but, contrary to Peirce’s own expressed anticipation, his heritage has, on the whole, been safeguarded as a fixed doctrine instead of forming the point of departure for further exploration. Like Husserl, Peirce deserves his community of scholars dedicated to pursuing his project, rather than maintaining it intact. In

the following, therefore, we will try to go further in our exploration of mediation than Peirce ever did. In this way, I believe, we can be truer to Peirce's intentions than those busying themselves to find out "what Peirce really meant".

Still, we have to start out from an idea of what mediation could have meant to Peirce. Summarizing all of Peirce's different attempts at pinning down the nature of *Firstness*, we could probably say that it is something that appears without connection to anything else. It is thus prior to all relationship. *Secondness* is not only the second term that comes into play, but it is also made up of two parts, one of which is a property and the other a relation. It is something the function of which is to hook up with something already given. In this sense, it is a reaction, in the most general sense, to *Firstness*, where the first part is the connection to the property independently appearing and the second part describes the nature of this relationship. *Thirdness* is not only the third term which is ushered in, but it consists of three parts, two of which are relational; one which is hooked up to the term of *Firstness* and another which is connected to the relation of *Secondness*, together with which we find a third term describing the relationship between these two terms. It is thus an observation of the reaction.

Appearance is monadic, reaction is dyadic, and observation is triadic. Thus, it is not sufficient to say that *Firstness*, *Secondness*, and *Thirdness* correspond to a one-place predicate, a two-place predicate, and a three-place predicate, respectively, as Ransdell (1989) maintains. This cannot explain the workings of the categories. Rather, *Firstness* must be a one-place predicate with one term in the slot, *Secondness* a second-place predicate having two terms, and *Thirdness* a three-place predicate including three terms. According to Peirce, "A fork in the road is a third, it supposes three ways: a straight road, considered merely as a connection between two places is second, but so far as it implies passing through intermediate places it is third" (CP 1.337.). In this sense, the fork is not only the place where the road splits but from where it goes to different places.

If we consider the numerous and varied descriptions that Peirce gave to his categories, it might be suggested, in conclusion, that everything said about *Firstness* boils down to a meaning roughly paraphrased as "something there", that those phrases describing *Secondness* are equivalent to "reaction to the appearance of something", and that *Thirdness* can be reduced to "observing the appearance as well as the reaction to the appearance" (Sonesson, 2009; 2013a). On the basis of these interpretations, I submit, the domain of mediation can be supposed to involve the relation of the acting and perceiving subject to the world at large. In other words, the three categories describe *intentionality* in the sense of Brentano and Husserl, that is, the directedness of the mind to the things of which it takes cognizance. In so doing, nevertheless, it adds some useful details to the description of the intentional experience. It offers some qualifications to the Husserlian

idea of the object of intentionality being transcendent to consciousness, that it, being immanent as transcendent. Indeed, this is made even clearer by the kind of reaction typifying Secondness that Peirce describes in the following way:

A door is slightly ajar. You try to open it. Something prevents. You put your shoulder against it, and experience a sense of effort and a sense of resistance. These are not two forms of consciousness; they are two aspects of one two-sided consciousness. It is inconceivable that there should be any effort without resistance, or any without a contrary effort. This double-sided consciousness is Secondness (*EP* 1, 268).

Thus, Secondness is about effort and resistance or, more exactly, about *felt* effort and resistance: resistance to the world “putting your shoulder against” something, as well as the world resisting back with “a sense of resistance.”² It will be noted that Secondness is thus not at the level of a physical causality as it is often presented. It is an experience. In fact, in Husserlian parlance it would be a kind of passive intentionality, more precisely, a kinestheme, that is, a phase in our experience of the movements, positions and muscle-tensions of our bodily parts, which, according to Husserl (1973), plays a fundamental part in our perception of spatial objects. Indeed, all perceptual appearance is accompanied by a co-functioning but unthematized kinaesthetic experience, which must be presupposed if the appearances are to have an object-reference, that is, are to be appearances of something.

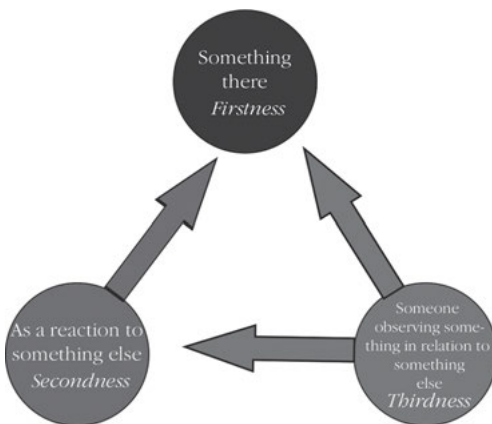


Figure 1: The interpretation of the three Peircean categories, according to Sonesson (2013a)

² It is also a category well-known in philosophy, but perhaps best known from the work of Maine de Biran.

A few glosses on these conclusions remain to be spelled out. First of all, nothing can appear without appearing to somebody, so even if Firstness, exemplified by iconicity, only appears for “a fleeting moment”, as Peirce observes, it is still a relation, in spite of Peirce’s insistence that it is not, or else it cannot even be an appearance. Still, we can recognise in Secondness a reaction in a fuller sense, something that may be an action, or also an awareness of the phenomenon. Thirdness may then either be the acknowledgment of the action or of the percept ascribed to Secondness. From this point of view, it is easier to understand why Peirce argues that Thirdness is different from Secondness, but that any higher relation is reducible to Thirdness: the observation of a reaction is different from a reaction, and so is the observation of an observation, but the observation of the observation of an observation is just another observation.

As is well-known, Peirce himself did not recognize the distinction between mind and matter, supposing the former to shade gradually into the other. Thus, he posited a “quasi-mind” at one end of the relations that he recognized. This may be a metaphysical truth, but here I am only interested in the experience given to phenomenology, in which mind and matter are very different things. Indeed, it is precisely because the mind and the body are experienced as in some sense different, that it makes sense to talk about the mind as embodied – and, correlatively, of the body as minded.

2 Naturalizing the doctrine of categories – in social action, development and evolution

In his early work, Peirce explained the three fundamental categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness in terms of first, second, and third person pronouns. He did not identify the second person, however, as one may expect, with Secondness, but with Thirdness. In his view, the second person was the most important, not the first: “all thought is addressed to a second person, or to one’s future self as a second person” (quoted in Singer 1984, 83 f). In terms that Peirce took over from Schiller, the first person stood for the infinite impulse (Firstness), the third person for sensuousness (Secondness), and the second person for the harmonising principle (Thirdness). Peirce called his own doctrine “Tuism” from “*Tu*”, as opposed to “*Ego*” and “*It*,” and he prophesied about a “tuistic age,” in which peace and harmony would prevail. It is not clear, of course, whether Peirce would still accept these identifications later on, but, if he did, this would confirm my present interpretation of Firstness as “Something appearing,” Secondness as reaction to this fact, and Thirdness as the “Observer observed.”

2.1 Dyads and triads in society

In social psychology, in particular developmental psychology, there is also much talk about dyads and triads, and about some things being dyadic and others triadic (Tomasello 1999; Zlatev 2008). Thus, interactions, engagements, eye gaze, and so on, are said to be either dyadic or triadic. This terminology would seem to have originated in the sociology of Georg Simmel (1971). Dyads and triads are, to Simmel, groups of two or three individuals, respectively. Units, not relationships are counted. Between two individuals there may be any number of relationships, just as there may be between three individuals. When, in contemporary articles, we read about a “mother-child dyad,” etc., this is clearly what is meant. Interestingly, the dyads and triads of psychology, just like those of Peirce, are not only defined by their number, but tend to consist of a child, a caretaker, and some object attended to. In general, translated into the terminology of Sonesson (2000a), a dyadic situation is taken to consist of *Ego* and *Alter* (another person) or *Ego* and *Alius*, a thing or a person treated as a thing, whereas a triad includes all three types. Even more specifically, the triad tends to involve child, caretaker and a referent.

Other uses are more explicitly relational: dyadic is opposed to triadic as the relation of a subject to an object, or another subject is opposed to the relation of a subject both to another subject and another object. Thus, on one hand, there is “dyadic eye gaze: looking at object or person,” and on the other hand there is “triadic eye gaze: looking back and forth between object and person” (cf. Bates 1979). A more complex interpretation would suppose that a dyadic relation is a relation between two individuals, while a triadic relation is a relation to the relation between two individuals. This is similar to what Peirce seems to mean, according to the interpretation given above. It should be noted that such a relation to the relation between *Alter* and *Alius* is not the same thing as two relations, to *Alter* on the one hand, and to *Alius* on the other. However, in practice, the only way to know that somebody is attending to the relationship between two individuals may be to observe him or her looking first at one individual and then at the other. Perhaps we would even need to go further, introducing relations between relations as well as relation between such relations.

Clearly social psychology, in spite (or because) of being a much more practical concern than Peircean philosophy, is as unclear about what dyadic and triadic relationships are as is Peirce. Basically, however, it seems that what is involved in dyadic relations, in both cases, is a subject taking cognizance of the world, and in the triadic relations, somebody (who might be the same) being aware of what the

first subject is doing.³ Typically, in social psychology, this is the caretaker observing the child's perceptual interchange with the world – and vice-versa. In other words, it involves *Ego* and *Alter* interacting with reference to *Alius*.

Understood in this way, Peircean semiosis, which we should no longer restrict to involving signs, is not properly speaking “communicative,” in the sense of Merlin Donald (1991, 171ff), but certainly “public” or, perhaps better “spectacular.” It is available to others (cf. Sonesson 2010). Yet, for it to be available, it is not enough for it to be present, but it must be accessible to attention. The elementary meaning-giving act, at least in the case of human beings, is certainly the act of attention. Taking my inspiration from Aron Gurwitsch's 1964 ideas about the “theme” at the centre of a “thematic field”, and surrounded by “margins”, later reconceived by Sven Arvidson (2006) as different approximation to the “sphere of attention”, I have suggested that the gaze may function as an organizing device, transforming continuous reality into something more akin to a proposition Sonesson (2012; 2014). Thus, in the end, what we have in Peirce's triad is the primordial way of something becoming a theme – and the process of thematization itself being thematized (see Gurwitsch 1964; Sonesson 1989, 2007a, 2007b, 2010). In Peirce's own words, attention is “the pure denotative power of the mind, that is to say, the power which directs the mind to an object” (*CP* 1.547). It is the basis of *noesis* – the way something appears to consciousness. It must be even more fundamental to *noesis* than the structures uncovered by Husserl (1913) himself. In fact, more clearly than the idea of immanent transcendence, the Peircean formulation manages to recoup the idea of something being offered, and the subject embarking on the experience and then taking stock.

Nevertheless, dyads in the sense of sociology may well turn out to be triads, if we apply the Peircean point of view. Here it is useful to remember Peirce's point about the straight road passing through intermediate places. In the case in which the dyad consists of two subjects (*Ego* and *Alter*), it seems particularly clear that a mediation – and thus a third – is required to account for what is going on and this no doubt extends to a lot of interactions between subjects and non-persons, i.e., between *Ego* and *Alius*.

³ Or something: The mind is not necessarily a subject to Peirce, but he does admit that there is no way of explaining it, at least at present, than by reference to a subject.

2.2 Dyads and triads in child development and evolution

It was noted above that, basically, what is involved in dyadic relations is a subject taking cognizance of the world, and in triadic relations, somebody (who might be the same) being aware of what the first subject is doing. Typically, we said, this is the caretaker observing the child's perceptual interchange with the world – and vice-versa. In other words, it involves *Ego* and *Alter* interacting with reference to *Alius*. And thus we are back to the primordial scene in which Ego first meets his Other.

In another version, the basic dyad (with no obvious succeeding triad) is the scene of combat. According to the Hegel/Sartre kind of dialectic between Ego and Alter one of the participants in the combat must always lose – or, indeed, both. In this reading of Hegel, Ego can only be recognised as a person by subduing the other; but once the latter has been subdued he is a Non-person, and his recognition of the other as a person has lost its value. Like Peirce epitomizing *Tuism*, Tzvetan Todorov (1995: 34ff, 15f, 31ff), criticizing the Hegel/Sartre point of view, observes that we are always *with* the other. There is, so to speak, no moment in time in which the other is not already there with us. Thus, Todorov also criticises those who believe that man starts out alone and egotistical, and then is forced to adapt himself to a life in society. It should be noted that neither Bakhtin, nor Peirce or the tradition stemming from Mead and Cooley emphasise any antagonism in the relation between Ego and Alter. In another work, Todorov (1989: 39ff) goes on to quote evidence from developmental psychology which shows us that the first other is not a man met in combat but the mother taking care of her child. And there is no problem in being recognised as a person: in fact, already after a few weeks the child tries to catch its mother gaze and is rewarded by the mother's attention. Conflicts emerge later and suppose a third party who determines who the winner is.

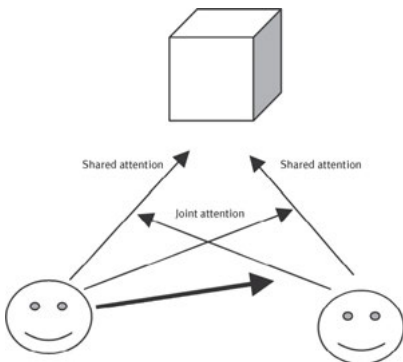


Figure 2: Shared attention: Second-order attention: “I see that you see X” (and vice versa) to which is added Joint attention: Third-order attention: “I see that you see that I see X” (and vice versa). Adapted from Zlatev (2008).

This brings us to developmental psychology, where it is always question of an infant, an object, and a caretaker – a “mother-child-object triad”. In fact, the caretaker is not necessarily a mother, not only in recent times of childcare leaves extended to both parents, but also in what seem to be the earliest times of human-kind, when allo-parenting appears to have been the normal practice (Hrdy 2009). There have been some attempts, notably by Cintia Rodríguez & Christiane Moro (1999) and by Donna West (2014), to couch early child development in Peircean terms, more specifically in terms of icons, indices and symbols. More basically, however, childcare must be a question of directing the attention of the child, or to follow up the direction in which the child’s attention is already attracted. And this is more readily framed in terms of something appearing, there being a reaction to this, finally giving rise to a gloss on this appearance together with the reaction. This process must be viewed as a cycle apt to repeat itself over and over again.

If the central issue of caretaking is the distribution of attention, then the triad (expanding to further levels) will be a criss-crossing of gazes and the recognition of gazes. Following Zlatev (2008: 226), it might be useful to make a distinction, which is not commonly made, between shared and joint attention:

When two individuals become aware that both are attending to the same object, what results is shared attention. /---/ To make a given object X fully intersubjective between you and me, I would need not only to “see that you see X”, (second-order attention), but also “to see that you see that I see X” (third-order attention) and vice versa – which is one interpretation of what it means to engage in joint attention (my italics)

Again, while the dyads and triads might be expended, there is a sense in which we cannot go beyond the threesome: attention to attention second-order attention is different from attention, and so is attention to the attention of someone’s attention third-order attention, but a further level will, in a sense, be only more of the same.

In his most recent book, Michael Tomasello (2014: 54ff) suggests that, both in phylogeny and in ontogeny, human beings start out being special when using the pointing gesture (which is only used by apes when enculturated), that is, as he also says, indexical signs, but that then, before arriving at language or any other symbolic signs, human beings also singularize themselves by using iconic signs, more exactly iconic gestures, which, as he rightly points out, are susceptible of being categorical, that is, to correspond to types rather than tokens, and thus, in a way, preparing the way for symbolic signs. Indeed, he even intimates that a precursor to the subject-predicate organization found in language consists of an indexical sign, serving to anchor the thought in reality, and either an iconic or a symbolic sign, both categorical, which serve to add a qualification to that which

is pointed out. Here he – inadvertently, it seems – recaptures an idea earlier formulated, in somewhat different ways, by both Husserl and Peirce.

Tomasello's description of the emergence of propositional structure could also be mapped onto Merlin Donald's (1991; 2001) vision of human specificity, as it emerges in evolution: from episodic memory over mimetic memory, giving rise to tool-making, imitation, and gesture, and mythic memory, which originates language, to theoretic memory, which brings about pictures, writing, and theory. If iconicity and indexicality (and perhaps even symbolicity) in the sense of specific kinds of mediations precede the real sign function – which allows the emergence of iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs, as I have suggested elsewhere Sonesson (2007a,b; 2012) – they may, already at the level of perception, comply with some kind of quasi-propositional structure.

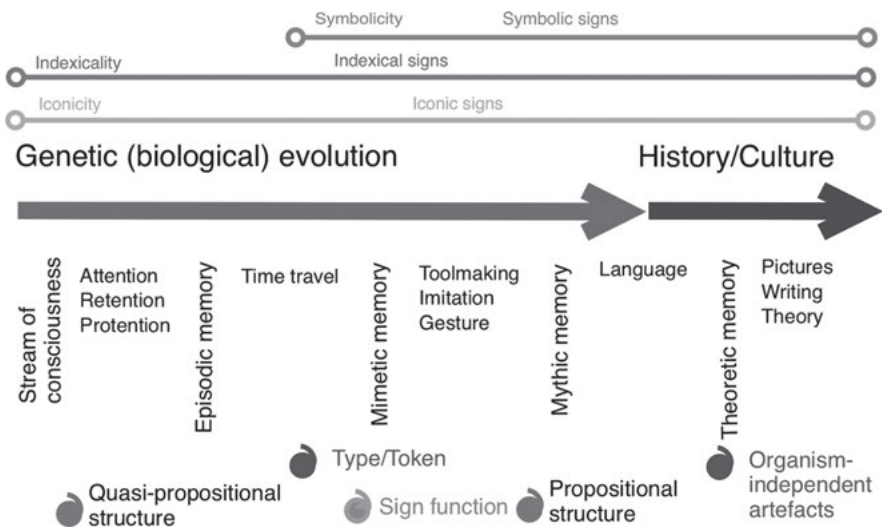


Figure 3: Donald's vision of human specificity in evolution, with some additions by the present author: 1. attributions of iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity to the different kinds of memory (Sonesson 2007a,b); 2. relations to type/token, sign function and organism-independent artefacts (Sonesson 2007a,b); 3. the distinction between stream of consciousness and episodic memory, as well as the features of these two stages (Sonesson 2015)

3 The quasi-propositional nature of perception

Both Peirce and Husserl are clearly committed to the idea that, since we do talk of (and use all other kinds of signs to refer to) reality as we perceive it, there must be

some sense in which this reality can be mapped onto propositions, in the sense of properties being ascribed to things, the implication being that these propositions may possibly be mapped back onto perceptual acts (see Stjernfelt 2014; Sonesson 2014). To Peirce, as he is usually presented (and no doubt cogent with his position before he realised that his use of terms was too narrow) perceptual reality itself is made up of signs, and in this capacity it may also contain *Dicisigns* (i.e. propositions or perhaps even assertions). To Husserl (1939), on the other hand, the perceptual world is pre-predicative (or ante-predicative, as Merleau-Ponty has accustomed us to say). It is certainly not itself made up of signs or representations in any other sense.

The world of perception, in fact, is the primary stratum of the Lifeworld, the world that precedes every other experience. Husserl (1939: 3ff) points out that the domain of logic is much wider than predication, and that, before predication, there is already a binarity, separating something that serves as a fundament (“Zugrundeliegendes”) and that which is said about it (“von ihm ausgesagt is”). Since we are at the pre-predicative level, the saying that is going on here might just as well be at the level of mere thinking or perceiving; that is, it just involves taking cognizance of a thing as having one particular property. This means, first of all, that the thing must be given as a thing embedded in the inner and outer horizons of the Lifeworld; that is, integrated in the world at large, and offering up its surfaces and perspectives for further exploration (Cf. Mohanty 1976: 139 ff). Husserl thus seems to agree with Peirce that there is a very generic kind of organization which may pertain to the perceptual world and which obligatorily appears in the proposition: the division into some entity and a property that is ascribed to this entity. But to Husserl this organization is passively pre-given, and the borders between the parts are not explicitly drawn up but merely sketched out in anticipation.

According to a common view, pictures are unable to make assertions. If so, one would expect perceptual reality to be even more devoid of an assertion function. Elsewhere, I have observed that the picture is evidently incapable of affirming anything, if one defines affirmation as something that is done by using language (cf. Sonesson 1996; 2012; 2014). We have to start by acknowledging the difference in nature of the semiotic resources at the disposal of the picture and those used by the verbal argument. However, if the assertion is more generally defined as a transaction, by means of which a specific property is assigned to a particular entity, then it is possible for the picture to make affirmations in the way of a picture. It is in the nature of the iconic sign to posit at the same time its resemblance and its dissimilarity to the object depicted: by the first stroke, the sign creates the expectancy of an identity that, by the second stroke, it must necessarily disappoint.

Even if pictures are able to predicate, however, there are two important differences between a picture and perceptual reality: first, a picture allows for a comparison between itself and that piece of reality which it invokes, but percepts cannot be compared to anything else; in the second place, a picture involves a frame, which also means that it has at least an elementary mechanism for shedding parts of reality which are not relevant and for organizing reality within the frame in terms of focus and margins, whereas perceptual reality has no determinate limits (it has ever more *outer horizons*), and its focus is vague and/or continuously shifting. Let us call the first difference the *comparativity requirement*, and the second the *framing requirement*. The ordinary Lifeworld given to our immediate perception does not fulfil any of these requirements. Nevertheless, even in the perceptual world there are no doubt portions that comply with one, or both, of these criteria. A shop window as well as an artistic “installation” fulfils the framing requirement and if they consist of objects that are arranged in a way that is clearly different from that of ordinary life, they also fulfil the comparativity requirement (cf. Sonesson 1989; 2010; 2014). Besides, both framing and comparativity can be obtained for free, if somebody behaves in an extraordinary way in an ordinary situation; because then the behaviour stands out against what is expected, as was the case with the Decembrists discussed by Juri Lotman (1984), or the (imagined) behaviour of the surrealists (cf. Sonesson 2000b).

This may be the case when ordinary reality is somehow organized into a message by the addresser, whether on purpose, as in the cases considered above, or unwittingly, but still open to the interpretation of the addressee, as in the case of traces left by an animal passing by. More commonly, however, the pre-predicative structure of our experience is no doubt initiated entirely from the receiving end. It is, I think, an important modification brought to the phenomenological model employed, most directly adopted from Roman Ingarden, when Jan Mukařovský (1974) and his followers in the Prague school of semiotics set out to define the act of meaning from the point of view of the addressee, not from that of the addresser, contrary to the now well-established pragmatics paradigm. Such an approach makes it understandable that traces left by an animal on the ground, or clouds harbouring rain, can be signs in equal measure to words and pictures (cf. Sonesson 2012).

The elementary meaning-making act, at least in the case of human beings, is, as observed above, the act of attention. Taking my inspiration from Gurwitsch's (1964) ideas about the “theme” at the centre of a “thematic field”, and surrounded by “margins”, I have suggested that the gaze may function as organizing device, transforming continuous reality into something more akin to a proposition (Sonesson 2012; 2014). I think, however, that Gurwitsch's (1974: 254ff) criticism of Husserl, according to which the predication (“X is red,” and so on) which Husserl

conceived to be a “synthesis,” really is an “analysis”, applies to pre-predicative experience as given in perception, rather than to the full-fledged logical formulation of a predication. Whereas the latter may really be an adjunction of new properties, perception is always an ‘explicitation’ of what is already contained in the horizons of the perceptual thing – which is, by the way, what Husserl himself claims when describing perception. In the case of the die, this would mean that pre-predicative experience consists in something like “this die (which, apart from obligatory die-properties, is red, worn on the edges, rather big for a die, etc.) is red”. Thus, unlike a predication, perceptual experience starts out from the whole and goes on to particulars, that is, it narrows down the perceptual focus. Pre-predicative experience always consists of a theme, a thematic field, and a margin, though different parts of the thing may assume these functions as the explicitation goes on.

If it can be said that the act of attention directed at different portions of the perceptual world is the antecedent of the proposition, I think already the observation of such an act of attention by somebody else can be a precursor to the assertion of a proposition. It is a curious fact that human beings are practically alone among all animals in possessing the white of the eyes, the presence of which in other fellow human beings is what allows us to see more clearly than any other animal what another person is looking at. It could therefore be said that it is the act of attention as such that constitutes a proposition (or, better, a quasi-proposition), but that only the act of attention that is attended to by another subject (in the sense of a person) makes up a quasi-assertion, thus manifesting third-order attention. And this brings us back to mediation in the Peircean sense: the observation of the observer for whom something is there.

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Section 3:

Society, text and social semiotics

Gianfranco Marrone

Farewell to representation: text and society

Abstract: Cultures develop the criteria to construct and recognize their texts and pose them as normal, usual, ‘natural’. For us a book is a text; in the Middle Ages, for everyone a city was a text. But when it is necessary to critically inspect such a culture by analyzing its texts, it becomes necessary to understand those texts’ conditions of possibility and their functioning. So, from the semiotic point of view, the text is something that needs to be *recognized* and *constructed* at the same time; that is to say, *invented* according to the double meaning this word has for the ancient rhetoric (*recovering*) and for modern science (*creating*) (Marrone 2014). This is true for the semiotician who searches for the fundamentals of any possible social and cultural meaning but, before that, for any subject, individual or collective, looking after his own identity. On one side, the text is the starting point of any semiotic investigation, a model produced to examine and interpret a given cultural reality; on the other, such a cultural reality exists because it is textually formed. This is very briefly the thesis that I will try to demonstrate in this paper, from which it hands down a new role for the semiotic analysis of text: that of a *new way of criticizing culture*.

Key words: Text, analysis, society, configuration, culture

1 Text and society

“A science which studies the *life* of signs as part of social *life*”. When, in the early 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussure (1917: 16, my translation) was looking for a new scientific object of linguistic knowledge, he proposed this definition for the *semiology* or *science of signs* that would play a very important role in the history of culture from then on. What strikes the reader about this definition more than the appeal to science is the double reference to *life*: of signs and of society at the same time. That is probably because – as the brilliant linguist must have thought – they are basically the same thing. Many later authors severely criticized structuralism, accusing it of having an abstract nature and being closed to the outside world. Here, at the very beginning of our history, we can see instead dynamic signs of dynamic society in need of a science to explain how they work and to understand

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what their reasons are. Languages, discourses and signs are social processes: their formal nature underlines, confirms and proves it.

What happened after that? At first, since authors such as Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco adopted and developed the Saussurean concept, the focus on sociality was essential. At that time, the rising mass culture with its peculiar communication media, the emerging consumer society, design, but also literary and artistic experimentation, the renewed logical-linguistic attention of philosophy and the development of an autonomous epistemology of human sciences, brought with them the need for a careful and disillusioned theoretical perspective that would be able to set up a *formal method of analysis of society*, free of any underlying ideology.

Semiotics – as Saussure’s chimera was called – addressed that need. At the mid-point of the century it was born as an individual science, with its own authors and its own institutions. Books like *Mythologies* (Barthes 1957) and *Apocalypse Postponed* (Eco 1964) best testify to the attention of the science of signs toward everyday social life and the vocation to *criticism* – in every sense of the word – that such a study perspective could not lack, focused as it was on systems and processes of signification. In order to study television or advertising, popular songs or comics, journalism or fashion, artistic avant-gardes or experimental novels, food mythologies or wrestling matches, it was necessary to gradually learn to look at them combining linguistic competences and sociologic interest, methodological attention and critical sensibility, formal vocation and a philosophical in-depth perspective.

However, the semiotics of the following period has mainly abandoned that original trend. The science of signification of the European tradition chose a different direction. The European science of signification focused, on the one hand, on a kind of semiotics that would investigate the whole culture, sharing its research field with human sciences such as folklore, ethnology, comparative linguistics, religion studies, narratology, historiography, psychoanalysis and sociology. This kind of semiotics would aim at building *general models* allowing an accurate study of anthropological mechanisms. On the other hand, semiotics focused on an analysis of non-verbal ‘languages’ – such as images, gestures, audiovisual material, everyday-life objects – that would propose accurate methods of analysis of *any particular work of expression and communication*, with the same success as structural linguistics.

Authors such as Algirdas J. Greimas and Yuri M. Lotman were able to walk both ways, and to go from the creation of a general cultural model to the accurate analysis of a single work. Thus the semiotic models allowed cultural anthropology to provide fodder for literal and artistic criticism, they allowed philology and iconology to give themselves an ethnological aspect and media studies to use

linguistic methodologies. At that time, however, the critical verve of the formal analysis of social facts got lost. And so did the hypothesis that any linguistic, communicative, expressive or semiotic phenomenon had a social basis, as Saussure – prophet of pure differences – had seen so clearly. This kind of analysis focused on *particular works* (such as novels, short stories, poetry, movies, paintings, pictures, ballet, advertisements, TV programs, newspaper articles, architectural works, objects), and anything that in our culture could be called a ‘text’ has entered the field of investigation for semiotics. The ‘text’ is here regarded as *any expression medium able to convey certain meanings*, with specific characteristics and clear boundaries, with its own processuality and so on.

The science of signification has gradually expanded the notion of text and used it as a tool to study not just semiotic entities using non-verbal expression-substances, but also different kinds of cultural phenomena that can have the same basic properties as a book-text (biplanarity, closing, stratification of levels, processuality, and so on) without its general bearing. Thus, even that which is not regarded as a text *from an empirical point of view* is analysed as such *from a methodological point of view*, as the same formal properties of texts can also be found in it. Such an analysis can be performed, for example, on TV shows, advertising campaigns, information streams, communication platforms, oral conversations, web interactions, marketing strategies, rituals, meals, subway stations, buildings, even whole cities. In this perspective, *the text is not a thing* anymore, it is not an empirical object *but a theoretical model acting as a tool for description* that, given certain requisites and certain explicit epistemological conditions, is able to retrace, at different levels, the formal devices of any object of knowledge of the science of signification.

A useful analogy can be suggested. As everybody knows, the concept of *narrativity* has been reached by gradually expanding the analysis of actual narratives (e.g. fairy tales, myths, novels, short stories and many other literary works) in order to explain seemingly non-narrative discourses (e.g. advertising, political, journalistic or philosophical discourses, culinary recipes, and so on). In the same way the concept of *textuality* has been built using actual texts (e.g. novels, poetry, pictures) as a tool to explain the structure of meaning of seemingly non-textual semiotic manifestations (e.g. urban spaces, hypermarkets or airports, methods of cooking, scientific experiments and so on). *The text is*, from now on, *the formal model that can explain all human and social, cultural and historical phenomena*. That is the reason why Greimas used to repeat ‘Outside the text no salvation!’ and why many semioticians still refer to their specific object of study as ‘text’ whatever its nature is.

Hence the ‘new wave’ of *sociosemiotics*, proposed by Paolo Fabbri (1973) as a methodological perspective for the study of all sociological phenomena. It

was on this base that authors such as Jean-Marie Floch (1985, 1990, 1995), Eric Landowski (1989, 1997, 2004) and many others set out to explore a semiotic study of social facts, such as advertising, brand strategies, political and journalistic communication, fashion, design, cookery, public spaces, everyday life, objects, that was focused on their social and cultural values and their discursive implications. Since sociosemiotics did not analyse only given works, but something less well determined – such as situations, practices, habits, sensorial and corporeal experiences, flows of information or media interactivity – *the dichotomy between ‘text’ and ‘context’ had no more reason to exist*. Many so-called *contextual facts* (e.g. that are ‘out’ of the given works’ text), *can also have a semiotic pregnancy of its own*, within a coherent description project.

While the linguistic perspective, even on its pragmatic side, differentiated linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena, according to sociosemiotics this difference is not given *a priori*, since both matters and situations could be at the same time meaningful and social, communicative and factual, textual and experiential. From the sociosemiotic point of view, we can call ‘context’ only *what is not relevant to the analysis anymore*; and it is actually the culture that determines if something is or is not relevant, even before the analysis itself. The text, on the other hand, is no longer the material base for interpretations that could integrate it, or even justify its existence, but the *formal device through which the meaning builds up its structure* and thus shows itself, the device through which the meaning spreads in society and culture.

The text is therefore *the specific object of study for the semiotician*, who analyses it and tries to retrace forms and dynamics, internal structures, levels of relevance, inputs and outputs. *The text is not a given entity*, nor phenomenal evidence; *it is the result of a double construction: a socio-cultural configuration* before and *an analytic re-configuration* afterwards. The text, in this perspective, is necessarily *negotiated* within cultural dynamics that, in creating it, come into existence and interlace in an unending chain with other texts, other matters, other languages. *The text is not closed in itself but easily remodelled and configured in other textual forms*, easily translated into other languages in the never-ending inter-textual, inter-discursive chain of the semiosphere.

2 Farewell to representation

So the base for any sociosemiotic study perspective is the fact that the concept of *representation* is not relevant either from the methodological or from the theoretical point of view. If, within the text, expression and contents are in reciprocal

presupposition, and if text and context define each other both in social culture and in textual/socio/semiotic analysis, the idea that texts are not actual realities but, at most, a 'representation' of reality, fades away. It is the same idea that lies at the base of statements that a novel 'represents' a certain portion of the world, a movie 'represents' a certain social reality, an advertisement a certain life-style, but without being any of those things. And it is this idea that leads to thinking that it is more productive to study 'actual reality' than to focus on textual forms that are just a 'representation' of that reality.

This idea, inheritance of a positivistic epistemological position naively realistic, has already been left behind by most philosophical – mainly phenomenological and hermeneutic – studies but also by ethno-anthropological and social researches, by sociology and ethnography of science including, of course, semiotics. Yet, for many obvious reasons, *it is still alive and well*: with the support of common sense, it comes back as long as the defence against it is low; sometimes it even appears in semioticians' writings and debates.

Let us go back once again. First of all, the text is not a representation of the world because, simply enough, it includes the world itself within its boundaries as a content and, at the same time, it is part of the world and acts in it as a social force. To study the text – but more than that, to read it and enjoy it – does not mean to focus just on formal-expressive surface elements speaking of an outside reality; it means, instead, to understand how contents and expressions are created together and act in society.

That is the reason why, when Greimas needs to study certain social and cultural phenomena, he looks into *exemplar texts* – explaining of course the reasons for his choice. His book about Maupassant (Greimas 1976), for example, is not, or not only, about *Deux Amis* as a tale, but it is about everything that is narrated in it: the Franco-Prussian war, everyday life in late 19th century Paris, the French feeling of peace, how French people never take themselves seriously as opposed to German people, who have rigid morals, and so on. In more detail, when Greimas analyses the dialogues between the two main characters, rich with clichés and commonplace opinions, he does not mean to study the literary dialogue but everyday conversation in general. Similarly, when he examines the useless attempts of the enemy general to get the password for entering the city, he means to study rhetorical and hermeneutical techniques of manipulation, persuasion, interpretation and contra-interpretation, etc. Moreover, by analysing how Maupassant (following the realist directions of the impersonality of the author and the refusal of any internal point of view of the characters) accounts for the *cognitive dimensions* of the characters, that is never explicit but always inferable from their behaviours, Greimas tries to retrace a global (or a real) cognitive space. In this way, a so-called fictional tale becomes a tool that gives access to the

understanding and explanation of a set of facts and phenomena it presents as its content but that, at the same time, transcend it.

Similarly, in *On Imperfection*, where he means to study in a semiotic sense the sensorial and perceptive processes of the body, Greimas (1987) does not describe those processes directly (as a psychologist would do) but studies how they are narrated in some literary texts (by Tournier, Calvino, Rilke, Tanizaki, and so on). From those texts, or even from fragments of them, Greimas extracts *discursive models* that in his opinion can be considered as examples and lead to a generalisation: this can be verified by applying them to other phenomena and other texts.

On closer scrutiny, we realise that this proceeding is not only an idea of Greimas, nor specific to semiotics. Yuri Lotman also shows how some (literary and non literary) texts can have an exemplary role in helping to understand some historical period, some cultural asset (Pushkin and Leopardi *are* Romanticism). Clifford Geertz (1973) does the same thing when he describes Balinese culture by examining a long passage from a novel by the Danish author Hans Jacob Helms. It is also what historians do when they read Marcel Proust's work to understand late 19th century French society. It is what consumes sociologists when they look into Emile Zola's novels for the social value of the first shopping centres. It is what scholars of conversation do when they try to retrace the laws of presupposition through Ernest Hemingway's famous dialogues. It is what urban sociologists do when they read Don De Lillo's novels in order to understand the sense of the American metropolis. It is what Marx basically did, when he looked into Balzac's work for the explanation of the social psychology of capitalism. And, let alone literature, it is the same thing archaeologists do when they progressively retrace from small fragments of objects, buildings or bodies, a whole culture or historical period: they just interpret and analyse texts. It is the only thing they can do.

Texts are also, and above all, documents, regardless of – or in spite of – the intentions of their authors, who, still, have to be considered in the sociosemiotic analysis. When we study a set of advertising campaigns in order to understand how everyday life-style has changed from the advent of the mobile phone (or of any other modern technology: from GPS to iPad, from notebook to the web), we have to take into account what kind of advertisement they have, what its strategic goals are, what is the intentionality of the text, as Ricoeur (1989) would call it, that is completely patent and explicit (see Marrone 1999).

Text-documents have, among others, a very important characteristic: they are *attested*, they exist and can be experienced concretely *regardless of the needs of the analysis*. They were not produced to be analysed but for other goals, with other intentions that – once identified – do not represent a problem for the analysis. On the contrary, other verbal texts and experiential circumstances (interviews, tests, focus groups, laboratory experiments) produced *ad hoc* for the anal-

ysis, lack that characteristic, both because their circumstances of enunciation are affected by the observational and scientific intentionality of the researcher and because they circulate in culture just as documents for research and so they have no social value but to be witnesses of the academic working. Consequently, if we examine an advertisement and a casual interview on the street, the first one appears to be more spontaneous and natural than the second, while the second is more factitious than the first. In other words, although from a social and communicative point of view the advertisement is constructed while the interview is instinctive, from the sociosemiotic research point of view it is exactly the opposite. Once more it is a question of *relevance*. This is the reason why the distinction between 'field' work and 'desk' work is no longer useful and appears to be just a strong hypostatisation of epistemological thoughts as commonplace as non-existent, basically positivist. Any serious social research is made up by both field and desk work: every field observation is textual analysis or presupposes it; every textual analysis is field work or presupposes it (Marrone 2001).

So, sociosemiotics can work both on 'text' and 'non-texts', (i) because the latter are also texts when they have some meaning, (ii) because the former already have, as their content, the world researchers mean to describe, (iii) because the one and the other are social actors acting in the world, often along with other social actors with their own pragmatic and passionate competences, cognitive abilities and referential values. On the other hand, analysing the so-called 'practices' as if they were not texts but some other fact that is thought to be 'pure' and immediate, means to fall back into forms of textuality without identifying them, and consequently without being able to control them – with bad results at the knowledge level.

3 Basic criteria

On those matters it seems superfluous, today, to discuss them further. It would be useful, instead, to enumerate some *basic criteria* for the building – or finding of – sociosemiotic textuality. The current list of these criteria is partial and temporary, since it has its origins in the necessity of fixing some point and encouraging discussion.

a) Fundamental is the principle of *negotiation* that gets rid of any ontologism. There is no text with a favoured expressive substance or conformation. Given certain conditions, even a small sign, a symbol, a logo can become an actual text, as well as, in other given conditions, they can become just parts of a larger textual occurrence, for instance an entire brand strategy. Sign and its minimal elements

are polar entities changing their role from time to time: a word can bear a meaning in itself (and it becomes text), but it is sometimes the union of morphemes and phonemes, and sometimes else a single entity within a sentence, which, in turn, is the minimal element of a whole discourse. Similarly, the relationship between the text and its parts, and between text and macro-text, is variable and depends on the relevance they acquire from time to time. Everything in the text is negotiated.

Its boundaries are both spatial and temporal, physical and semantic. Opening and closing themes, picture frames, book covers and curtains at the theatre, those boundaries are entities we are not used to questioning, but they have also been negotiated and, in any moment, can be called into question again by social subjects (e.g. actors suppressing the curtains and coming among the audience) or in the relationship with the 'empirical' object of knowledge and the scholar (e.g. if s/he decides to take into account an entire genre rather than a single work). Similarly, in a conversation there are norms regulating the turns of the speakers, there are also norms regulating the opening and closing of the speech, being negotiated *in praesentia*, as when someone closes a phone call by saying 'I only have three minutes left', 'Sorry, but I have got to go' while the other speaker wants to go on talking.

This process works also with places: although they have internal articulations and preset boundaries, there are people living within them, who change their meaning by *renegotiating* their map and physical boundaries. A city, for example, is the result of one process after the other where the actors are social forces often contrary to each other. Through their political-contractual relationships they determinate the actual text of the city, its internal articulations, its system of accents and marks, of valuing places, the production of socialisation centres or of company towns, and so on (see Marrone 2013).

b) Negotiation is a constitutive concept of textual reality because the main characteristic of texts (of languages and of semiosis in general) is *bipolarity*: the reciprocal presupposition of two planes, the one of expression and the one of contents, each of which is made up of a matter (quite irrelevant) and a form (constitutive). It is the *solidarity* between the form of expression and the form of content that creates the text by letting signification come out and become concrete. In other words, it is not the matter used (sonority, visuality etc.) nor the themes chosen that give rise to signification. It is the relationship between the two elements instead, that can be given only when matter and themes are articulated, manipulated and actually formed. So there is no more sound matter alone but a precise expressive configuration generating and being generated by the parallel movement. According to such a movement, there are no general themes, but just ways of discussing them, dealing with them, forming them. Afterwards,

when the two operations have taken place simultaneously and in reciprocal function, the human and social meanings appear. This shows once again the reason why *the text is not an objective entity but a (dynamic) formal construction*: it is the process relating two simultaneous operations of formation, which is arbitrary at the beginning but necessary for the structure of the text itself and, for this reason, it is always changing in a process of negotiation.

Let us take product design, for example: it does not plan objects and their technologies, but the relationships between those physically given things and the social meaning they have or can assume (social meaning also includes their practical functions) (Mangano 2011). They do not design some glasses but a way of showing (or hiding) the face (Marrone 2010a). The same goes for architecture: they do not design an apartment, but a way of living in it and therefore a certain idea of the family that will live there. What I said above is just another way of saying that text is not the physical book, but what comes out when that book is read.

c) The third principle, *textual closure*, also derives from negotiation. Closure is never given, but takes place in custom communicative canons, where it can be more or less marked. A ceremony, for instance, has its well defined boundaries with specific performative acts marking the beginning and the end of it. A social event, as a carnival, has less marked boundaries instead. In general, as for semiotics, textual boundaries are always variable in order for circumstances of enunciation and production to become part of the text if needed. This happens, for example, in the so-called interactive, cross-media texts in which the answer of the addressee contributes to the authorial construction of the text itself. But it also happens in many mass media products in which, for example, if a certain director or actor works in a movie, this pre-determines the plot and gives rise to certain expectations about its results (Marrone 2013).

Many misunderstandings have arisen around the concept of textual closure that structural analysis saw as a categorical imperative. However they disappear if we consider closure as a weak property, as something negotiable (as implied by the French term *clôture*) and not as a strong property, not as an ultimate fixation (as implied by the French term *fermeture* that is never used for this property of the text).

If we consider closure like this, it becomes clear that, though textual boundaries are not ontological ones, they must be there anyway to mark, at least, the constitutive discontinuity and the basic perception of difference allowing signification to exist. There must be boundaries – being among them Romolo's plow furrow, the Berlin wall or the road sign with the city name – for a city to exist as an object of meaning and to be perceived as such. That is the reason why many scholars of contemporary widespread phenomena of diffusion and partition of

cities affirmed that the city itself is going to disappear. As for the principle of biplanarity, closure, if not expressed, is always signified. In the example of the city, this happens when a guide said 'here begins the actual city' pointing at a building or crossroads that otherwise would look like any other.

d) More important than closure, then, is the *holding* of the text, here understood in the sense of the famous Saussurean structuralist slogan according to which in a language *tout se tient*. The holding of the textual whole generates at the same time the internal articulation of the text (its structure) and its boundaries (that are not necessarily sharp but can exist). Formal *cohesion* and semantic *coherence* of textual linguistics can be considered as part of this basic principle avoiding, in this way, falling into the *a priori* theoretical regulation and fixation that could be recalled by those two elements.

From this point of view, textual holding requests internal changing and intrinsic *processuality*. In fact, in addition to its own systematic organisation (the paradigmatic one), a text has also a syntagmatic development that can appear as temporality in linguistic communication or in some audiovisual material, like spatial development of visual elements in an image, like the actual narration – in which, however, strict rules are given and due to them what is found at the beginning is not what is found at the end. In spite of any supposed circularity (as in some folklore genre, for example), the perceptions of elements, and therefore their semantic value, changes continuously along the narrative. There are of course cases in which the content is *inverted* at the beginning, and then *given* only in the end, as Greimas (1970) pointed out in its study of Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*; other cases in which this does not happen, as in certain fixed images. In any case the text has its deep narrative organisation where a pragmatic/passionate programme and a clash of subjects bring about a subjective transformation that can be both individual or common.

e) This leads to yet another important point, the *multiple levels* of the text, that is to say that the whole semantic configuration of a text can be understood both in a simple and in a complex way, in an abstract or in a concrete way. Greimas defined this principle as *generative trajectory of meaning*. It is meant to describe deep narrative structures and surface discursive structures where textualisation can take place any time at any level. In general, both in life experience and in textual analysis, the same meaning can be expanded or condensed, it can be understood by unfolding it in many intricate elements or summarized in a few defining lines. Each text is retold and can be retold again (as in Peirce's unlimited semiosis) thanks to the innumerable ways in which it can be translated.

There are two levels of relevance at which, internally already, it can be explained: the *deep narrativity* level, that acts as a common background and interpretive grid for any human and social signification; and the *discursivity*

level, that is the way in which an enunciating subject (enunciator and enunciatee) places the text in a social communication allowing it to circulate, because it exists ahead of the text and at the same time uses it.

f) We now get to the idea that inside every text there is its content, but also the image of its communication (or *enunciation*): the principles for its functioning, the criteria of its production and reception, in other words its *instructions for use*.

Beyond its real sender and addressee, within the text there are also their simulacra, the *enunciator* and the *enunciatee*, who are abstract agents that can become actors in different ways. Between *sender* and *enunciator* and between *addressee* and *enunciatee* there are biunivocal relationships because, though the latter are the simulacra of the former, created to their image and likeness, they can also determine them and act in reality more than them. A brand is the *communicative image of a firm* and more or less corresponds to its productive situation – but, on the market, it ends up by being more informative than the firm itself, since it does things and makes others do things, proposes projects of meaning and communicative scenes, constitutes actual communicative processes. Similarly, the target is *the image of consumers* but ends up by creating them, instructing them with the aim of adapting their consumer habits and changing their life-style (Marrone 2007). The image of the audience of TV programs produces receptive behaviours of audiences; the idea of a listener of our discourse produces it; a certain building or apartment causes people to behave the way an architect had in her mind when she designed such a space. The possibility of a position overturn is perfectly plausible as well, so that, as de Certeau (1980) used to say, it is the *practice of consuming* that constitutes the meaning of texts. It is the fruition technique that overturns the molar structures through which texts propose certain messages. In any case, the level of enunciation and all its consequences about inside and outside the text is to be found within the text itself, but it always looks outside of it, to the cultural world that in some way will retell it in other texts.

g) From this derives the last principle I want to mention, the one of *intertextuality* and *translation*. If the inside and the outside of the text define each other, the relationship between two texts is an element of the identity of both, that is as fundamental as their own internal division into levels of meaning. *Textual closure does not mean isolation of the text*, the text is not a monad that does not communicate with other closed texts, but quite the opposite. According to Barthes (1970), every text is a *perspective of quotations* because in it there can be found what Fabbri (2001) calls ‘invitations’ to read other texts. Jorge Luis Borges used to say that every writer creates his predecessors. In other words, intertextuality is not a philological going back to sources, nor a hermeneutical history of the effects of reading, nor even a post-modern link to authors and literary traditions of the past.

It means instead that other texts are already present in the text as it is written (what Eco 1979, 1984 calls *encyclopaedia*), that is to say that *the text has a discursive base inscribed 'naturally' into a culture* through a net of references putting as the centre of the text configuration the process of translation – inter-linguistic or intra-linguistic, inter-textual or intra-textual, inter-discursive or intra-discursive.

It should be clear now why Greimas affirms that *textualisation is not to be considered at the end of the generative trajectory* (Greimas and Courtés 1986). Textualisation is the moment when discourse meets the plane of expression, and would give rise to problems of linearisation (in written texts), temporalisation (in oral texts), topological disposition (in images), synchronisation (in audiovisual), etc. But we can have textualisation at any level of the generative trajectory: the fundamental one, the anthropomorphic one, the discursive one, and so on. The semiotic square, says Greimas, is the “visual representation of the logical articulation of any category” and therefore it has both expression and contents. In this way, as we go down the steps of the trajectory and we go, for example, from textual to discursive structures, we do not leave the substance of expression behind, in fact *we find another one*, that maybe similar or different to the first, but is another substance anyway.

It is indeed impossible to go out of the text to a ‘pure’ semantic abstraction, just on the plane of content, as they often say. *Another text is built instead* – through unlimited semiosis (Peirce 1937), transcodification (Lotman 1977), transposition (Greimas 1970) or translation (Fabbri 2001) – a text that involves the discourse made by the first one, giving up its plane of expression *and building a new one*. This second text can be built *ad hoc* by the theory as a formal model and being a ‘scientific metasemiotic’ aiming at explaining a preexistent textual configuration. Or it can be already there in a particular culture as a metatext given in relation to the first.

According to Lotman (2009) metatexts are texts themselves, circulating in the same culture as the texts they talk about and interlacing with them. A declaration of poetics is a metatext in relation to the poetry of which is the theory and is a text in relation to the culture in which it circulates. A taxonomy of genres is a metatext in relation to the drama, novel or epic poem it classifies, but it is a text in relation to the culture that produces and transmits it. The same can be said of a journalistic opinion piece and the news story next to it on the newspaper page; the Catechism book and the prayers in it; the interview to advertisers and the advertisement they made; an essay of textual semiotics and the narrative analysis it aims at explaining.

Cultures are built and change due to an endless textual, inter-textual and meta-textual production. Every text links to other texts using the same or other substances of expression, the same channel or another. So, remake and remix

practices are not a prerogative of our cultural condition, they are, in a way, the rules supporting the semiosphere (see Dusi and Spaziante 2004). The *generative trajectory is one of those practices of textual remake* that is methodologically coherent and controlled on the theoretical and epistemological level.

In this inter-textual thread, of course, not all texts are equal, nor they have the same social function or the same value. Some texts are more important than others; some talk about other text's narrative structures; some texts present themselves 'naturally' as discursive products (e.g. instruction manuals), thus becoming relevant matrix for the creation of other texts, for starting new meaningful practices that will relate to them as direct, institutional expressive manifestations. It is now possible, to think of (inter- and intra-semiotic) *translational intertextuality as the logic of culture working together with the generative trajectory of meaning*.

This allows us to leave behind the idea of two different generative trajectories – of content and of expression – meeting just on a few happy occasions. It also allows us to see that between the different levels of relevance of meaning inside a text and the intertextual chains inside a culture there can be a strong *homology*. If the levels of the trajectory are all textual dimensions, crossing the trajectory itself means to go from one text to the other (every text having, of course, a different value and a different function).

Taking this position does not imply forgetting about the matter of the upstream creation and the downstream use of a text and everything this brings about in terms of subjective, pre-subjective and inter-subjective experiences, of activation and passivation of the body, of social practices and existential livings, of effects of meaning and symbolic effectiveness. In fact, if in relation to a given text these phenomena are placed upstream or downstream, in a wider cultural context *they are placed into other texts*.

Rather than facing the question of the origin of meaning, or that of its dissolution, by talking about an 'experience' of meaning as something blurry and methodologically uncontrollable, it would be more useful and productive to widen (or narrow, depending on occasions) the focus of analysis, as Lotman says, concentrating on a single text (without necessarily recalling the context), on another (understood as a possible metatext of the first) or on a wider intertextual net (in which the relationship between the texts finds its functioning rules).

So, studying somatic experiences and social practices by analysing how they have been told on the plane of contents in some texts, does not mean taking into account their 'representation' in those texts. It means, actually, to retrace, from the role they play in the semantic organisation of texts, linguistic and *social discursive model* explaining the meaningful articulation of those experiences and practices and of others in the future. That is what Greimas (1987a) did when he

wanted to study sensibility and aesthesia by analysing Tournier, Calvino, Rilke, Tanizaki and Cortázar. That is also what Landowski (2004) does when, in order to retrace experiences of inter-somatic contamination, he talks about advertisements of Brazilian beers. Or again what Fontanille (2008) does when, to go beyond texts and work on practices, analyses *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. And it is what I aimed at when I used *A Clockwork Orange* to work on the social body and life forms of drug addicts (see Marrone 2009).

In conclusion, identifying *once and for all* some basic formal criteria for the constitution of the semiotics of text is as useful as it is risky, because it could imply once more a prescriptive and ethnocentric image of meaning. What I list above are, undoubtedly, crucial concepts and categories for a semiotic analysis that is a critical – in every sense of the word – analysis of society and culture. The risk exists, though, of *hypostatizing* them and of falling back into a theoretic perspective naively and unconsciously linked to a specific and limited cultural asset, with its values and ideologies, its naturalising assumptions and its small truths. In other words, it could be as impossible in facts as desirable on an epistemological point of view, to jump over this perspective to an abstract meta-semiotic level, defying any rigorous analysis of cultures and thus being able to explain *textual specific mechanisms* through which any specific cultural asset is built and survives, often in function of other complementary or opposite assets.

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Social semiotics: Towards a sociologically grounded semiotics

Abstract: Semiotics has defined its field as the study of meaning, which is entirely legitimate. However, if we wish to reach a deeper interpretation and explanation of semiotic texts, we need an articulation of semiotics with an epistemologically superior level. Semioticians have looked for this articulation in the framework of an individualistic paradigm, in biology or sometimes in psychology; we counter-propose a sociological paradigm.

Our paper reviews earlier attempts at such an articulation in sociosemiotics and sociolinguistics and argues that they range from a weak awareness of society dismissed in the name of semiotic relevance (Greimas and Courtés) to the systematic articulation of language with the social (Bernstein). Finally, we demonstrate how an articulation between semiotics and society (in the sociologist's sense of the word) can illuminate semiotic analysis through the example of case studies from Antiquity to our own times.

The anchoring of semiotic systems in society challenges both Peircean global semiotics and cognitive semiotics, which both imply the historical priority of biology as an explanation of cultural semiotic systems. Both approaches try to pass directly from culture to biology, but the recognition of the mediating role of society creates major epistemological problems for a biological approach to semiotics.

Key words: social semiotics, sociosemiotics, sociolinguistics, cognitive semiotics, Peircean semiotics, global semiotics

1 Semiotics and the social sciences

Semiotics, like any other scientific field, could not be constituted without the definition of a specific epistemological object. This definition delimits what belongs legitimately to the field and what lies outside it. However, this delimitation, necessary though it is, should not be interpreted as the isolation of semiotics from other scientific domains (the besetting problem of the positivist sciences).

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Given the understandable tendency to extrapolate from the particular, the result of isolation is partiality in the best case, and in the not infrequent worst case, misleading conclusions.

Narrowing choices is the necessary result of the epistemological definition of a scientific field. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, each science has to limit itself to only *one* of the possible perspectives through which an empirical object can be approached (Saussure 1971 [1915]: 23). This is what was later called the “law of relevance” (*loi de la pertinence*). This fundamental principle was adopted by Louis Hjelmslev (1961 [1943]: 10–11), Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtés (1979: Définition, Description, Opération, Pertinence, Procédure), and Umberto Eco, who points out that, while social phenomena and material life are not reducible to pure mental facts (a view leading to idealism) all phenomena in society can and must be studied from a semiotic viewpoint, “*sub specie communicationis*” (Eco 1972 [1968]: 25–30, and Eco 1976: 6–7, 26–27, 158).

No epistemological object is completely autonomous, and there is a hierarchy of epistemological objects, according to which the articulation of a narrower with a wider epistemological object allows a deeper interpretation of the former. On this basis, we shall explore in this paper the articulation of semiotics with the epistemological level which is by definition the one immediately wider than that defined by semiotics and which oddly seems to have escaped the attention of most semioticians. This wider level is that of *material society*, as defined below.

The great bulk of semiotic studies concerns the immanent analysis of texts, but there is a less frequently studied sub-field of semiotics, the current term for which is sociosemiotics. We shall begin by reviewing briefly the state of our knowledge in this area.

In French semiotics, sociosemiotics has a limited and timid presence. A brief but enlightening description of it is given by Greimas and Courtés. They discuss two aspects of sociosemiotics, classification systems and the dynamics of communication. In the first they include three different social connotative types. The first type are “mythical epistemologies”, social discourses on signs, including philosophies of language. The second are “cultural ontologies”, which support the above discourses, since they establish truth criteria. The third type are the taxonomies of social languages, which are strictly defined in archaic or traditional societies (including categories such as *sacred vs profane* or *superior vs inferior*), but increase greatly in complex societies (for example, sacred language is divided into religious, philosophical, poetic, etc. discourses). We may understand why Greimas and Courtés state that the study of sociosemiotics leads to a typology of cultures. The second aspect of Greimas and Courtés’s sociosemiotics is the study of the dynamics relating to the communication circuit, which they see as activated in both extremities not by neutral instances but by competent semiotic

subjects (Greimas and Courtés 1979: *Sociosémiotique*, and Greimas and Courtés 1986: *Sociosémiotique*).

The Greimassian approach to sociosemiotics is not without historical precedents. While the first stage of Russian formalism focused on the expression plane of the works of literature and art and the second on the syntagmatic dimension of texts as holistic entities (that is, both stages dealt with the immanent analysis of texts, the core of semiotics), during the third stage the interest of the Formalists turned to the relationship between the text and its environment. This relationship was approached from two perspectives. The first was the insertion of a text within broader systems external to it, first genre and then the whole of the cultural system conceived as a “system of systems”. The second perspective focused on the communication circuit, namely on the communication space between the writer or the text and the reader, and this space was conceived as a series of mediations, such as literary institutions and circles, public opinion and even economic factors (on Russian formalism, see Sebeok 1994 [1986], vol. 1: *Russian Formalism*).

However, the only semiotic approach currently devoted to sociosemiotics is the “semiotics of culture” of the Moscow-Tartu school and its founder Juri Lotman. According to the Theses of the school, culture is seen as a holistic cybernetic system of systems, a set of semiotic systems and texts, and the central object of semiotics is the semiotic-typological approach (see Uspenskij et al. 2003 [1973]). Lotman’s later concept of the “semiosphere” remains tightly connected to the Theses, with the difference that he now attempted to found semiotics on the right-left asymmetry of the human brain; this right-left pair is seen as a universal basic structure operating from the genetic-molecular level to the general structure of the universe and from the basic mechanism of thought to the structure of semiotic systems (see, for example, Lotman 2005: 219–222).

There is a convergence between the Greimassian approach and the Moscow-Tartu school. However, in spite of the broadening of the semiotic domain achieved by these two schools compared to the narrower immanent textual analysis, their approaches remain enclosed within the relevance of meaning. The Paris school is aware of a field that escapes the scope of the Moscow-Tartu school, namely the social sciences. Even so, it hesitates to make the leap to the articulation of semiotics with a wider level obeying a different relevance and ends up taking contradictory positions. Thus, in the entry on sociosemiotics in the first volume of their dictionary, Greimas and Courtés (1979: *Sociosémiotique*) argue that the correlation of semiotics with the social sciences should not result in an interdisciplinary socio-semiotics, that is, the bringing together of two heterogeneous fields, but should remain pure semiotic intertextuality. They explicitly state that they choose methodological coherence over interdisciplinarity.

The two above options are clearly presented in the second volume of their dictionary (Greimas and Courtés 1986: *Sociosémiotique*). They observe that the current stage of research reveals two tendencies. The first is to accept that social facts are irreducible to purely semiotic ones and are studied by a set of special theories (such as sociology, economics and political sciences); in this case, semiotics would be limited to investing with meaning these external realities. Greimas and Courtés continue to opt, however, for the opposite approach of a sociosemiotics within general semiotics, which conceives of the social in semiotic terms.

This defence of semiotic relevance is not without contradictions. In the entry on sociolect of the first volume of their dictionary, Greimas and Courtés accept the existence of social stratification into classes, strata or social groupings as “phénomènes extra-sémiotiques” [extra-semiotic phenomena] and state that there are semiotic configurations corresponding to them. This wavering reveals two things: on the one hand semiotics, in order to answer a part of its own problematics, *is under pressure to go beyond the boundary of its relevance*, and on the other that *the tradition of the domain acts as a restraint against this transcendence*.

We encounter exactly the same attitude in the introduction of one of the basic reference texts for sociosemiotics, namely the special issue of *Semiotica* guest edited by Paul Cobley and Anti Randviir (2009). With the goal of defining the physiognomy of sociosemiotics, Cobley and Randviir invited representatives of different tendencies relative to the field, discuss a wide spectrum of its sources and present their own view. In presenting the papers included in the issue, the authors strongly defend the semiotic relevance, bypassing the fact that at least half of their authors hold not only that an extra-semiotic, sociological concept of society exists, but also that extra-semiotic processes are crucial for the formation of semiotic systems. From the contributions of these authors emerge a model and programme for sociosemiotics that are very different from the view presented by the editors.

We believe that, independently from their personal positions, semioticians need to finally realise that *parallel to the paradigm of semiotic relevance, there is another paradigm, that of its articulation with the social*.

Greimas and Courtés observe that, unlike sociosemiotics, sociolinguistics is well established as a subfield of linguistics. A brief outline of the positions of some major authors in the field of sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis will show us that the conflict of the two paradigms above is repeated in this field.

2 Linguistics and the social sciences

Several linguists have proposed that language should be studied in its relationship to society. Dell Hymes's "ethnography of speaking" is focused on "the use of language in contexts of situation", whence his concept of speech act, which he combines with Roman Jakobson's communication model. According to Hymes, there is a hierarchy of speech circumstances ("social contexts"), starting with the "speech community", continuing with the "speech situations" in each community and ending with their unit, the "speech event", which normally comprises more than one "speech act", governed by formal rules (Hymes 1974: 3–4, 9–13, 19–23, 35, 47–53).

However, while Hymes frequently uses the term "social", he does not use it literally, but as a substitute for "semiotic" (for example, he refers to the "semantics' of social relationships"). As will be clear throughout this paper, we feel strongly that these two terms cannot be made to coincide. Hymes's sociolinguistics is, as he himself states, an "ethnography of speaking", "of *communication*" (Hymes 1974: vii, 3–5, 8, 60, 112, 196, our emphasis). He operates from within the semiotic relevance, though in the direction of the study of language in a wider context.

M.A.K. Halliday, like Hymes, starts from the founding concept of the "context of situation", which he defines strictly semiotically and specifically as not all the features of the environment of speech, but only those that are relevant to speech. Halliday believes that there is a rather limited number of aspects of situations, founded on three semiotic components of the speech situation, the "situational determinants": (a) the field of social action, of symbolic activity, referring to what is taking place, that is, the activity going on, including subject matter; (b) the tenor of role relationships, referring to who is taking part, that is, the role relationships in the situation; and (c) the mode of symbolic organisation, the part language is playing, referring to the features of the channel, the rhetorical mode, etc. (Halliday 1978: for example, 29, 31, 63, 117, 189).

Halliday emphasises the strong, if approximate, univocal relation between these components and three major functional components, independent from them and relatively independent from each other, but highly integrated internally, which organise the semantic system of language: (a) the ideational function, the observer function, which is subdivided into the experiential and the logical functions; (b) the interpersonal function, which offers a meaning potential to the speaker as intruder and is the participatory function of language as doing something; and (c) the textual function, which follows from the text-forming potential of the speaker and makes language relevant (Halliday 1978: for example, 45–48, 63, 112–113, 187).

According to Halliday, situational determinants activate and determine, in a one-to-one correspondence, functional components, i.e., their meanings are realised through the latter, with as a result that they are predictive of the text. Halliday extends these lines of one-to-one correspondences further by stating that, from the lexico-grammatical viewpoint, there is a systematic relation between functional components and specific grammatical structures or structural configurations. These structural configurations coexist and, together with the configurations of potential meaning, constitute the register, the structure supporting the actual text. The movement from situation to register is mediated by the code, which Halliday, agreeing with Basil Bernstein, defines as meaning potential, that is, access to particular areas of language (Halliday 1978: 31–33, 45–49, 62–63, 68, 70, 111, 116, 117, 185–189).

Halliday's sociolinguistics relies heavily on Bernstein. For him, as for Bernstein, language variation is anchored in the social system. He refers to different kinds of actual social groups, from social class to family (Halliday 1978: 2–3, 23, 68–69, 113, 184–186). He thus appears to include in his sociolinguistic theory extra-semiotic concepts of society, but on closer scrutiny they remain divorced from his theory. According to Halliday, the social system is identified solely with culture and is considered as a semiotic system, and "social reality" becomes a "semiotic construct" (Halliday 1978: 2–3, 23, 68–69, 113, 184–189).

A different approach is offered by the critical discourse analysis of Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge, who do not found their linguistic analysis on the concept of situation. According to Kress and Hodge, language is constituted by interrelated categories, which take the form of a set of models or schemata, deriving from visual perception, describing the interrelation of objects and events and incorporating classification categories. For English, the categories are organised according to a three-level hierarchical taxonomy from the general to the specific. The authors relate their models to two main concepts: the first, which we encountered already, is classification and the second transformation, a concept they say is close but not identical to that used by Noam Chomsky (Kress and Hodge 1979: for example, 7–10, 38–39, 120).

Avoiding the purely linguistic approach that adopts the narrow relevance of the field with the use of such terms as "semantic" and "value", Kress and Hodge, admittedly without extensive excursions outside the semiotic relevance, open the field with the important introduction of the concept of "ideology", a term which avoids the neutrality of the term "semantic" and appertains to the social sciences. They consider ideology as the "systematically organized presentation of reality" and they are interested in "the relation between linguistic processes and their ideological motivations" (Kress and Hodge 1979: 15, 17). Ideology, for Kress and

Hodge, is thus the site of the articulation between the semiotic and the extrasemiototic.

The orientation of Kress and Hodge towards the dependence of language on ideology is also displayed in the case of their analysis of one of their submodels, the possessive, typically represented by “has” and also represented by the transformationally derived forms of *of* and genitive *-s*. They conclude that the *has* relationship (*This poetry has spontaneity*) reinterprets qualitative relationships into quasi-commodity ones (in this example, poetry is the possessor of a commodity); the genitive *-s* form (*John’s school*) inverts the actual part-whole relationship, because the larger term is presented as possessed by a part of it, and the *of* relationship (*A glass of milk*) reflects “the ideology of an alienated commodity oriented society”. They state that the above three forms correspond to Marx’s conception of the fetishism of commodities in capitalism, thus passing explicitly from semiotics to sociology (Kress and Hodge 1979: 116–119).

According to Kress and Hodge, utterances and speakers are subject to classification, mediated by class assumptions. However, while the subordinate class has its own system of categories and values, it is filtered through that of the dominant class. Classification by individuals is constrained by extra-linguistic forces, modality transposes social conflicts into forms of negation, thus leading to the internalisation of the social structures, and finally the whole of language and ideology is regulated by (material) society (Kress and Hodge 1979: 5, 13, 64–68, 77, 150–151).

The approach of Kress and Hodge represents a definite step towards the articulation of linguistics with society. For a further analysis of this articulation, we shall now turn to the approaches of Basil Bernstein and William Labov.

Bernstein argues that speech events are regulated by principles, a speech model, which he calls a “code”. He differentiates between a “restricted”, “public” code and an “elaborated”, formal code, observing, however, that the differentiation between the two codes is not exclusive but statistical, given that there are areas of overlapping. Bernstein’s definition of code does not refer only to the linguistic part of a message, but also to the meaning processes and structuring leading to it. For example, the restricted code has a more limited range of alternative choices (Bernstein calls it “closed” type), and more rigid syntactic and vocabulary selections; verbal meanings tend to be collective, concepts to be descriptive and complexity to be lower; the code may be considered as “universalistic” from the viewpoint of the potential general accessibility of the corresponding speech model. The elaborated code, on the other hand, allows a greater range of alternatives (Bernstein calls it “open” type), and more sophisticated and flexible vocabulary selections; verbal meanings tend to be individualised and concepts to be abstract; the code’s speech model is “particularistic”. The opposite holds with

reference to the degree of explicitness of meaning, because the restricted code is “particularistic” and thus context-dependent, presupposing implicit understanding of the context, while the elaborated code is “universalistic” and context-independent. The two codes, which are independent of intelligence, are differently oriented towards the relationship between objects and between persons (Bernstein 1971: for example, 13–14, 42, 61–62, 76–81, 121, 129, 131, 145, 148, 171, 194–196).

According to Bernstein, the syntactic level, his “surface structure” of language, is guided by the semantic level, the “deep structure”; this causal link belongs to the purely semiotic domain. Bernstein then takes a step towards the speech situation, inspired by Halliday’s approach. The new link in his causal chain are social roles in their interactional situation, which he sees as the locus of the social structuring of meanings. The major situation would be the family, of which he defines two different types: the more rigid “positional” family and the more flexible “person-oriented” (“personal”) family. These two types of families, based on differences in roles, create two radically different communication systems, i.e., codes, and hence cultural meanings (Bernstein 1971: 15–16, 144–145, 149–155, 171, 184, 186, 194, 241–247).

With his final step, Bernstein locates the foundation of his causal chain in the correlation of social roles with the social structure (the macro-sociological level), emphasising the social division of labour and the degree of education. On this basis he distinguishes two social classes, the working and the middle class (Bernstein 1971: 12, 24–25, 185). Bernstein defines the relation between code and class in a definite but not exclusive manner. The elaborated code, with an emphasis on the person-focused mode, marks the middle class, while the restricted code marks the working class, though it is not limited to that class.

Bernstein elaborates further on the connection between family type and code: positional families tend to use the restricted code, but they may also use the elaborated code in its object-focused mode. Thus, the two modes of the elaborated code are allocated to different family types. Bernstein also states that both types of families are found in both social classes, but there is a closer connection between the positional family and the working class (Bernstein 1971: for example, 12, 77, 79, 128, 150, 160–163, 183–187) – see Figure 1. Through this flexibly causal passage from class to family to code, Bernstein supports the thesis of the anchoring of linguistic phenomena in actual social structure.

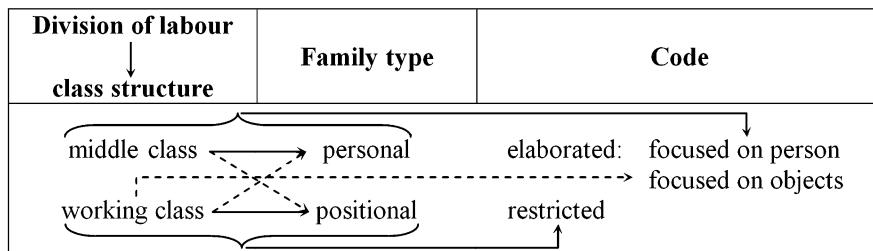


Figure 1: Bernstein’s articulation between the linguistic code and social structure. Plain lines: main derivation. Dotted lines: secondary derivation.

We find a very similar orientation in the work of William Labov. Labov starts even from the phonetic level. For example, he examines the variations in speech of the voiceless interdental (non-sibilant) fricative [θ] (as in *thing*, *thick*) and finds three different forms, which he classifies from the one with the lowest social esteem to the most prestigious variant. Based on data from New York City, he demonstrates a clear correlation between the pronunciation of the [θ] index and a composite sociolinguistic variable, a combination of socio-economic class (lower, working, lower middle and upper middle classes).

A major point of convergence between Labov and Bernstein is their common view of what sociolinguistics is, as evident in the following definition by Labov: “We may define a *sociolinguistic variable* as one which is correlated with some non-linguistic variable of the social context: of the speaker, the addressee, the audience, the setting, etc.”. For Labov, such a correlation displays “exterior, sociolinguistic controls” (Labov 1972: 283–287, 305).

The recent development of sociolinguistics has revolved within the spectrum defined above, with as foundational principle the study of language “in context”. From its very beginning, sociolinguistics gave emphasis to the semantics of language, an orientation that brings it close to semiotics. This overlapping becomes especially evident in the search for cultural models (value systems, belief structures), whether referring to language use, related to language variation and language learning, illustrating corporate identities as revealed by business media discourse, or displaying the new entrepreneurial discourse on the university or other previously not economically oriented public institutions, such as the health service (Kristiansen and Dirven 2008: 9–11; Meyerhoff 2006: 4; McGroarty 2010: 17; Mayr 2008: 3). However, unlike semiotics, sociolinguistics regularly uses the term ideology and deals with more contemporary issues, such as identity, power relations, and gender (Thornborrow and Coates 2005: 15; Omoniyi and White 2006: 2). The sociolinguistic approaches oscillate between remaining within the semiotic relevance, frequently using a social unit of the environment as a general

substratum, and explicit correlation with material society. This latter orientation seems to be especially fruitful if we follow Rajend Mesthrie, who points out that any “coherent theory of language in society can only unfold within a particular theory of society” and concludes that “many of the insights emanating from sociolinguistics do fit the Marxist critique of social systems quite well” (Mesthrie 2009: 6, 27, 32).

Thus, both in semiotics and sociolinguistics we find two different paradigms, the one remaining within the semiotic relevance, the other proposing the articulation of the semiotic with the extra-semiotic domain of the social. *These two paradigms cannot be conflated into one.* For this reason, we propose reserving the term *sociosemiotics* for the first approach and that of *social semiotics* for the second. We do not mean to imply that a sociosemiotic approach working from inside the semiotic relevance is not legitimate, or that the two approaches are incompatible. However, here we want to argue that the study of the material, socio-historical functions of semiotic texts can add substantially to our comprehension of both texts and society.

To demonstrate what a social semiotic approach can achieve, in the following section we will briefly present five of our own case studies, extending over a period of 6,000 years, before formulating some theoretical implications.

3 Social semiotics: The case studies

3.1 Mesopotamian kingship

During the Al-‘Ubaid period (from the sixth to the beginning of the fourth millennium B.C.E.), the social structure of Mesopotamia consisted of small agricultural communities, ruled by a priesthood which controlled the irrigation system necessary for cultivation and the survival of society. With the rise of kingship, which first emerged during the Uruk period (fourth millennium) or the next Early Dynastic period (third millennium), the power of the priesthood was gradually eclipsed. This rise was combined in the third millennium with the intensification of social stratification and the development of a dominant class. The lawgiver king, surrounded by this class, was in complete control of the state and the irrigation system (for the above, see Adams 1966: for example, 51, 65, 68, 82–85, 94–143, 152–156, 168–174; Wittfogel 1977 [1957]: 40, 56, 113–115, 127, 183, 308, 309, 313, 325, 326, 342–343, 391–392).

The extension of the political hegemony of the king can be traced in the evolution of his title. The early “King of the Country” was followed by the title “He

who Rules the Four Quarters”, introduced by Sargon of Akkad (2334–2279 B.C.E.) and until then attributed only to gods; an equivalent title was “King of the Universe” (Frankfort 1948: 228–230, 396–397 n. 39). These titles invest the king with cosmic power and place him in the centre of the universe.

This semiotic investment of the king with cosmic powers is not limited to his title: it pervades the whole “royal” Mesopotamian semiotic system and results from a *reinterpretation* of the older “priestly” system. Central to the Mesopotamian semiotic system is the connection between the king, the gods and the normal functioning of the universe on the one hand, and the king and the fertility of fields and people on the other (Banu 1974: 288–289, 306). Fertility was considered as following from the functioning of the universe, and by securing the former through the control of a technical factor, the irrigation system, the king acquired god-like powers. It is, then, the material power of control over this system that connected the royal (political) and the cosmic code (cf. Greimas and Courtés’s concept of “*code partiel*” [partial code], or “*isotopie*” [isotopy]; see Greimas and Courtés 1979: Code, Isotopie) and *determined* the nucleus of the new semiotic system; the semiotic formation around the symbolic power of the king is a *cultural interpretation of his actual material power*. While in theory the king was subject to the gods, in reality he was using religion to confirm his political position. This symbolic system was projected on the form of architecture and the organisation of urban space (Lagopoulos 1985: 13–30).

3.2 Ancient Greek *symmetria*

From the end of the sixth century B.C.E., Greek thought was heavily influenced by the theory of the Pythagoreans. According to Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, numbers are the source of all existence, and proportion, the relation between numbers, presides over all things and over the spherical universe as a whole. The perfect number is ten, the *tetraktys*, the sum of the first four integers. Due to numbers, there is a universal harmony, a world order, and from the latter was derived the notion of *symmetria*. *Symmetria* indicates the commensurability, that is, the proportional relationships between the various parts of an artefact and between them and the whole; it is linked to the definition of a basic unit of measurement, i.e., a module (Pollitt 1974: 14–23, 26, 88, 126, 162, 167–169, 182, 187; Raven 1951: 147–148).

Symmetria regulated the production of all artefacts, sculptural works, the Four-Colour school of painting, the architectural orders. In urban space, the world order, deployed in a multiplicity of major connotative codes, governed the general semiotic urban model, the geometrical diagram of which was a circle

(an ideal form) with a centre. There were six connotative codes connected to the model: the cosmic, the circle marking the limits of the cosmos and of the earth, and the centre their centre; the political, based on the principle of *isonomia*, the equality of political rights between citizens, in which the circular diagram alludes to the equidistance of all citizens from the agora; the social, since this equality is related to the reciprocity of relations between citizens and thus to social equilibrium; the aesthetic, because *symmetria* is related to beauty, two of whose aspects are equilibrium and the circle; the anthropomorphic, because the centre is an *omphalos*, a navel; and the code of health, in which *isonomia* expresses the correct proportion and equilibrium of the elements of the body and by extension of the whole city (cf. Vernant 1974, vol. 2: 179–186, 204, 206, 209–211; Raven 1951: 150).

This circular model of the city seems to be at odds with the actual planning of Greek colonies, which used the grid pattern. The latter was integrated by Hippodamus in the fifth century B.C.E. within a comprehensive philosophical system of Pythagorean origin. The ideal Hippodamian city is *myriandros*, that is, it has 10,000 citizens, a number derived from the perfect *tetraktys*, which thus imbues the city with its perfection. Although the city is not circular, it revolves in a circle-like manner around the agora, thus relating it to the general semiotic model. The uniformity of the blocks, lots and even houses projects onto space the principle of *isonomia* and simultaneously the city is generated as a multiple of these modules according to the principle of *symmetria* (cf. Hoepfner and Schwandner 1994: 302, 306, 308, 312).

The codes presiding over the ancient Greek urban semiotic model constitute the nucleus of the hegemonic ancient Greek ideology and reveal its deep structure. This structure was the product of a new form of logic, rationalism. The filter through which rationalism operated is the Pythagorean conception of the world order. Both appeared just after the rise in Greece of a monetary economy at the end of the seventh century, a few decades before Pythagoras was born. The monetary economy transformed qualitative differences between goods into quantitative relations between them, which were translated into proportions (Vernant 1974, vol. 1: 176–179 and vol. 2: 37–39, 104–107, 117–123).

This movement from economy to semiotics is detected in the views of none other than Aristotle himself. He argues that the reciprocity of social groups is based on the exchange of products, and this exchange presupposes the reciprocity of the products, which is achieved when quantitative proportions are established between them. Money is the common measure of all products and everything must be measured, “for such a standard makes all things commensurable [*symmetra*]” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V.v: 10–16).

Thus, the social semiotic analysis of ancient Greece reveals the *transformation of the logic of an economic system into a highly abstract semiotic system, ruling the whole of culture.*

3.3 Noble birth and loyalty in the medieval romance

While the Arthurian romances are full of fictional elements, they nonetheless describe a universe that corresponds in crucial points to the worldview of their audience, the courtly nobility (Boklund 1977). The world of the romance is structurally divided into the space of the court – where everyone is of noble birth and order, beauty and culture reign – and the space of adventure, which is chaotic, dangerous, and populated by uncourtly commoners and monsters.

The narrative starts when someone from the space of adventure, but of noble origin, intrudes into the court and challenges its values. The hero of the romance pursues the intruder into the space of adventure, where he defeats him and both return to the court of King Arthur, where the defeated enemy is admitted as a new noble member.

The world of the courtly romance is thus a world in which the courtly nobility is the guarantor of order and culture. It is also a world in which political power is completely dependent on the acts of individual members of the nobility. King Arthur never does anything in the romances and all the action is carried out by his loyal knights. Both in the romance and in feudal society, faithfulness, being true to one's word, is the central virtue of the medieval nobility. In reality, the decentred nature of feudal rule means that the relationship between king and aristocracy badly needs the reinforcement of this moral sanction.

Thus, the Arthurian romances, for all their apparent fictional character, *function as an ideological mechanism for the preservation of the coherence of the dominant class.*

3.4 Poverty and sainthood in the *Life of Saint Alexius*

If a semiotic text moves from one social context to another, it will function differently in the new setting: it will be reinterpreted to suit the new context. One example of such a reinterpretation is the legend of the life of Saint Alexis, one of the most widespread and popular of medieval saints' legends (Boklund-Lagopoulou 1984). The story seems to have originated in Syria in the sixth century and from there passed to Byzantium and later to Western Europe.

If we compare some of the later English versions of the story to that used in the Greek Orthodox liturgy for the feast day of Saint Alexis, some clear distinctions emerge. The liturgical text sees the story of Alexis primarily in terms of the struggle to subdue the flesh and live “the life of angels”. On the other hand, in the English versions (where the saint is called Alexius), Alexius renounces the wealth and power of his family in order to live a “hidden” life as a poor beggar in his parents’ house. The texts set up an interesting pattern of “exchange” between Alexius and his family. The wealthy family gives alms to the unknown beggar, who in turn through his “hidden” life gains grace, which he then shares with his family in a kind of economy of salvation. The moral of the story seems to be that the rich may be able to get into heaven after all, if they remember to share their wealth with the poor.

We argue that these differences between the liturgical and vernacular texts spring from the fact that they are addressed to a different social group: an audience of monks and clerics in the first case, a non-clerical and more popular audience in the second. The story is adapted to respond to the concerns and the worldview of its audience: how to live “the life of angels” or the relationships between the rich and the poor.

3.5 The conception of regional space in modern Greece

Our last case study concerns the conception of regional space by the inhabitants of Northern Greece, a study carried out with a large number of interviews and a long questionnaire. In the discourses elicited by the questionnaire, marked differences emerged between classes as to how they conceive of their region. The working class has no unified regional model, but is split between two opposite poles in respect to a set of codes which the speakers either adopt or ignore: the codes of economic development, ecology, lifestyle and wealth. When these codes are used, a certain geographical determinism emerges, because development is associated with ecological features, and this is the context for statements about lifestyle, which is associated with wealth. Similar codes appear among the lower middle class, but their pairings are different: ecology rather than economic development is associated with the code of economic activities, which seems to indicate a tendency to conceive of economy in individualistic terms. The code of wealth appears together with the code referring to the mentality and character of people. The codes used by the middle class are strikingly different from those of both the above classes. The middle class relates economic issues to social issues, and some of the social codes are related to aesthetic judgements; it also associ-

ates functional issues with matters concerning the built environment (Lagopoulos and Boklund-Lagopoulou 1992: 258–260) – see Figure 2.

Code	Class		
	working	lower middle	middle
economic development	{ + and –		{ +
economic activities	{ + and –	{ +	{ +
ecological		{ +	
lifestyle	+ and –		{
wealth	+ and –	{ +	
mentality		{ +	
general social			{ +
aesthetic			{ +
functional			{ +
built environment			{ +

Figure 2: Spatial models of the social classes in Northern Greece. +: significant use of code. -: significant non-use of code. {}: strong association between codes.

There are also differences between genders. Women in general show a total lack of the code of social origins and an almost total lack of the political code in their regional conception, but have a tendency to use the code of leisure. If we examine socio-spatial gender groups, a number of differences emerge. Rural women markedly avoid issues of leisure, while among city (metropolitan and provincial) women there is a certain balance between reference to and avoidance of these issues; city women are focused on their personal experiences. While city women in general avoid issues of economic development, among provincial women there is a clear preference for the latter issues, less pronounced for the countryside.

The male regional models are significantly different. In general, neither men nor women make many references to politics, but rural men are divided between use and non-use of the political code. Men, contrary to women, are not attracted by issues of leisure and do not refer to their personal experiences. City men show a balanced use and non-use of the historical code, a code markedly absent in rural women. Provincial men show a strong tendency towards both general economic and ecological matters, the latter lying outside the interests of women in general, while rural men show a tendency only towards the former (Lagopoulos and Boklund-Lagopoulou 1992: 250–252) – see Figure 3.

Code	Whole sample		Settlement hierarchy								
			metropolis and province		metropolis		province		countryside		
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female	
social origins		—									
political	—	—								+and—	
historical			~								—
experiential	—			+							
leisure	—	+					+and—		+and—		—
economic development				—					+		~
general economic								+		+	
ecological								+			

Figure 3: Male and female models of space in Northern Greece as a function of settlement hierarchy. +: significant use of code. —: significant non-use of code. ~: tendency to code use.

Thus, the conclusion that our study arrives at is that *there is no unified semiotic universe for the different social groups composing modern society*. Although there may be some similarities, on the whole each group sees regional space in its own way.

4 Social semiotics: A renewal of semiotic theory

4.1 The issue

We hope that the above examples have shown the inextricable links between the semiotic and the social. We feel very strongly that an examination of this complex relationship substantially enriches our understanding and interpretation of semiotic texts. It is, however, striking that the great majority of semioticians are reluctant to conceptualise the issue of the articulation of these two spheres. Semiotics tends to either ignore the social, or confuse semiotic and social, by linking the two terms ritually together and connecting them with an “and”, with no further differentiation, or by meaning “cultural” when writing “social”.

The problem with remaining within a specific scientific relevance is immediately apparent if we consider the field of literary history. It is simply impossible to do any analysis of an historical text without a knowledge of its social and historical situation. In order to understand a text, any literary historian needs a profound knowledge of the semiotic universe of the society where the text was produced, which presupposes research in cultural history. But cultural history is not a self-explanatory reality, since it is interwoven with the more general dynam-

ics of society, as studied, for example, by economic and social history. Nothing differentiates epistemologically the presuppositions for the analysis of historical texts from those of contemporary societies.

Before continuing with the discussion of the theoretical foundations of social semiotics, we need to address a current misunderstanding concerning the definition of “meaning”. There is a semiotic approach, related to social constructivism, for which any kind of statement, scientific or not, is a legitimate object for semiotics. We encounter this view with Cobley and Randviir (2009: 8, 13–14, 17–20, 24), who argue that, because what we consider as reality is mediated by sign systems, therefore the study of humans and their relation to the environment must be achieved by semiotic concepts and the sciences concerned with sign systems. We agree that our conception of reality is mediated by signs, but we believe that their conclusion distorts it in an imperialistic manner.

The necessary mediation of signs is also posed by Louis Hjelmslev, who observes that any structure comparable to language is a “semiotic”, i.e., a structure founded on signs, a view quite close to Peirce’s position that signs account for any kind of knowledge. However, Hjelmslev differentiates between “connotative semiotic”, namely non-scientific semiotic systems (the object of the study of meaning), and “metasemiotic” (metalanguage), comprising scientific semiotic systems (although the two should not be seen as absolutely exclusive); semiology (the science whose object is meaning) is one of the metasemiotics studying non-scientific systems (Hjelmslev 1961 [1943]: 106–120). The semiotic perspective is thus most directly and legitimately applicable to connotative semiotic systems.

The differentiation between semiotically relevant and semiotically non-relevant perspectives is pointed out even by Jacques Derrida himself. Writing about the word “communication”, Derrida points out that it is not limited to a semantic or conceptual content, or to a semiotic operation, even less to a linguistic exchange. A shift of force may be communicated, in the sense of being transmitted; two distant spatial sites may communicate through a passage or an opening. In this case, Derrida concludes, “what is transmitted, communicated, are *not* phenomena of meaning or signification” (Derrida 1972: 367–368, our italics).

The social sciences, like the positive sciences, adopt a semiotically non-relevant perspective and their field cannot be imperialistically conflated with semiotics. Semiotics, using meaning (for example, semiotic terminology), adopts a perspective focusing *on meaning*, while, for example, economics and sociology, also using meaning (terminology), are mainly interested in *non-meaning* phenomena. Social semiotics is about *articulating* semiotic analysis with social phenomena. We conceive of this articulation within a broadly Marxist social theory.

4.2 Theories articulating the semiotic with the social

The articulation of the semiotic with the social goes back at least as far as the Marxist sociological poetics of Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev and Mikhail Bakhtin. Medvedev and Bakhtin point out that ideology, as the social consciousness of a collectivity, is always embodied in a “semiotic material”, in “objects-signs”, which constitute the “ideological environment” of man, i.e., culture. The authors state that ideology is the domain of signification and signification is realised in social communication; different forms of signification are produced by different forms of social intercourse. These forms mediate between the determining socio-economic reality and the distinct ideologies. As a result, the ideological environment is determined by the collectivity’s economic existence, but this is not, for Bakhtin and Medvedev, a passive determination, since simultaneously each ideological field exerts a return influence on socioeconomic reality (Medvedev and Bakhtin 1978 [1928]: 7–15).

More recently, the anthropologist Maurice Godelier has spoken of the *functions* of the semiotic systems within society. He defines these as *representation* and *interpretation*, the way a society situates itself in the social and natural worlds; *organisation* of the relations between people and between them and nature; and *legitimation* or de-legitimation of these relations (Godelier 1978: 157–167, 170–173, 179–180, 185–186) – all functions which we encountered in our case studies.

Like Godelier, the literary scholar Raymond Williams also grounds the semiotic dialectically in the social. Williams’s cultural materialism starts from the premise that “social being determines consciousness” in the sense of setting limits and exerting pressures on how humans conceive of themselves, their world, and their possibilities for action (Williams 1973: 3–4).

The human geographer David Harvey argues that the central process of capitalism, capital accumulation, is continually oriented towards the annihilation of space through time, whence a series of time-space compressions. As Harvey observes, capitalism is subject to periodical crises, which he relates to the over-accumulation of capital (Harvey 1989: for example, 239, 306–307, 327). These crises create a strong experience of time-space compression, that is, the sense of the shrinking of world space and the shortening of time horizons to the present time. The new experience takes the form of radical transformations of the systems of representation, aesthetic movements and cultural formations, where by culture Harvey means the “complex of signs and significations (including language) that mesh into codes of transmission of social values and meanings” (Harvey 1989: 299 and, for example, 240, 299, 327).

We owe to the philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu the key sociological concept of *habitus*. *Habitus* is a historical system encompassing both semiotic

factors and material practices and connecting dialectically systems, that is, structural determinations, and actual practices (Bourdieu 1980, for example, 88–96, 101–102).

This is the general framework of Bourdieu's cultural analysis, an example of which is his analysis of the intellectual and artistic fields. According to Bourdieu, in Western societies there have been constituted relatively autonomous symbolic fields of relations of production, circulation and consumption of intellectual and artistic goods, which are commodities integrating symbolic value; these are the *habitus* fields. In each field, various values and cultural perspectives are conveyed not only by the goods themselves, but also by their functions and the symbolic practices attached to them, and this variation depends on the position they occupy within the symbolic field. The perspectives in each cultural field arise from the cultural and material interests of agents competing through power strategies for cultural legitimation. Cultural perspectives and positions follow from the characteristics of the (material) social position of their agents in the system of the field. These groups activate the cultural network, which is a network of social relations and strategies, governed by its own logic but founded on the wider context of class relations (Bourdieu 1971).

Common to all the above Marxist approaches is the fundamental epistemological thesis that society cannot be reduced to culture alone, and that there is a process of *production* of the semiotic from the material, a relation, we stress, which is dialectical. They are related within a holistic model of society, a complex circuit of unequal interrelations, as shown in Figure 4.

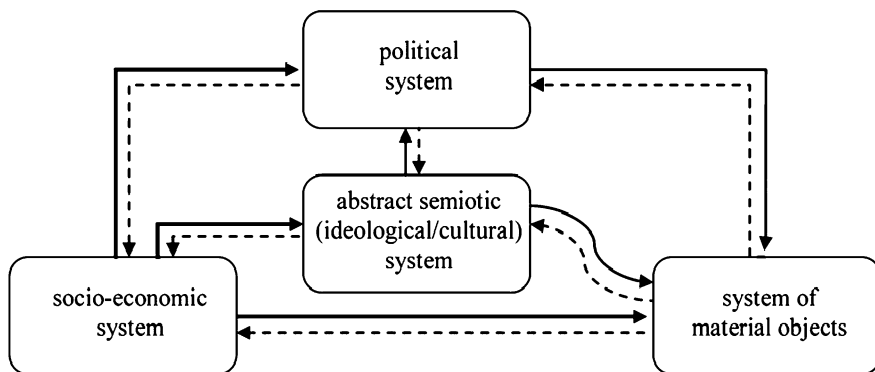


Figure 4: The major components of society and their dialectical interrelationships. Bold lines: fundamental production processes. Plain lines: major influences. Dotted lines: secondary influences.

The main components of society as a whole shown in Figure 4 are the socio-economic, the political and the semiotic systems, as well as the system of material objects; their interactions are marked with arrows of different intensity; the socio-economic system ultimately determines the whole of social structure, but in the last instance, i.e., through return influences and mediations.

Two important further observations can be derived from the above model:

- (a) Economic theory attributes to commodities, i.e., the system of material objects in capitalist society, certain attributes which we may summarise as their use value (their utility), and their economic value (exchange value and price). One more value must be added, pointed out by both Harvey and Bourdieu, namely the symbolic (semiotic) value of commodities.
- (b) In capitalist production, there are three stages of circulation of capital and commodities: a circulation process before production, a process of production and a new circulation process, through which the product reaches the market in order to be materially consumed. The production, circulation and consumption of goods are also observed in societies in which goods do not circulate in commodity form, thus this complex may be considered as a universal sociological model.

There is a striking resemblance between this socio-economic circuit and the communication circuit, during which an addresser produces a message, which is then put into circulation and reaches one or more addressees that interpret it or even pragmatically use it, that is, semiotically consume it. There is, then, a general isomorphism between the socio-economic circuit and the communication circuit. This isomorphism reveals the radical similarities between the interrelated and hierarchical life cycles of the material and the semiotic dimensions of the products of society (see also Lagopoulos 1993: 274).

4.3 The implications

The social model of Figure 4 radically challenges biological approaches to semiotics. The fundamental principle of Thomas A. Sebeok's "global semiotics" is that semiosis coincides with life. In this manner, cultural semiotics or "anthroposemiotics" became just one branch of semiotics, the other branch being "biosemiotics", the ambition of which is to study biological processes of any kind and on any level of living organisms (Anderson et al. 1984; Sebeok 1997).

However a "global semiotics" cannot simply include two parallel branches, one dealing with human culture and the other with biological processes. If it is to be a systematic theory, it needs to develop a unified theory of both kinds of semi-

osis. Given that the biological has priority over the cultural, this would amount to explaining cultural theory through a general theory anchored in biology (an epistemological issue that does not seem to have preoccupied Peircean theorists). On the other hand, this paper has proposed that culture is grounded in material society. Global semiotics, by grounding semiotics directly in biology, bypasses this crucial intermediate social level, which it would also need to explain biologically.

Exactly the same problem is faced by cognitive semiotics. Cognitive semiotics does not look for the roots of semiosis in the general biological processes in an organism, but specifically in the cognitive processes of the brain; it attempts to explain the foundation of cultural systems on the basis of neuroscience, looking thus for universals. Jean Petitot, for example, considers that there are two levels of semiosis. The foundational level consists of interconnected elementary units that process information, thus constituting an underlying sub-symbolic process. From this level derives the deep cognitive level of macro-symbolic dynamic structures (Petitot 1990). According to Per Åge Brandt, there is a deep level of meaning (cf. Petitot's foundational level), "grounded in the cognitive neurobiology, the neuro-physiological processes, of the human mind". At this level, a neuro-phenomenological process takes place through which sensory matter is transformed into organised percepts – apparently of a universal nature. Their manifestation, specification and stabilisation pass through a cultural, as well as individual and inter-individual, contextualisation (Brandt n.d.: 5–6, 9–11). Cognitive semiotics, like global semiotics, thus replaces the relativity of the social production of meaning with the absolute of its biological production. That means that it must either reduce society to culture, thus falling into the current semiotic fallacy, or offer a biological explanation of society, in harmony with its neuro-physiological explanation of meaning.

Actually, there was an attempt to do this, using a different form of biological reductionism, about a century ago by the "classical" branch of the Chicago sociological school of human ecology. The views of Robert E. Park, one of the main representatives of this tendency, exemplify its epistemological assumptions, which are based on social Darwinism. The principle founding society is the struggle for existence, i.e., the primitive form of competition. It constitutes the pre- or sub-social level of a community, which is that of a biological, natural economy and from this level derives the cultural level of communication, which exerts a certain influence on it (Park 1961 [1936]: 22–29). Already before WW II this biological interpretation of society had been abandoned by the school.

Both global semiotics and cognitive semiotics are purely positivist approaches, reductionist, scientific (that is, elevating science to an ideological principle), society-insensitive, and a-political views of semiotics. They are a-polit-

ical in the sense that they are blind to the material socio-historical determination of semiosis; to see semiosis as socially determined is, on the other hand, deeply political, because the a-historical naturalisation of society is an apology for the *status quo*. Instead of a holistic, they adopt an individualistic paradigm in their attempt to ground semiotics biologically, the former in the organism (as opposed to society, which produces socio-cultural individuals), the latter in the brain (as opposed to culture, forming the mind). What they have in common with the other strands of semiotics, such as classical semiotics and postmodernism, is the invisibility of the material social dimension. This curious absence should probably be attributed to the academic background of semioticians (keeping also in mind that pushing semiotics towards the positive sciences can assist in fund-raising). It is characteristic of this situation that global semiotics and cognitive semiotics follow the general logic not of sociolinguistics but of psycholinguistics. However, the latter studies the neuro-biological and psychological *processes* that allow humans to acquire, understand and use language, without falling into the Frazerian trap of searching for universal semiotic *contents* and thus without the ambition to explain the semiotic. The turn to biology is the expression of the obsolete idea, rejected by the social sciences decades ago, that the models of the positive sciences, unlike those of the social sciences, are “objective” and thus must be considered as universal.

4.4 Towards a sociologically grounded semiotics

Immanent semiotic analysis, within the semiotic relevance, is undoubtedly legitimate. It allows the description and understanding of semiotic texts and systems. On the other hand, the viewpoint of social semiotics, the articulation and integration of culture with material society, reflecting the foundational process creating culture, leads to the articulation of semiotic analysis with its sociological determinants, thus allowing, beyond description and understanding, the socio-historical *interpretation* and *explanation* of the semiotic (see also Goldmann 1970: 17–21). Social semiotics is the political economy of semiosis.

We do not intend to counter-propose to semiotic or biological imperialism a sociological imperialism. Semiotic systems have an internal coherence, due to the mechanism of differentiability, because of which they are to an important degree auto-regulated, and their immanent analysis is the *core* of semiotics. However, if they are produced by social reality, they cannot be fully autonomous, but must be relatively autonomous vis-à-vis the social. The major axes structuring semiotic systems are socially created, because semiotic systems have social functions, and it is on this basis that the auto-regulatory capacity of the semiotic operates. Social

semiotics represents the maximal extension of semiotics. It does not contradict semiotics, but complements it.

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Section 4:
Semiotics and media

François Jost

What relationship to time do the media promise us?

Abstract: The objective of this article is to justify two presuppositions, both synthesized in the title, and to demonstrate their heuristic relevance by means of a particular example – the ubiquitous presence of news. The first presupposition concerns our relationship with the media, and I would argue that a blind trust in the broadcaster is no longer pertinent in an era characterized by editorial marketing in all its forms, and that, far from revealing the truth of the text, all paratexts, epitexts and peritexts are no more than promises. The second presupposition states that our relationship with the media is, first and foremost, a temporal one, and that this relationship is defined in function of the various genres for which the media serves as a vehicle. Although we often believe that all media belong to the same family – a family in which all the members help one another and that getting our news either from a TV screen or a tablet is somehow equivalent, actually we are not taking into account the fact that the choice between the two is by no means arbitrary, involving as it does a temporal alternative dictated by what we can expect from the medium in question.

Keywords: Media, temporality, live broadcast, narrative tension, promise, narratology.

1 Introduction

In spite of its apparent simplicity, the title of this article contains a number of presuppositions, which are by no means self-evident, and which must be admitted as a point of departure. The first concerns our relationship with the media and is based, more broadly, on an idea of audio-visual communication, or even of media communication of whatever kind it may be. Rather than maintaining that our interpretation of a film, a TV programme, or a news item is governed by a *mise en phase* between producer and broadcaster, who find themselves on the same wavelength thanks to a contract or pact – for example, an autographical pact – I would argue that a blind trust in the broadcaster is no longer pertinent in an era characterized by editorial marketing in all its forms, and that, far from revealing the truth of the text, all paratexts, epitexts and peritexts are no more than promises.

The second presupposition contained in the title is that our relationship with the media is, first and foremost, a temporal one, and that this relationship is defined in function of the various genres for which the media serves as a vehicle. Of course, this relationship is not exclusive. It is, after all, possible to think of individual media as being defined by their specific relationships with space and content. But, in this article, I shall emphasize the temporal dimension in order to foreground what the popular term “convergence” often obscures. Thanks to or, perhaps, because of this ecumenical term, which connotes the idea that all media belong to the same family – a family in which all the members help one another – we sometimes believe that getting our news either from a TV screen or a tablet is somehow equivalent, without taking into account the fact that the choice between the two is by no means arbitrary, involving as it does a temporal alternative dictated by what we can expect from the medium in question.

The objective of this article is to justify the presuppositions alluded to in the title and to demonstrate their heuristic relevance, by means of a particular example, the ubiquitous presence of news.

2 Genre as promise

Let us begin with the promise. I shall not focus in a detailed manner on this concept, about which I have written at length elsewhere (see especially Jost 1997 and 1998). Suffice it to say that, in my view, media communication is based on *two kinds of promise*.

- An ontological promise. This promise is contained in the name of the genre itself. Just as, for Stendhal, “the Beautiful is the promise of Happiness”, a “comedy” is a promise of laughter, independently of how funny the comedy actually is. A “live” show is a promise of simultaneity between the event and its reception; the TV news programme a promise of true facts about the world ... The list could go on, but it already convinces us that knowledge about promises associated with specific genres is, to varying degrees, shared by the public. But while everyone agrees that the job of a comedy is to be comical, the term “live” is much more ambiguous. It is sometimes applied to programmes in which a singer sings rather than mimes on stage, sometimes to “live” footage. Journalists themselves are prone to making seemingly strange claims, such as “the images that we are about to see were *recorded live* yesterday in Bagdad ...” Meanwhile, it cannot be claimed that fiction, in the form of drama and soap opera, universally involves the kind of “suspension of disbelief” that underpins the idea of a contract. Brazilian *telenovelas*

are taken seriously by a substantial percentage of their viewing public, and fans frequently take a very dim view of the actors who play villainous characters. It can be concluded from these observations that the attribution of a specific genre to a particular programme involves both knowledge and beliefs. But where does fiction begin in the audio-visual sphere? With the image? The narrative? The discourse? Providing solutions to these questions presupposes a certain degree of knowledge. Nevertheless, whatever the varying degree of knowledge possessed by the audience, classifying a particular programme as fictional rather than belonging to the sphere of “reality” engenders a series of beliefs.

The ontological promise corresponds more or less to the “horizon of expectation”. However, this initial level does not provide a sufficient explain of the mechanisms of televisual communication.

- A *pragmatic* promise. It is one thing to know what *live* and *fictional* programmes are, but quite another to determine whether such and such a programme is *a* live broadcast or *a* fictional one (a drama, an episode from a series, etc.). Often, TV viewers will not be aware, *a priori*, of what genre a programme belongs to, either because it has a new format, or because they have no means of knowing. For example, there is nothing to differentiate between a programme broadcast live and a programme “recorded in live conditions”. Extra-televisual elements are required to ascertain whether it is one or the other (for instance, observing that a singer in a variety show described as being “live” is appearing on another channel at the same time, or at a venue in Paris on the same evening). To influence the beliefs of television viewers, channels attribute specific genre names to specific programmes; because the term “live” delivers an ontological promise of authenticity, those channels are not, as we shall see, overly fussy about attaching the description to the images they purvey, even when it is inaccurate. But marketing strategies go much further. Today, most TV success stories are based on the invention of new categories whose meanings are defined by the channels that broadcast them. The biggest hit of the last few years is, without doubt, “reality TV”. Originally launched with the description “real-life docu-soap”, *Big Brother*, screened as *Loft Story* in France, was presented as a new genre, “télé-réalité” (“reality TV”). While the name given to the show’s genre by its producer, Endemol, placed the programme within the realms of fiction by suggesting that it was a *soap* made with real life, M6, the French channel that broadcast *Loft Story*, originally positioned the programme in the *real world*. This strategy proved successful beyond all expectations, focusing debate between intellectuals – aired in newspapers, on the radio, and in other media outlets,

for the thirteen weeks the show lasted – on its documentary nature and the way in which it represented young French people in general. This kind of pragmatic promise can also consist in positioning a drama or film in an evening schedule dedicated to a societal problem, which authenticates it in the eyes of the TV viewer.

3 The temporal promises of televisual genres

TV genres are based on temporal promises that act on inferences that viewers make or fail to make in regard to the construction of space and time proposed to them, as well as on the framing and montage with which they are confronted. This cascade of consequences is described in the table on the next page; the rest of the article will consist in a commentary on the table.

As we know, what characterizes the chemical or electronic image is that it is both an icon and an index. It derives the credit that we accord to it from the fact that it not only resembles the world, but that it is also, and above all, an imprint of the world, which, according to J. M. Schaeffer (1987), confers upon it the status of an existential proof. The more an image presents itself, or, rather, is presented, as an index, the more closely it is linked to a promise of authenticity. And, inversely, the closer its status is to that of the iconic, the more secondary its existential status becomes.

Table 1: Table of temporal promises and knowledge

Spectator		Knowledge		Intentionality
				–
Programme or procedure	Ontological promise	Concerning the construction of space of time		INDEX
Automatic recording	Promise of authenticity	+ or – random	Endured	
Hidden camera	Promise of authenticity	Highly random	Temporal retention	
Unpre- pared “live” transmission	Promise of authenticity and exceptionality	• Framing + or – under control	Endured	
		• Camera angles + or – Endured		
Pre-prepared “live” broadcast	Promise of an augmented readability of the real	• Framing and perspectives + or – under control	Work on simultaneity + or - possible	
Documentary Reportage		Construction of space in function of the real	Construction of time in function of the real	
Film or series considered in terms of plot	Promise of narra- tive pertinence of visual and aural elements	Construction of set in function of the plot	Construction of time in function of causality	ICON
Film or series considered as <i>oeuvre</i>	Promise of the artistic relevance of the visible and the audible	Space moti- vated by artistic intention	Emphasis on narrative tension	SYMBOL +
	Promise of artistic relevance of visual and aural elements	Importance of details		

Surveillance footage generated by CCTV or webcams (which are also, in a sense, surveillance cameras) is, first and foremost, an *ontological promise of indexicality*, in the sense that its purpose is to capture a trace of reality. This does not mean that the images produced by these cameras are bereft of any iconic dimension, or that what they display is somehow secondary. On the contrary. Footage of a row of cars in a deserted street or of someone being attacked in that street are not the same thing, and do not provoke the same reaction. But what I mean is that what is shown (the attack, for example) is only of interest because I know that the image is an imprint of the world, or, more precisely, of the present world, and that it will, in this instance, encourage me to intervene or send out a call for help. At the same time, this means that, in these circumstances, the images have not been manipulated or organized by human intervention, and that they are valid thanks to their relative transparency. This situation can be summed up in an inversely proportional formula: *the closer the image is to being an index, the less it is characterized by intentionality*. In the case of CCTV cameras, the overall intention is, of course, surveillance, but the scene revealed at a given moment does not depend on any editorial interference at the time at which it is broadcast. Thus, the CCTV cameras in a department store will deliver largely random images to a screen, random images out of which it is not possible to construct a homogeneous space. The fact that we are subject to, or, in other words “endure” time – that the image is a simple retention of a fragment of time that reproduces the flow of the world without ellipsis – boosts its promise of authenticity.

Today, the hidden camera, used and abused by TV news programmes the world over, is surfing on the same wave. The more random the frame, the more badly defined, blurred and unstable it is, the more the spectator is sensitive to the promise that it has not been subjected to an arbitrary, human manipulation of reality and, therefore, that more than merely offering a restitution of space, it succeeds, first and foremost, in delivering an untrammelled retention of time.

In both cases, we are confronted by the *topos*, much appreciated by journalists, of images that “speak for themselves”. Journalists consider that the “enunciator”, in the sense outlined by Oswald Ducrot, is reality itself. (It should be recalled that, for Ducrot, enunciators are “those people who supposedly express themselves through enunciation without, however, precise words being attributed to them” (Ducrot 1985: 204)).

From this point of view, this kind of “real time”, as it is perhaps somewhat hastily called, is different from what is to be found in “live” television broadcasts. But a distinction should be made between unprepared and pre-prepared live broadcasts. The unprepared live broadcast is an unscheduled event that emerges unannounced from the televisual flow. In truth, such events are extremely rare. Perhaps the most obvious example is the 9/11 attacks, which swept the sched-

ules clean of all other content. Trained on Manhattan during all hours of the night and day, the only fixed camera in the area belonged to CNN. This kind of event marks the frontier between the real time of surveillance cameras and “live” broadcasts. While the images recorded by the first are, as I have said, bereft of any intentionality other than that indicated by their name, live broadcasts are the result of a specific, one-off, instantaneous human act, a judgment that the event to be broadcast is important enough to interrupt normal programming. Live transmissions are significant quite as much in terms of their interruption of the normal order of things (“breaking news”) as they are in terms of the events they broadcast. This performativity of live transmissions, which emphasizes the act as opposed to the information contained in the images purveyed, is largely characteristic of 24-hour news channels. For example, in 2011, the normal output of these channels was interrupted by footage of Dominique Strauss-Khan’s entrance into a New York court, the iconic content of which – getting out of the car, a short walk to the steps, climbing the steps, walking through the door – was, to say the least, sparse. But the fact that it “broke” the quiet flow of normal news items gave it an importance of another order. The promise of authenticity is accompanied by a promise of exceptionality. A promise made both in regard to truly exceptional events, such as 9/11, and to ephemeral events of no great importance. Here again, the fact that there is no fixed camera angle, and that the image either moves or is blurred, strengthens those promises. What counts is the pressure exerted by time that characterizes this TV genre.

Much more frequently, the present time of “live” broadcasts is pre-prepared. Whether a football match, the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, or the investiture of the President of the French Republic, the event in question has been scheduled, and cameras have been set up to film it. Clearly, as Umberto Eco observed some fifty years ago, writing about the marriage of Prince Rainier of Monaco and Grace Kelly in *L’opera aperta* (1965), this involves the selection of certain facts and details rather than others. Generally, the director constructs the live montage in function of the narrative he has in mind and not of a succession of details that might present a certain degree of interest. The approach to filming football is, for example, codified at the European level.

Although each shot of reality is intrinsically indexical – because it is linked to the time of the event filmed; because fragments of reality are chosen from a broader ensemble; because those fragments are knowingly aligned in the montage, which introduces causality into temporality; because of all these things – the programme constructs a time that no longer characterized by the imprint of the real, but which, instead, partakes of a temporality based on an ontological promise of readability. Editing is an intentional act designed to give meaning to the event. Some commentators wrongly make a distinction between

live and edited television (Bourdon 1988). But the two approaches cannot be said in any way to be contradictory. When a live broadcast is pre-prepared, it is possible to construct a number of alternating or split screen narrative sequences that, for example, compare the relative progress of a group of breakaway riders to the *peloton* in a bicycle race, or insist, live, on the ubiquity of television by simultaneously presenting a number of special correspondents in various regions (an approach used in armed conflict situations).

At any event, the time presented in such cases is “iconic” to the degree that the coexistence of various elements (the juxtaposition of the breakaway group and *peloton*, correspondents in different regions) is informed by a meaning that does not necessarily exist in reality (it should be recalled that the icon is a sign of essence rather than existence).

Big Brother provides a good example of this mixture of, or even confusion between, indexical and iconic time in live broadcasts. Originally, in the French version, entitled *Loft Story*, the programme was broadcast live (in fact, with a delay of 2 minutes, 45 seconds). It was on this promise that the programme was based, with a view to highlighting its status as “reality TV”. Live transmission would have been, due to its indexical nature, a guarantee of non-manipulation, of authenticity. But while the action was partially captured by surveillance cameras, it was also recorded by remote control devices operated by the programme’s director. Furthermore, the director made a selection of images from the production unit’s fifty cameras that enabled him to create a story. Indeed, there is a category of journalist working on reality TV programmes known as “story editors”, whose function is to construct plot lines from a selection of live footage. As long as the viewer believes in its pure transparency, and, therefore, in its indexical temporality, the reality of a programme appears to be beyond dispute. But since we know how it is really made, we are tempted to regard it as fictional, or, at the very least, a narrativization dependent on a degree of subjectivity. From a guarantee of reality (indexical time), we transition into the iconic time of the arbitrary nature of narrative.

In documentaries and reportages, it is presupposed that an even more important role should be accorded to human intentionality in the construction of space and time. Merely because, as recordings, they bear witness to the past, the television viewer interprets them as being governed by an intentional, mastered time. The journalist or director is held responsible for the order in which they reveal the world by means of the space and duration accorded to various details. Consequently, even if programmes of this kind derive their legitimacy from an indexical contact with the world, specific worldly elements are used to construct a broadly iconic time, or, in other words, a time, detached from the world’s imprint, which

dispenses with moments and realigns others in a process that consists of *editing* instants together.¹

It is clear that fiction is based on an iconic time. Nevertheless, from this point of view, films can be opposed to TV series. While films involve an immanent reading which projects us into the time experienced by the characters within the framework of narrative time that the filmmaker attempts to construct, our critical judgment is based exclusively on a continuous comparison between the two temporalities – that of the story being told and that of the order of the narrative. We consider the results of this comparison to be either successful or unsuccessful depending on our feelings about a film's narrative moves quickly or slowly. A programme broadcast on weekly basis over a period of several months encourages us to take as a temporal reference, alongside this narratological comparison, our own lived time. The protagonists age as we age. This is particularly evident in series featuring children. From the first to the third season of *Homeland*, for example, Brody and Jessica's daughter, Dana, becomes a teenager and has her first sexual experience. In *Citizen Kane*, in order to express the how the protagonist's relationship with his wife gradually falls apart, Welles presents us with an episodic sequence. In a few dozen seconds, the once loving couple descend into a state of reciprocal ignorance. Viewers may or may not appreciate the stylistic schematization, which is, without a doubt, typically Wellesian, but the effect is undeniably brutal. In *Breaking Bad*, breakfast is symptomatic of the family ambience, but here the decline in the warmth of relations between family members takes place over three seasons – from an attentive Walter who prepares the morning meal for his family; to the morning on which Walter Junior wants to see his father, who Skyler has thrown out of the family home; to the scene in which, like Susan, she reads the paper when sitting opposite him. This calque of lived time, which occurs within the framework of a real duration lasting several years, rather than in a diegetic duration constructed and simulated by the story, could never be reproduced in a feature film.

A last point should be made. When we watch a film as an *oeuvre*, we benefit from a guarantee that its time is symbolic and that it therefore obeys a logic that depends on observable laws governing construction, association and assembly. Watching and understanding *Dallas*, a soap opera, requires only a vague degree of attention to the conversations taking place in the series; the shape of the

1 "In film, on the other hand, the moving image is invested by time. Thus, a cartoon produces the same perceptive effect of flow as a 'real' film without, however, functioning as an index of physical or human time. While in the moving image the temporal dimension is a function of the icon, in the photographic image it is a function of the index" (Schaeffer 1987: 65).

whisky glasses and pictures hanging on the walls is unimportant. All these props are required to do is to deliver minimal connotations, such as “wealth”, “Texas”, “comfort”, etc. We can imagine the producer telling the decorator, “Give me a set typical of wealthy Texans”. The details are less important than the overall effect created by the framework in which the narrative – which is primarily based on dialogue – takes place.

Watching a film or series as an *œuvre* implies more than simply following a story. It involves a close examination of image and meaning as if they were *necessary*, or, in other words, as if they provided specific information that other images and meanings do not deliver. Every detail counts. Let us take a laboratory scene from *Breaking Bad*. On one level, its purpose is merely to set the background of the clandestine lab in which Walter White produces methamphetamine. But take a closer look. What is the significance of the board in the background emblazoned with the word “SIGNS” if not that, throughout the series, we should take every detail into account in order to reveal its *mises en abyme*, its visual commentaries, the leitmotifs used to construct meaning, in the same manner as the details explored by Daniel Arasse (2009) in the field of painting. Insofar as time is concerned, it is not only a question of constructing a causality encompassing causes and effects, but of creating a narrative tension that plays with our perception of time.

The ontological promise of genre is, to a greater or lesser extent, shared by members of the audience. A genre gives rise to inferences about what can be expected from the programmes placed under its label, but these inferences, which necessitate a certain distance, presupposed by the perception of the audio-visual enunciation, are formulated by the viewers to varying degrees.

I insist on the fact that promises linked to genres are closely associated with knowledge; the viewer needs to have acquired knowledge about audio-visual language, or, at least, to have thought about that language to be able to latch on to the chains of inferences linked to those genres and with the intentionality that they presuppose. It is because genres are not “natural” phenomena that an education in the media is necessary, especially in that, to these ontological promises, should be added what I refer to as pragmatic promises.

4 Time in the media

Pragmatic promises are promises that the producer, the production company and the broadcaster make about a particular item or programme. It is one thing to know what a comedy or a live broadcast is, but quite another to know whether the

programme that I am about to watch *is* a comedy or that what I am watching is a live broadcast. And the power of the broadcaster is, precisely, to assign a label to the programme that, at the same time, serves as a proposition of meaning.

For example, channels sometimes describe programmes as “live” when they are not. And it is not always easy to know whether that description is true or not because there is nothing to differentiate a live broadcast from a programme “recorded in live conditions”. In Spanish, live is *en vivo*, while *en directo* refers to programmes recorded “as live”. I do not know how the difference is expressed in Portuguese. But, in many cases, what renders it possible to make a distinction between the two is not of a semiotic order, but of the order of lateral knowledge about reality: I see a singer performing “live” on a TV channel when I know that he is playing in a venue in the city I live in at the same time ... The channel’s lie is clear for all to see.

But, in certain cases, this kind of knowledge is necessary in order to avoid being duped. Here, rather than talking about lies, which are common, I shall focus for an instant on examples of contradictions between ontological and pragmatic promises.

Let us take a look at a trailer for the live broadcast of the Bastille Day celebrations held on July 14, 2012. On the right of the screen is a message proclaiming “Tomorrow, Live”. The voice over speaks of an exceptional event, an event that, of course, never took place, because François Hollande had just been elected President of the Republic.

From 8.35 am, live coverage from the Champs-Élysées. We talk to members of the military and conduct an interview with the Minister of Defence at a time when the question of security is at the heart of national and international concerns. Interviews with political personalities at the foot of the official tribunal. At 10.00 am, coverage of the procession along the world’s most beautiful avenue. Immediately afterwards, an analysis of the highlights of the ceremony, featuring numerous guests. And, at 1.15 pm, the President of the Republic will reply to questions posed by Claire Chazal and Laurent Delahousse. A special programme on July 14 presented live by Marie Drucker. And an interview with François Hollande. Tomorrow, live on France 2.

The commentary is illustrated by images of the procession and the highpoint of the spectacle, the *Patrouille de France* acrobatic air display team passing overhead leaving red, white and blue trails hanging in the sky. We are also shown the tribune of guests from all over the world, along with a shot of the Minister of Defence being interviewed, and a close-up of Hollande, serious and thoughtful, cut with images of the procession. Then, we see the President replying to questions from journalists the day after the event.

Naturally, these illustrations raise chronological issues. How is it possible to show images of an event that has not yet taken place? To what degree can a pre-prepared live transmission be prepared? In regard to the procession, we more or less understand where the images come from. This programmed live broadcast is a *rehearsed* live broadcast in all senses of the term (“*répété*”, or, literally, “repeated”) in French: the procession on the allotted date will be a repeat of what it was in the rehearsals of the preceding days. It is not, therefore, a unique, singular event, but an event that has been rehearsed on a number of occasions prior to the final performance.

On the other hand, it is not possible to show the Minister of Defence being interviewed without a pragmatic contradiction arising. If he is to be interviewed live the next day, it is impossible to show images from that interview. This would suggest that the interview had been recorded. It should therefore be admitted that the footage comes from another interview and that it does not deliver on the promise that it is live, exclusive and unique. What is true for the minister is equally true, in an even more obvious way, for the President of the Republic. It is impossible to show images of an interview that has not taken place. Should we believe that lies are being told about the idea that the interview is live, or that we are not being told the truth about the status of the images shown? Of course, everything points to the fact that it is the second solution which is correct. For the illustration to be possible, we have to imagine the following time-related imbroglio: a future event, the value of which is linked to the fact that it will be broadcast in real time, in the spectator’s present, is announced with images from the past, archival images which, obviously, have no *raison d’être*, because the event announced is, as we might imagine, new, exceptional and non-iterative. We see, here, just how erroneous the widespread idea of a live broadcast as something spontaneous, unprepared and unedited can be.

This example of various potential interpretations of the “present” of the images reveals a double action process occurring in two stages:

On the one hand, we need to know what to expect from a genre, what I have called its ontological promise. This knowledge, which is at least partially associated with a learning process, conditions a certain number of spatio-temporal discursive parameters (the placement of the cameras filming the event, the way the event is framed, etc.).

On the other hand, it is necessary to resist the pragmatic promise that the broadcaster offers in the form of labels or categorizations. Although such labels may sometimes be accurate, they can also, as we have seen above, be misleading or downright false.

5 Narrative tension and information

I said in the introduction that receiving a piece of information through a TV set or a tablet is not the same thing and that it in fact implies a temporal choice dictated by what we can expect from the media.

What characterizes the news in general is that it provides “narratives”, or, in other words, series of events governed by a succession and transformation of predicates. All news recounts a rupture in the equilibrium of a given natural, political or social milieu. In the spirit of the kind of comparative narratology that I have been practicing for a number of decades, we should take into account the degree to which the media through which the message is supplied modifies the type of narrative which it delivers. Here, I would like to examine the effects produced by “narrative tension”, which I mentioned above, in the sense given to the term by the narratologist, Raphaël Baroni (2007).

In his book, *Tension Narrative*, Baroni draws our attention to the daily experience of the complex sentiment prompted by an unfinished narrative. We want to skip pages, run the film forward, watch only the highlights of a series; we are impatient and, at the same time, we like this feeling of indeterminacy and the surprises the story holds in store for us. In sum, he writes, “if the narrative [...] really does have something to do with the way in which we experience time, this temporal depth is never more striking than in the expectant uncertainty felt by the interpreter (the reader) during the aesthetic experience, in the suspense or curiosity that give fictional intrigues their strength (Baroni 2007: 18).

What can we conclude from the fact that users of online media are more autonomous, more independent – some go so far as to say “more free” – than viewers of the news programmes of a major TV channel? Not much; after all, the observation does not enable us to understand the feelings produced by that autonomy. However, taking in a summary of the day’s events on the 8 pm news programme, watching a 24-hour rolling news channel, or visiting a news website, each provide very different temporal experiences. And analysing and comparing these experiences of time is all the more interesting in that we are not confronted here by fiction, but by factual narrative, or, in other words, narrative constructed from worldly events.

This slippage from the fictional to the factual implies two divergences from Baroni’s argument concerning fiction. The experience of uncertainty at the basis of the fictional narrative is based, in books and films, on the fact that that narrative is a “finished narrative” and that readers or viewers know that someone, namely the writer or director, already knows the ending, and that they too will eventually know it equally well. This experience is slightly different in soap operas, whose script-writers know when their stories begin, but rarely when and

how they end. Although, in France, people often talk about “news soap operas” (“feuilletons de l’information”), the concept of a knowledge of an ending cannot be said to apply to the news. No script-writer, no storyteller, expert, or politician can know with certainty how an event will play out. While with drama, in all its forms, we are aware that the events recounted have already reached a conclusion, news events are still developing, a fact that inevitably affects the degree of narrative tension associated with them.

It affects the degree of narrative tension for another reason: the very nature of time. This is our second fundamental difference of news. The time in which the written narrative is read is fragmentary and discontinuous. Sometimes we proceed slowly, at other time we accelerate or interrupt our reading, we do something else, we begin again. The time of a film is, on the other hand, imposed, at least when we watch it in a cinema and not on DVD, which enables us to watch films in a discontinuous manner. But, whatever the case, this time is not really ours; it is different from the flow of our lives, which we agree to put on hold. Films proceed at their own pace, which, outside the cinema, does not equate to our own personal and social temporality. On the other hand, the time of the news is our time. It flows at the same speed as our own. The dates are the same. Its events unfold within the framework of our calendar. And, as I said above, everything is done to present it as a time to which we are *subject* and that, in other words, we have to endure.

With these elements in mind, we can ask what the media changes in terms of the news and, *in fine*, what type of narrative tension is implied by news programmes, 24-hours news channels, and news websites, whether they are pure players or not. Attempting to describe and compare them will help us to understand their quasi-anthropological necessity.

Rather than comparing these three genres term for term, we should start with a general dichotomy involving two types of televisual temporalities, namely flow and stock. As we know, the first is made up of a succession of ephemeral moments unlikely to be recycled after their initial use. The second are documents belonging to a reusable catalogue of documentary or fictional items. Normally, TV news programmes are considered to belong to the first category (flow), since in most cases, they are out of date after only a few hours (which gives 24-hour news channels the edge over generalist channels). But the situation is more complex. In television news programmes, some sections belong to the category of flow, while others consist of stock. For example, some subjects are valid for a longer period of time than others; a sequence explaining the conditions of life on Mars has a much longer period of validity than a reportage on military clashes in a war-torn country in which a conflict is continually evolving. Some reportages focus on events developing over the long-term and can thus be rebroadcast,

while others are one-off affairs. These last rapidly constitute a stock of images used in various websites to serve internet users. Although some TV link-ups can be reused, the more “live” a broadcast is, the more the flow of images is likely to derive its strength from the contemporaneous nature of its reception.

What is of interest to us here is the difference between the narrative tension implied by, on the one hand, pseudo-stock and, on the other, live sequences. Let us begin with the narrative tension inherent in live sequences. In the perspective that I have adopted, it is less their object, the type of events to which they give us access, than their enunciation as such, which produces a certain narrative tension. At first sight, live broadcasts seem to represent the culmination of the transparency promised by news, a world in which images speak for themselves. Yet, as Sternberg (1992) tells us, “suspense” is based on “the ontological opacity of the future” and is it suspense that retains the attention of the viewer of live transmissions because, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Jost 1999), far from coinciding with and attaching themselves to the temporality of the world unfolding in front of the cameras, it is based on two kinds of temporality, the present and the future, represented by what we expect the live transmission to reveal, namely a decision or an act. There is nothing more spectacular in this regard than the launch of a rocket, in which the present and the future melt into one at the end of the countdown (Jost 1999).

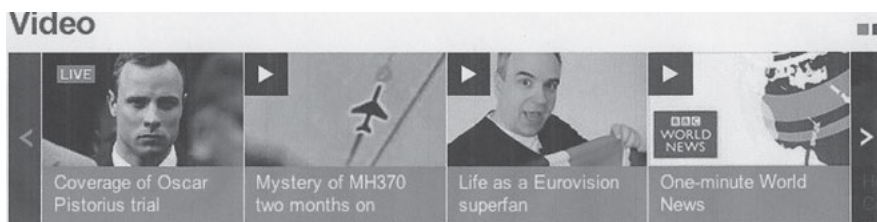
In this situation, suspense is a “primary suspense” based on the uncertainty of the result, on an *uncertain prognosis* (Baroni 2007). From a thymic point of view, this uncertainty produces a mixture of hope and anxiety. Sometimes, this mixture of emotions is generated by a football match, sometimes by the eagerly awaited announcements of a politician at a press conference, sometimes by the *dénouement* of a scandal. In this regard, the factual differs completely from the fictive for, while we impatiently await the resolution of a well-constructed film because we know that it will provide answers to the questions we are asking ourselves, with “live” transmissions, we are also uncertain about the end. Many “live” transmissions fascinate us not only because we do not know *how* they will end, but we are also unaware of *when* they will end. Consequently, the following Baroni’s remark about film is even more relevant to “live” transmissions: “Uncertainty can be displaced from the issue at hand to duration, tension being, in such a situation, based entirely on temporality itself, rather than on the nature of the event” (Baroni 2007: 277). When we know that a fictional character is going to die, it is less that manner of his death that is of interest to an audience than exactly when he will depart our mortal veil. In factual programmes, the emphasis on duration is even more marked. Indeed, it encourages us to think that all we have to do is wait patiently and we will inevitably find out what happens in the end. This tension has two consequences for 24-hour TV news channels. The first is, of

course, that of a substantial increase in the number of “live” sequences broadcast with a view to creating more tension amongst viewers, while the second is, at the same time, to transform all facts into potential events. I shall give two examples. The first happened in Argentina. During a stay in Buenos Aires, I was watching a news channel before going out to meet my friend, Oscar Steimberg. A reporter was commenting on footage that contained little in the way of information, filmed live from a supermarket that had been attacked. The programme went on and on and I had to turn the TV off and go to my appointment. When I met Oscar, I asked him to tell me more about the event, which I had not really understood, but which I thought must be of a certain importance. He had heard nothing about it. The next day, I turned to the same channel and watched a new live transmission, apparently as serious as the one broadcast the day before. I then understood that I was tuned in to a channel that, specializing in *faits divers*, transfigured the most insignificant of happenings into extremely important events merely by exploiting the magic of “live” transmission and its capacity to plunge us into anxiety.

Second consequence: the feeling produced by how the broadcast is delivered is more intense than what the broadcast is actually about. One of the recurrent motifs employed is the closed door which, filmed live, invites the viewers to await its opening. This was the *mise en scène* preparing the way for Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former head of the IMF, to emerge before the TV audience from a New York courtroom after the judge’s decision to charge and bail him. And it was also the backdrop to the interminable lead-up to the announcement of the birth of the royal baby in the United Kingdom, with a fixed shot of the door of the Lindo Wing of St. Mary’s Hospital taking the lead role, while, thousands of miles away, a group of journalists waited outside a hospital for the announcement of the death of Nelson Mandela, which, in fact, happened much later. Meanwhile, back in London, the door opened at last to deliver “the image that the United Kingdom had been waiting for twenty-four hours”. And there, although it had been camped out on the steps for a day and a night, the camera crew was unable to capture the sound and broadcast the message of Prince William, the proud father ... A journalist at the scene, less than “ten yards” from the Prince, admitted that he had not heard a thing ... All that for nothing! The whole episode brought to mind the story of the Knight of the Holy Grail who fell asleep at the very moment he attained his goal ...

The shot of the closed door represents a distillation of everything that can be expected from a live transmission – expectation, symbolized by closure, and the emergence of information, which stands for openness. Before, there was nothing; after, we know all we need to know. In spite of its poverty in terms of providing information, this type of image has the capacity to glue viewers to the screen as they await the banal sight of a door opening.

If I wanted to make a comparison with a website, how would I describe the user's experience? Let us take this page from the BBC News website (bbc.com/news). At the top, we find a front page relatively similar to that of a newspaper, with the most important news story and a photograph. Following the lead image, the user has a choice of videos, each with a descriptive title.



Let us leave to one side for the moment the picture on the left, with its label “live”, which is linked to what I said above. The other three call upon a sentiment – curiosity – that secretes the “impatience that attends the resolution of an enigma” (Baroni: 260). This is absolutely evident for the “MH270 Mystery”, but it is true for other subjects as well. The title is a “teaser” that excites the imagination and makes us want to know more. Clicking on the thumbnail of a stock image is tantamount to taking a bet that we will learn a little more about what the image suggests, experience the joy of having a truth revealed to us. The image hides the event, a click unearths it, as if it were buried in the depths of the page. If the live broadcast is informed by suspense and prognostication, videos described by a title-image are informed by diagnosis, which replies, in the fictional narrative, to the question “how did he manage to get out of that one?” It is, first and foremost, a desire to know applied to the past. Inevitably, these videos deliver a past time and supply explanations about that past. They satisfy what the Scholastics called *libido cognoscendi*, which is also characterized by a scopic passion. We want to know and to see.

This thymic disposition is at work both in a nightly news programme, with its reportages, and in news websites. In truth, the same videos are often recycled on the latter. In this regard, narrative tension is the same in both cases, except that seeking out a reportage for oneself, rather than being subject to it by the news playlist, reserves fewer surprises.² In truth, this curiosity is also triggered by the titles, be they on a webpage or in a newspaper. Phrases such as “a Japanese taxi driver trapped his clients and made them urinate in his car” and “the State con-

² The “news playlist” designates the order in which the subjects are addressed.

demned for failing to save a woman from her murderer” are enigmas to which we await a resolution located in a narrative situated both in the future (as act), and in the past (as event).

Just as the suspense of the live broadcast has consequences for the content and presentation of 24-hour news channels, the curiosity engendered by the categorization of stock products produces its own effect on the way in which websites are laid out. Emphasis is placed on events that, first and foremost, play on the scopical impulse and which offer a promise of something spectacular, or, at least, entertaining. May 8 – Armistice Day – or the kidnapping of two hundred young women in Nigeria, are merely two headlines amongst others, while a video of two guests at a Jordanian talk show who destroyed the set is given pride of place. If live broadcasts can transfigure a banal object – for example, a door – into a symbol of expectation or of a particular event, videos must be spectacular even if the event they portray is unimportant in itself.

Our link with the media is, above all, temporal. Based on our knowledge, this relationship with time conditions our beliefs and our propensity to resist the promises made by the media about the nature of the programmes we watch. Examining these relations, we notice that the various media providing us with access to news are by no means equivalent to one another for the simple reason that they create different narrative tensions. VOD (video on demand), and news on websites – to take the case of news in general – are not in direct competition with television because they are not based on the same promises, the same narrative tension, or the same affects. Television will always have the privilege of showing the world live and being able to play on this uncertainty, which links us both to the visions provided by fiction and to our own lives; meanwhile, the titles and emblematic images of an event will always exert a centripetal attraction that derives from our *libido cognoscendi*, a desire that encourages us to click and see.

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Semiotics and interstitial mediatizations

Abstract: From the founding works of Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes, Christian Metz and Eliseo Verón, the study of mediatization has held an important place in the innovative proposals that semiotic approaches have been developing. That line of research is now focused on the explosion of social networking media. As in the rest of the social sciences, we are forced to innovate, at least partially, our models and methods of analysis. That road cannot but be considered other than useful and necessary, although challenging and questioning.

In this article we will present a synthesis of the moment in semiotics of mediatizations of a coexistence between the *broadcasting* and *networking* models called, at least for now, *postbroadcasting*. We will then present a review of some of the innovative movements happening now: not only by confronting the *new mediatizations* but also new perspectives that arise from the study of *previous mediatizations* and their audiences. We will focus on two mediatizations that are seldom present at the centre of media studies: graphics in public places and the media of sound – both of which, from our point of view, make up the background of the new mediatizations.

Keywords: Socio-semiotics, broadcasting, networking, postbroadcasting, interaction

1 Introduction. A semiotic approach without a sign

This article is written taking into account that the understanding of the relationship between any part of the semiotic tradition and innovation cannot be approached from general theories of signs. That *macro* path leads inevitably, in our opinion, to the typical blind alley of metaphysics. The innovation process within our discipline will be consistent as long as the work is fixed in the *convergence* of theoretical elastic models and their methodological approach to new objects. That way leads our constructions of new objects of study related to, if that would be necessary, the life of the previously existing media.

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Even though the most common definition of semiotics is, the one from Saussure, “*the life of signs as part of social life*”,¹ in our discipline there has been a revolution between the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s and that has not received enough attention. Even when it is true that Pêcheux (1978) and Verón (1987b) posited strong founding gestures of this new perspective, it is also true that this revolution has mainly occurred in a progressive manner and without great manifestos.

Perhaps it all started for us with Barthes’ concern (1962, 1970a, 1970b) about photography and advertising rhetoric; or Metz’s discussion about the relevance of the concept *language* for the film, (1964, 1970). Obviously, Eco made a great contribution, giving space to “mass culture” among the semiotic phenomena and, on the other hand, instituting the first approaches to the study of “live television” (1985[1965]). Since then, there has been an explosion of semiotics into the mediatizations.

There is no doubt that Christian Metz (1972) produced one of the major steps for the study of mediatizations. His effort to adapt a Saussurean concept of language as a formal system to the study of the film language was revolutionary. He highlighted the impossibility of finding in the world of the image and films the linguistic double articulation. Moreover he noticed the absence of *strong* codes in films in contrast to those putatively attributed to verbal language.

Once the Saussurean model was questioned by Metz, the French researcher began to search the social conventions of film language that make society understand it. He worked in two different levels: firstly, the internal conventions among film editing, which are typical of motion pictures with sound; those modes of discursive construction are not found in literature or in verbal communication. Secondly, the film sense is supported by the presence of cultural conventions that exceed every film: genres and styles organize the production and the comprehension in discursive social life².

The presence of the *film edition series* and the *genres and styles conventions* showed that there is a field of *social assumption* working as a set of discursive conventions in society. That generated a theory about film because it works as

¹ As is known, Saussure talks about *semiology* but that has been superseded by ‘semiotics’ as a term.

² Metz describes how a sequence, relevant in a humorous film, it is not at all relevant in a romantic comedy (Metz, 1974: 45–49).

several social discourse rules³. That approach showed a very important and innovative path to study every mediatization.

From that background in the work of Barthes, Eco and Metz, the study of mediatizations began finally with Eliseo Verón's book (1987a) *Construir el acontecimiento*. From that moment, the study of the mediatizations have constituted a specific and different field in semiotics in general and in Argentine and Latin American semiotics in particular. Verón's assertion about the media as a *builder of social reality* opened the field of media analysis in search of experiences and *transdiscursive* social conventions. The *marks* on the discursive surface are explored, through *operations* analysis, as *traces* of social conditions of sense production (Verón, 1987b)⁴.

Of course, we cannot advance much more here in the description of a process that we consider important to describe our work and for understanding the processes of research innovation as we understand it.⁵ However, what is important, as we have recently summarized (Fernández, 2014, 2015), is that we can sum up the process of research and analysis of a phenomenon in the media in three different and partially sequential instances:

- *Semiohistory*, which describes the temporal trajectory that converges in the phenomenon we are studying from at least three levels: technical devices and their relationships with the social concerns that guide, consciously or not consciously, their development. The specific discursive level, when genres and styles are intersecting each other, more or less in conflict, in the particular studied time. Finally, the social actions and usages of those formations that involve media and discourse.⁶ Each series has an independent life which will be connecting with the others.

³ In reference to this field of social knowledge and patterns, to avoid the risk of metaphysics, we prefer now to use the notion of *presupposition*, even in a field where not many colleagues are wandering nowadays.

⁴ Verón wasn't alone in Argentina. In two recent books that presented the results of extended careers, researchers can see the strong contributions to this field of both Oscar Steimberg (2013) and Oscar Traversa (2014).

⁵ A lot of Latin-American research would be included in that approach: work on rites (Finol 2001), poverty and its social representations (Pardo, 2007), government communication processes (Fernández, Sznaider, 2012) or social mobilizations that cross public space by putting in action also old and new mediatizations (Cid Jurado, 2013).

⁶ As is known, Verón (1997) has defined a medium according to two series: the technological devices that constitute it and the uses the society applies to them. We now consider that these are necessary because, as we will see later, it is necessary to consider them when we study *new mediatizations* and *social networks* in which the discursive (and not only the discursive) are im-

- *Sociosemiotic status*, which consists in establishing those trajectories of genres and styles and the game of transpositions that is recorded throughout the discourse that we study. This time we record the information provided by *marks* that appear on the surface of these texts as *traces* of a certain combination of classifications with previous examples we know by our training on the subject; ultimately, it is about describing how phenomena or texts we study are crossed by social classification categories: technical devices, media, transpositions, genres and styles.
- *Discursive analysis*, the stage in which our subject of study, historically and sociosemiotically located, is submitted to a specifically textual analysis in which the sense production operations that make a text are discovered and by the way they differentiate from others, at the thematic, as well as at the rhetorical and enunciative levels, is described.

Usually, we consider today that this scheme originates in the social life of the *mass media* and the *broadcasting* system, in which it is possible to clearly distinguish, as it exists in reality, instances of *production* as well as *recognition* (Verón 1987b). The new mediatizations — especially the main *social networks* (or *platforms*), like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. — question *that differentiation for two types of reasons*. Firstly, they show interactions on their interfaces and, in addition, not all operations are purely discursive: *to like, favour, share, download or upload*, etc. are actions in the sense that other social sciences have defined, such as ethnography and microsociology.

As we will see, from this point of view we can now discuss the *broadcasting approach*, but bearing in mind that our goal is to understand the relationships of innovation between semiotics and its objects in transformation. Social information and the mainstream of the music industry were developed through the presence, the support and the rules of the broadcasting multi-media system: that is, the relationships between material and discursive production and recognition media grammars. Different cultural phenomena such as globalization, actuality, tango, pop culture, cinema and many others would be impossible to conceive without the broadcasting media system. In spite all of that, the system's aspects are changing, causing transformations and crisis in their paths.

bricated (Fernandez, 2008). In fact, both were always embedded as we will see later, but now it is inevitable to observe the phenomenon.

2 The third moment of the study of the new mediatizations

The development of the sociosemiotics of mediatization research allowed us so far to set in train a double movement: on the one hand, an understanding of new phenomena that develop in *networking* and their relations with previous events; on the other, the possibility of understanding in a different way the already extensively studied phenomena of the *mass media*. Studies on the new mediatizations are transforming and progressively tracing three different moments in the way of understanding these *new* mediatizations (Fernández, 2015). Each of those moments are related to changes in the new mediatizations which, as will be seen briefly here, have not represented the end of the previous ones nor produced definitive breaks in continuity. Nevertheless, those changes caused by the new mediatizations have reconceptualized previous interindividual and massive media. These technological, discursive and usage transformations – and, in addition to this, the new concepts about media life – manifest themselves with force and in particular ways in the media of sound, especially in the system of journalism and in music.

The first moment to describe and present the new media, which could be called *foundational*, is linked to the recognition and concern about the emergence of computers, digital formats, connectivity and easy access to large volumes of information. Authors like Toffler, Negroponte, Debray, Verón and Scolari (2004) opened this first path. The major issues were the outbreak of information networking, processing capabilities and changes in the *access* to information and some of its consequences, for example, in the journalistic field and consumption behavior. *Bloggers*, *pirates* and *prosumers* were described as new social actors. In the world of music, copy and mail delivery began to announce the industry's crisis. The phone went mobile; radio became segmented and deepened its stylistic distinctions, rather than adhering to a generic model. Moreover, music listeners began to edit their own music selections, by selecting and *hitting* pieces produced by the industry.

In the first decade of 21st century, the second moment of academic concerns was generated by the new mediatizations; this should be renamed as *fascination with networking*: the explosion of living social networks, the hope in the transformative power of *interaction*, *convergence* and *mobility*. This time, inaugurated by Jenkins (2006), Castells, Piscitelli, Scolari working with Logan on mobility [(2014 [2010]) and transmedia narratives (2010), Igarza (2009), among others, the work continues and its consequences are expanding. As we can see, until this

moment the new phenomena were presented and described by researchers not belonging to the field of semiotics (perhaps with the exception of Scolari).

And now, those who have experienced or researched the life of the new mediatizations can say that they are in a third moment, a new stage of knowledge about these objects that only a few years ago were just presenting themselves. It is a time of resurgence and recognition, in the universe of the new mediatizations, of the socio-cultural problems. This has been referred to in our work as postbroadcasting: the time when the coexistence between broadcasting and *networking* is finally registered (Fernández, 2013). Coexistence means that the stress, competence, and battles for survival, etc. are played out in the conflictual relationships between both systems.⁷

These last statements mean that through the networks and in their mediatizations many opportunities are appearing to apply prior knowledge about social and discursive life. This is due to the fact that it is now accepted that the media transformation processes also contain levels of accumulation of practices and experiences (Fernández, 2007). There are three aspects that are representative of this third moment:

- a. while networks create an horizontal or *peer to peer* effect, still the vast majority of participants are only publishing little pieces of info or looking at the flow of postings, though it is true that the emitters are many more than in the broadcasting world;
- b. now we know that not every phenomenon on the web is a phenomenon of networking; beyond Twitter microblogging, we have studied the *Vortex.com* platform, based in streaming, but establishing relationships between a radio station, a theatre and a website offering multimedia discourses. The *Vortex* platform never proposes to their followers any of the kind of interaction upon which Facebook or even Twitter is based (Fernández, 2014a);
- c. in addition, researchers have discovered that amidst the widespread optimism of the digital world, there is also obsolescence and failure, such as Second Life, Google + or, finally, the failure of the great socio-political shift announced by Castells after the Arab spring.

In the first two moments the social sciences in general and semiotics in particular appeared in a defensive position before the socio-cultural development of the media. Their reaction was conservative and distrustful regarding the new theoretical formulations that seemed to get ahead of phenomena. Now, in the third

⁷ Sandra Valdetaro (2008) has described newspapers' strategies to compete with on-line information. The main concept has been to design printed paper as a screen.

moment, the positions of the social theories are changing because they are again studying the results and not announcing the future.

The main characteristic of this time is that we are not only facing the list of what is new with some developed statutes, but in a position where we can build new statutes from lists of results with data of the past and the present that, by definition, already do not only look to the future even if we are still in the short term. Thus, semiotics regains its place, in specific terms and in terms of its interaction – in some very new ways as we will see with other disciplines of social theory, as a whole, it recovers its workspace behind the practices of society. For example, nobody dares to proclaim the Utopian future of new media anymore with reference to such developments as *Google-glass*. In the best case scenario, its development is observed and optimism is left to the web search giant and its pre-paid commentators.

It is important to understand and take advantage of this stage of experience; work starts from here. In the world of music, this stage is referred to what we call *postbroadcasting* and something that should be taken into account is that the results that will be presented here, emerge from a tour of periodization of the relationships between music and media that have been described in previous works (Fernández, 2014: 36–40). However, investigations about the media of sound (radio, phonograph, telephone) have occupied a marginal space among semiotic concerns. Nevertheless, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, the advancement of knowledge not only puts us in a better position in respect of the new phenomena but also allows us to deeply understand phenomena already studied in the past.

3 Our observational blindness and deafness, interstitial and interactive mediatizations

At first glance, the new mediatizations put into question a key distinction that comes from the sociosemiotics of mediatizations that we practice: the distance between *production* (emission) and *recognition* (reception). Originating in Kerbrat-Orecchioni's differentiation (1986) and developed by Verón (1987b), the theory of the differences between the production instance and the recognition moment in a mediatized exchange system is placed in question within the new mediatizations: on the screen there is a constant presence of the acknowledgment of reception at almost the same time of the emission, meaning also production.

In the present, we believe that the idea of such differentiation responds, not so much to the order of the phenomenon, but to the way in which it has been

conceptualized. That way of conceptualization was recently named by us as *spectatorial* (Fernández, 2015). Classic studies of Lazarsfeld and Kendall (1948) on radio audiences, for instance, were made at a time when radio was still central furniture at home, in front of which an individual or the family would gather to listen to that radio broadcasting without image. Today that original stable position of the audience in respect of the receiver can be discussed, but it is true that all the media of sound were built by a strong transmediatic and meta-discursive work for the promotion of that spectatorial position of the audience in front of the radio and even the set of sound media.⁸

The spectatorial consideration regarding the audience is at the base of the concepts considered to study the effects of media with its discourses as a *black box*, without a semiotic analysis strategy. This same idea was also applied to film and later to television: fixed positions of expectation in which viewers were interrogated about their tastes and opinions about perceived discourses. This inquiry into the position of radio and its audience went then directly to the television audience studies and, from there on, was installed as paradigm of studies on effects of the media, at qualitative and quantitative levels. These inquiries demonstrated the utility of investigating individuals about their supposed radiophonic listening before taking into account their modes of access to the listening: if it was searched consciously, or it was a randomized listening (in public transportation, for instance); and, once accepted that listening, it is always necessary to check if it is something that the listener pays attention to. It is evident here that, the decision to accept an individual receptor as a *listener* has to do with the possibility of the listener to hold his/her position of *listening* (Fernández, 2012: 281–288). That position and a complex selection of the individual listening had already been added to the whole of the mediatizations of the sound (Fernández, 2010). It sets the semiotic studies on reception in evident relationship with an ethnographic perspective, beyond the presence of new mediatizations, networks and platforms. It leads us to consider the discursive system of the media of sound as a necessary background to explain the relatively easy incorporation process of complex and new discursive exchanges on the Internet and social networks. The main reason is that the reception of sound mediatizations, more or less fragmentary, always forced an *in depth* and *layered listening*, discriminating, even without consciousness, different spatial and temporal locations of a complex discursive offer. Without doubt, it is a pre-announcement of *Hypertext* and the *hypermedi-*

⁸ Gutiérrez Reto, M. (2008) considers that the use of the image of the dog facing *the voice of the master* phonograph horn as the RCA Victor logo was, among other things, a proposal for the visual position in front of the transmitter of sound.

atization more than the cinematographic screen as Manovich (2005 [2001]) had argued (Fernández, González-Azcárate, 2011).

From that point of view, the mediatizations of sound are a very particular mediatization and perhaps that profound differentiation could be a cause of the small and lateral attention provided by researchers of audiovisual and written media. That exclusivity was never satisfactory for us because, above all, to avoid the complementation with other researchers of mediatizations in moments of multiple convergences we need to have common fieldwork. Some time ago, a colleague asked us why we addressed a media phenomenon, according to him, as lateral as sound, instead of dedicating ourselves to other more prestigious or *massive* objects, such as cinema, or as television. We were on the street in an almost unknown city for both; I could therefore show that there were a large number of individuals walking, bicycling or even inside their cars, with headphones or listening to radio or music through mobile receivers. The question had its answer in the simple fact that this phenomenon happens in front of our eyes without requiring any special effort to search for it.

Following a long journey of observation and reflection without establishing relations with the sound, we have recently decided to pay special attention to the graphic communication in public places, in the streets, and relate it to the mediatizations of sound. On this mediatization, evidently happening in front of our eyes, we found a lot of traces equivalent to the reception of media of sound in mobility situations. Through the streets, individuals receive this media in their movement, outside of their will and in depth. There, the individual is selecting, more or less consciously, among multiple texts that they are later going to remember and beyond that select what they are going to remember among that diversity. And that happens, with inevitable differences, in New York, Paris, Mexico D. F. or Buenos Aires.⁹ The mediatizations of sound and the graphics in public places can be called as *interstitial* just as Roberto Igarza (2009) called the *mobile mediatizations in production*, although in these cases it involves exchanges in *broadcasting* and only in reception. But both cases require the will of the receiver to receive and moreover, to *interact* with the texts s/he is seeking or texts that find her/him.

Certainly, it is debatable whether the mediatization of sound and the graphic media coverage on public roads is equivalent to television or film media. But the transformation of television, which tends to rely on the place of the unique broadcasting unit at home (Carlón, 2009; Verón, 2009), or the multiple formats in

⁹ Veron accurately describes the similarities and differences between the social observer and the scientific observer. He found the key difference in the fact that the scientific observer has an added level of control over his work: that of the scientific system (Verón, 2013: 402–408).

which a film is distributed outside the theatres, shows that these kind of mediatizations are increasingly more interstitial and interactive too, although we believe that the traditional expectations will not disappear completely.

Of course, that perspective will generate a relatively large new field of discussion, but what interests us here is to emphasize in the attention afforded to mediatizations with longevity. We have been studying them for decades but the experience of investigating new mediatizations helps us find new phenomena and reshape objects. From now on, we will discuss two spectation practices of very different exchange systems within the mass media:

- the *spectatorial* position in which receptors have a relatively fixed place in front of their chosen or accepted mediatization and
- the typical *interstitial* and *interactive* position on the new mediatizations, but present for many decades at least in the media of sound and in graphics in public spaces, oscillating in the graphic press with advances now in the audiovisual mediatizations such as cinema and new televisions.¹⁰

Based on the detailed study of new mediatizations on networking we found at least partly unnoticed aspects within massive mediatizations. That compels us to new methodological proposals and new exchanges with other social disciplines. As we said at the beginning, innovation is not generated by the metaphysical reformulation of the major theoretical concepts, but by the interweaving between elastic research and coexistence in the study of the new discursive phenomena with the previous.

Two lines of questions are now opened with this interstitial approach, both of them related with the past and the future development of the music and information field of work:

- What was the reason for the importance of the big media in the construction of the socio-cultural agenda in the era of newspapers and then television? Was it for their real importance over other mediatizations or because the researchers were occupied in studying them above all other options?
- It is very difficult to think about the future of our culture without broadcasting: are there no longer international news, events, tendencies and styles? Is there any international style of music, or local music as original as the tango was, with no distribution all over the world? Is it not reasonable to think that

¹⁰ We have noticed hybridizations between *broadcasting* and *interactions* in regards to the proposal of Vortex.com, the articulation of a FM radio, with a theatre for live performances and a platform in *streaming*, however, with very little effect of interactive *networking* (Fernández, 2014).

the future of the surviving broadcasting phenomena will be developed more by interstitial than spectatorial practices?

4 Conclusions

The mediatizations of sound have been deeply innovative in Western culture as the original source of the processes of broadcasting, constituted in broadcasting's basic structures; for example, information systems and the music industry, key phenomena in the global culture until the arrival of the new mediatizations.

The process of *networking*, combinatorial expansion of digital, networks and mobility, puts into crisis much of mediatized systems, including precisely information and musical construction. Nevertheless, this profound transformation does not seem to affect the communication on public highways or mediatizations of sound. Our streets are wandered by countless individuals wearing headphones or listening to in-car audio equipment. They are there, facing us and, in spite of this, that generates little theoretical concern. Our current research shows us that the important things happening in the culture regarding new mediatizations are happening, centrally, in the mediatizations of the sound.

The study of the new mediatizations, especially in the field of information and musical life, obliges semiotics to articulate productively with ethnographic studies, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, with the complex statistical developments of big data. The cultural innovation of these mediatizations requires us to interact with other methodologies while we revalue the specific contribution of the semiotic approach.

The worlds of graphic media in public spaces and media sound systems have been much unnoticed amidst the major concerns of society. The unrecognized importance of these phenomena would continue its strong presence in front of the eyes of those who decide not to look at those social and cultural practices outside the predominantly audiovisual or scriptural paradigms.

We have shown that innovation in the strict sense is not built from macro levels but micro or medium levels of knowledge of the phenomena that we want to investigate. Theoretical and methodological innovations are not only a novelty in front of a novelty: for something to be innovative it must cause profound changes in the theoretical and methodological tissue from which it works. We cannot innovate from metaphysics, thinking about the big issues in a discipline such as semiotics, or trying to find something new, to understand some new procedure between the new and previous mediatizations.

Hot societies such as ours, in the sense proposed by Lévi-Strauss (1970[1962]), which are fed by the myth of change, development and progress, produce novelties in different realms of social life: objects, ways of saying, acting, illuminating and dressing, are constantly changing with greater or lesser 'success'. Among these new developments, happening in the short-term, only some of them or the combination of them generate transformations. For instance, when a transformation lingers in the world of the media it must generate novelty.

According to what we have seen in this article, mediatized life is changing so much that social life is becoming brutal, and semiotics must focus on it, using many historical semiotic tools; but, semiotics is forced to articulate with other theoretical methodologies and approaches. Therefore, the future of semiotics implies profound changes inwards but also, and especially, outwards. That is, towards the mode of articulation with other disciplines that is no longer happening a posteriori, but in the process of the study of the processes of production of sense.

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Section 5:
Semiotics for moral questions

Patrizia Violi

Spaces of memory and trauma: a cultural semiotic perspective

Abstract: Over the last twenty years memory and trauma have been the object of fast growing attention in the Humanities and have been investigated within the perspectives of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory. This paper aims to discuss how a culturally oriented semiotic approach is more adequate in terms of reframing in a more insightful way some fundamental issues of this field. With reference to my recent research regarding memorials and museums, I will analyse the relationship between space and memory and the key role that a number of specific places play in the cultural memorisation of traumatic events, demonstrating how a semiotic methodology may serve to clarify a number of theoretical and methodological impasses. In particular I will discuss the notion of trauma, as it has been defined within the field of Trauma Studies, and also the notion of trauma sites, a category of ‘places of memory’ that exhibit a very specific type of semiotic functioning. The notions of trace, authenticity and indexicality will be presented and further analyzed in terms of their usefulness within this broader perspective.

Keywords: Trauma, trace, authenticity, indexicality, memory, museums

1 Semiotics and Memory Studies: an overview

Over the last few decades we have witnessed in the humanities an increasing development of research devoted to studies of memory and trauma, analyzed in all their numerous different aspects within a wide range of different disciplinary perspectives: from history, perhaps the most obvious discipline to approach memory given the foundational link between memory and history, to literary studies, to sociology, and, last but not least, the very pervasive, although often not well defined, field of Cultural Studies.¹ A proliferation of different defini-

¹ Impossible to give an even partial list of all the significant works published in the recent years on this topic: I will limit here to some “classic” references on traumatic memory: Caruth 1996a,

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tions and categorizations have so far been suggested: cultural memory, collective memory, prosthetic memory, post-memory, multidirectional memory and so on.

Despite the usefulness of some of these and similar distinctions, we seem to lack at the present time a general theoretical and methodological framework able to throw light on commonalities and differences in what now appears rather a fragmented picture. This selfsame fragmentation is reflected in the appearance and multiplication of a series of different new academic disciplines: in the most prestigious universities, especially within the Anglo-Saxon world, there now exist courses in Memory Studies, Trauma Studies, Testimony Studies, Holocaust Studies, Jewish Studies and many more.

An approach of this kind, in both its assumptions and methodology, differs considerably from a *semiotically* grounded perspective, where the object of study is not defined on the basis of a content-based typology that envisions a specific different discipline covering each specific thematic dimension, but is, rather, approached in terms of its systemic and structural features, by defining the overall system of values and transformations, as well as the reciprocal interdependencies that underlie the various forms of manifestation.

It is worth offering a few words on this phenomenon, since I believe it will help us in focusing more closely on a relevant epistemological difference to be found between semiotics and other approaches that analyse what, at a first glance, might appear to be the very same objects. The above mentioned new disciplines are each defined on the basis of their object of study, while semiotics aims to provide a general theoretical and methodological framework that can be applied to many different types of cultural phenomena, in a transversal way. In the semiotic approach it is not the object that drives, directs and qualifies the analysis, but rather a number of general assumptions regarding how meaning-making processes actually work. These general principles, in their turn, can be applied to many different semiotic objects, bringing clearly into view relevant similarities and differences.

Thus, one basic assumption qualifying a semiotic approach is the idea that the object of inquiry is always constructed, and can never be taken as given. What, in other disciplines, is taken as the unquestioned and given starting point of the inquiry is, for semiotics, the result of the constructive work that constitutes the analysis. The object is never 'there', so to speak, in the world outside, independently of our ways of looking at it, giving meaning to it, and constructing it as a semiotic entity. A constructivist assumption of this type has also another impor-

1996b; Antze and Lambek 1996; Kaplan 2005; La Capra 2001, 2004. For a general introduction to cultural memory see Erll 2011 and Erll and Nunning 2008.

tant consequence: that one and the same entity may acquire many different kinds of meanings depending on the way it is actually used, interpreted and signified.

Without denying the undoubted interest of the many or the singular works produced in the field of Memory Studies, I believe a semiotic approach can offer an important contribution to the development and growth of the field in general. Combining its structural-generative approach with the insights of the cultural and interpretative perspectives, semiotics can provide us with a very powerful methodological tool, able to offer more coherent and appropriate descriptions of phenomena, which will in the long run lead to clearer understandings of the object of analysis, and also offering some original reformulations of certain key questions and their solutions.

Memory, as well as culture, has a systemic character: it is an overall system where a series of different phenomena are correlated, each acquiring its relational value from the network of links with the others. Moreover, similarly to culture itself, memory is a diachronic process that changes continually over time. If cultural changes are the result of assimilation and translation of new texts that were previously 'external' or 'peripheral' in respect to the centrality of some given culture, memory processes modify continuously over time the internal relationships between remembering and forgetting. What in culture can be described as a process of endless translation between an 'inside' and an 'outside', in memory takes place in the form of a continuous re-memorisation of forgotten elements together with new forms of oblivion. A background-foreground mechanism seems to characterize memory functioning, where a total cancelation of the past is not very common; more often some elements are only subject to temporary forms of oblivion: put into the background and 'narcotized', to use an expression of Umberto Eco (1990) they can always return to the foreground and become 're-activated', and thus becoming central in the shared memory of a given community.

In contrast to a psychological approach that looks at internal mental processes, a semiotic perspective can only be 'externalist', which is to say 'textualist', in a larger sense. Semiotically, memory can only be studied through the different texts, or semiotic objects, that express it, together with the interpretative practices that give sense to them. A semiotic analysis of memory implies the selection and construction of a given corpus, and the preventive choice of a relevance plan to guide the analysis, as is the case in any kind of semiotic analysis.

I will give some more concrete examples of a semiotic approach to memory taken from work I have been carrying on recently (Violi 2012, 2014) focalized on the 'spatialization' of memory, i.e. the process through which forms of memorialisation become inscribed into specific "places of memory", such as memorials, memory museums, and other sites of different kinds. These particular places have become the object of greater research interest recently, and the now already

quite extensive literature on the topic confirms such a degree of attention,² as well as the parallel growth of new specialised disciplinary fields (Museum Studies, Memorial Studies, Traumatic Heritage Studies and so on).

Within the semiotic domain too, on the other hand, the analysis of space itself has received increasing attention over the last decade, with intensive analysis of cities (Marrone and Pezzini 2007; Marrone 2010), geographical regions (Violi and Lorusso 2011) and specific places such as museums (Zunzunegui 2003; Pezzini 2011; Hammad 2001).

My own current research is located within this wider horizon of shared theoretical and methodological assumptions, the most basic of which is the general idea that space is in itself a semiotic system, a secondary modelling system, to use the words of Juri Lotman (1990), that parallels the primary modelling system represented by natural languages. Space is a form of sense articulation that conveys meaning, tells stories, constructs values, a powerful system through which any given society represents itself, its power relations, its internal hierarchies, its social structuring of inclusions and exclusions. Space speaks of the past as well, and of all the transformations undergone over the course of time; in a word, space speaks of memory, and at the same time it rewrites, transforms and interprets that selfsame memory.

Being a semiotic system, space is characterized by the coexistence of the two constitutive planes of Expression and Content, and a first important contribution that a semiotics of space can offer is a more precise definition of their reciprocal interrelationship. It would be misleading to think of space as composed on the one hand of a material landscape made of “things”, objects, buildings and so on, and on the other of a set of contents associated with one another through a cultural code. Following Greimas (1976), space is rather an organized extension inhabited by people and things, which are both components of the Expression plane of what might be defined as a *syncretic* semiotics, i.e. a system whose Expression exhibits the co-presence of various, and heterogeneous, semiotic systems. The overall meaning of a space is a process that combines different configurations with different practices, uses, functions, a coupling between space and the various subjects that inhabit it. Since a similar coupling may vary over time, one and the “same” place may acquire different meanings, depending on how is used and lived in according a process that can be qualified as *re-semantisation* where while the physical morphology does not change, the coupling function that associates expression with content forms does, producing new, quite

² See, among others, Arnold De Simone 2013; Williams 2007; Bennet 1995; Bassanelli, Postiglione 2013; Maleuvre 1999; Marstine 2006: Message 2006.

different meanings, as in the case of a church that becomes used as a space for exhibitions or as a garage.

A second important semiotic notion that is particularly useful in the analysis of space is the distinction between the act of enunciation and the text that is enunciated (énonciation and énoncé). The concept of enunciation can be very usefully applied to museums and memorials too; in these cases the énoncé corresponds to the story that is told, with its actors, its temporal sequences, its aspectual articulations, its value systems. Enunciation pertains to the level of the choices made by the curator or organizer of the site, and it could be defined as the setting of the expository space, which is always at the same time a proposition for the ways in which the site is meant to be seen and perceived. Choices at this level are responsible for the forms in which the enunciated story is presented to the visitors and, in the end, for the modalities of its vision. Enunciation, too, tells visitors a story, and can thus be analyzed as a narrative structure; the story told at this level, however, is not the represented trauma, but that of its envisionment throughout the visit. The narrative structure of the visit is articulated along the various phases of its path; its final narrative program is the modal transformation of the visitor and her acquisition of a given set of competences. In traditional museums the main value at stake is a transmission of knowledge that affects the cognitive competence of the visitors; in the case of trauma sites the performative effects of these sites are often more relevant, addressing the emotional and experiential involvement of visitors. Enunciation can be seen as the story of the actual trajectory of the visitor-Enunciatee; of her transformations and acquisitions of value.

Particular attention should also be paid to the transformations that singular objects undergo once they are located in a museum or any other exhibition space. Any object exposed in a designed environment is a double-layered semiotic entity: first of all is a trace of a given historical period (this is the case in traditional museums too) or, in the case of trauma sites and memory museums, can be an everyday life object such as a spoon, a shoe and so on, used at the time when the site was a prison or a concentration camp. Once that place becomes a memory site, the object is also a trace of a specific enunciation of the museum-makers' intentions in putting it on display, precisely the way they did. We have here yet another instance of the change of level on the Expression plane defined by Fontanille (2008) as *syncope*: what at one level was merely an object, often deprived of any symbolic values beside its function, now signifies in its new setting a whole form of life.

2 Trauma sites

These above premises can help us in reformulating on a more precise basis a question that has been frequently discussed in recent literature on the topic: that of a potential typology of different places devoted to transmitting the memory of some traumatic event. Several different criteria have been suggested, based on different forms of communication (Sherman 1995), visual aspect and various elements in the expression plane (Young 1993, Williams 2007). What appears unsatisfactory in all these, and similar typologies, is the fact that they all appear to be based on purely morphological criteria, without taking into account that what might appear similar at the expression level might carry very different meanings if we look at their semiotic functioning. Here we could imagine an analogy with the difference between iconology and semiotics in the domain of visual representation, where iconology takes as starting point for the analysis some given motif: for example the recurrent motif of a throne in many different paintings. The problem with this approach is that what appears at a superficial glance to be the ‘same’ motif, might turn out to cover very different semiotic functions and thus acquire very different meanings depending on its structural relationships and forms of interaction with other elements.

In what follows I will suggest some considerations regarding a particular type of memorial spaces that I have defined elsewhere (Violi 2012, 2014) as *trauma sites*, and which appear to constitute a specific category on the basis of their semiotic functioning, rather than on the basis of some external feature. Before we enter into the details of their specific semiotic nature it is necessary to explain what these sites are. A trauma site is a former place of imprisonment and extermination, a prison, a detention centre or a concentration camp, subsequently transformed into a museum or memorial to conserve the memory of that particular tragic past, in the hope that people will “learn not to repeat the mistakes of the past”. Whether or not this is really the case is of course another matter, but the above commonly used slogan associates memory with a potential performative value, an implicit competence that visitors might acquire by merely seeing these real places. A competence of this kind is not merely limited to the modality of ‘knowing’, i.e. to the purely epistemological plan (*to know what* happened) but it also affects the plane of action and produces a transformation in the attitudes and behaviours of the visitors (*to know how* to behave in the future).

A prototypical example of a trauma site is Auschwitz, which nowadays has acquired an almost iconic power to signify a whole complex experiential, narrative, and emotional system. In this, and similar cases, a powerful phenomenon of condensation takes place, something close to what Jacques Fontanille (2008) has called “syncope” in the passage from the level of an object (the camp in this case)

endowed with its own meaning, to a higher semiotic system where the object represents the level of Expression and the content is a life-form. The capacity of one single place to signify a particular form of life appears to be a peculiar characteristic of trauma sites.

In general terms, a trauma site is a memorial that elaborates a previous existing trace and is located in exactly the same place where tragic events, generally mass-murder and imprisonment took place, thus transforming places of horror into museums and places of exhibition open to the public.

The transformation from *places*, portions of spaces where traumatic events happened, to *sites*, can be read as a semiotic transformation of a public nature: a given portion of space is invested with value, semiotically marked and institutionally recognized as a sign of the event in hand. Access to the site is formally regulated and the site itself becomes the object of specific practices of visiting and commemoration.

What characterizes such places and makes them different from many other similar places of memory is the continuity between event and space that represents the very *raison d'être* of their museification: trauma sites are *traces* of past events with which they are connected via a causal link. As we will see, however, things are not as simple as that, and the connection between event, space and memory is far more problematic than it might appear at first sight.

For the time being let us just notice that these places combine two different meanings, belonging to two different temporal dimensions and to two different enunciation processes: in the past these places were places of imprisonment and 'containment' in Foucault's sense, and today they have become places of exhibition. We have here a particular instance of what I described before as *re-semantisation of space*, a process of semiotic rewriting that transforms at the same time functions and meanings of the place according to a double movement of de-semantisation and re-semantisation. A site has certainly acquired a new signification, becoming a place of exhibition, while at the same time maintaining the old one, which is the very reason for its being a museum or memorial.

The very expression "trauma site" seems to allude to this double nature of a place that is at one and the same time a testimony of traumatic events and a site of exhibition, i.e. a museum of some kind. A similar system of double signification implies to focus the analysis at the same time on both the notion of trauma, and how trauma acquires its meaning, as well as on the relationship between trauma and space.

3 For a semiotics of trauma

In the last 20 years there has been an increasing growth of interest in the notion of trauma and its relationship with memory: trauma appeared to be an almost universal clue to reading many different dimensions of our contemporary world.³ However, without entering into this debate, I will start my discussion from what is one of the most basic epistemological tenets of a semiotic perspective, i.e. the above-mentioned constructivist approach.

It might seem problematic, at first sight, to say that a trauma is not given but is socially and semiotically constructed, since trauma appears in the light of common sense assumptions to constitute a ‘naturally’ evident phenomenon in itself. I believe, however, that one of the most challenging aspects of semiotics is its capacity to overcome common sense opinions, forcing us to question the very notion of the ‘natural’. According to common sense, trauma is an event that is independent of us, something that just happens, that affects us, and that we can immediately recognize as such.

Interestingly enough, very similar assumptions can be found in the theorizations of Trauma Studies, although they might appear to be highly sophisticated. Indeed, they all share what could be described as a naturalistic-essentialist theory of trauma. Simplifying a much more complex debate, we could say that according to such a position, a trauma is an event that produces a laceration in our normal psychic life, a sudden and violent break in our temporal continuity that we cannot face and repair. Trauma exceeds our possibility of representing it and voicing it, and, as a consequence, trauma implies a crisis of representation and an impossibility of witnessing it. Thus, in Trauma Theory, trauma is seen as an unrecoverable fracture that is the direct consequence of some external event. Attempts have even been made to find a neurobiological basis in our brain as a basis for a theory of this kind: some neuroscientists have claimed that a traumatic experience leaves a direct imprint in the brain (Kolk 1996). What appears problematic in a position of this kind is not the potential material grounding of traumatic phenomena, so much as its reductionist appeal: in this way traumatic experience is endowed with an ontological essence, totally independent of any form of symbolic elaboration and semiotic mediation.

We are facing here a species of *naturalization* of the trauma: the trauma is an external event that produces as a direct consequence a traumatic effect, objectified even in the brain. Moving from individual psyches to societies and larger

³ For an overview on trauma see, among others: Herman 1992; Leys 2000; Luckhurst 2008.

communities, the very same schema is applied: communities, too, appear to be affected in a direct way by an objective external event.

How might semiotics help in suggesting an alternative view of traumatic experience?

The first important move is a separation of the event itself from the *sense* of the event. An event does not coincide with its sense: the sense can emerge much later, changing over time and becoming historically transformed, and always open and subject to re-interpretation. Events and their sense are not one and the same thing: the *meaning* of events does not naturally and immediately coincide with the event itself, but is that which some interested community or other recognizes and constructs as such.

This is not to deny the existence of facts, or to claim the superiority of interpretations over facts, but rather to assume that facts can be reached only by way of interpretations which are not the same things as facts. The principle of interpretability, based on Peirce's theory of knowledge, is at the basis of an interpretative approach: each object opens up for a potentially unlimited chain of *interpretants*, and it is only through this kind of attribution of sense that it becomes what we come to perceive as a given object or fact.

The separation between an event and the sense of the event means that a fact is not endowed with meaning *per se*, but only acquires its meaning through interpretation, through semiosis, i.e. through our own attributions of meaning. Applying this argument to trauma, we could say that events are not *de facto* in themselves traumatic, but they become traumatic only once they have been recognized, and constructed, as such. This was precisely Freud's position, when he first studied, with Breuer, trauma in relation to the aetiology of hysteric symptoms. (Freud and Breuer 1892–95). Here he used the word *Nachträglichkeit*, translated into French as *après coup*, and in English as deferred action, or afterwardness, or retroaction, to refer to the effect of a traumatic experience that can appear years after its actual occurrence. Such deferred action is precisely the space of the distance between the event and the sense of the event, or the effect of the event, I just mentioned.

In semiotics we have a notion that refers to exactly the same idea. This is the notion of the C space, developed by Umberto Eco (1988) to distinguish between physical facts and semiotic, or cultural, phenomena. While physical and natural phenomena are deterministic and causally produced, in the realm of semiosis and culture there is no causal link between facts and their effects, between facts and their meaning. If we apply the idea of C space to trauma, we can imagine an interval between the traumatic event and its effects, a space of semiotic mediation where sense takes form. In a way similar to what Freud himself suggested, a trauma becomes a phenomenon that is inherently semiotic, since its meaning is

not a deterministic causal effect, but rather a matter of interpretation, an attribution of meaning.

A similar distinction between the traumatic event and its sense has also recently been proposed by the sociologist Jeffrey Alexander (2003, 2004), and its notion of cultural trauma, where trauma is seen as a construction and not as an immediate effect of some given event.

In all these approaches an anti-naturalistic attitude toward trauma emerges, which emphasizes the semiotic mediation that takes place between facts and meanings. Two important consequences follow: first, a non determinist conceptualisation of the trauma; second, a *décalage*, a temporal interval, between facts and consequences, events and meanings. This is precisely what happened in the case of the Holocaust, which for decades after World War II was not acknowledged or even fully recognized as such. It took a long time interval to conceptualise this terrible event as genocide, in the way we are now used to defining it nowadays.

All this amounts to claiming that a trauma is a culturally, and semiotically, constructed event, not a natural cause that automatically produces certain deterministic effects; the same traumatic events can be reconstructed, memorialized and signified in very different ways, through the mediation of texts of different kinds. Memorials, museums and trauma sites are among such memory mediators, and they all play an important role in the cultural construction of trauma as places devoted to its memorialisation. History is not only a matter of time, but also of space, since places of memory inscribe values into space, and in that way contribute to construction of the past.

4 Traces of the past: indexicality and authenticity

As I said previously, I have been working on one particular kind of memorial, the trauma sites that transform into museums places where mass suffering of various kinds actually took place.

What characterizes such places in relation to other memory sites or museums is the *indexical semiotic link* they bear to the past traumatic events: these places exist factually as material testimonies of the actual violence and atrocities that took place there. Even when very little of the original place is actually maintained, visiting sites of this kind offers a different phenomenological experience than those of other similar memory museums. We visit such places precisely because we know, or believe we know, that they are the 'real places'. There appears to be a very strong, and almost mysterious, link between death and the place of its occurrence: a kind of surplus of meaning, a symbolic power. People come back

to that place, they worship it, they put up signs and make it a pilgrimage site, as happens in Italy and Latin America in the case of the small roadside altars commemorating people killed in traffic accidents.

The fact that something ‘real’ happened in that very place does make a difference, which consists basically in the fact that these sites do not *represent* the trauma, as does any other museum: they rather *re-present* it as an a-temporal dimension the trauma itself.

This feature is responsible for what could be described as *the testimonial nature* of such places: they have been the material places where the original trauma occurred, and the contiguity between event and space make them, in a way, also *material witnesses* of the trauma. As a consequence, visiting these places also becomes a complex experience which is not only often highly emotionally charged and unsettling, but is also, in a way, endowed with some kind of testimonial aspect too. Here we might refer to the notions of *secondary trauma* and *secondary, or vicarious, witnessing*, developed in recent years (Hartman 1996)

Even when using a degree of caution in order not to overuse these notions, this indeed appears to be the case, at least according to empirical research on actual visitors to Tuol Sleng (Hughes 2008) that confirm this impression. Almost all the visitors interviewed after their visit to the museum used precisely these words, describing their experiences of the visit as a significant *act of testimony*, a symbolic *gesture of solidarity* toward the victims of the genocide.

If a visit can be perceived as an act of testimony, this is precisely because we believe that the site was the actual place where the traumatic events took place; in other words it has to do with its ‘authenticity’. Authenticity, in this case, means the indexical link I mentioned above, which is, in its turn, based on the notion of *trace*: a trauma site is an authentic trace of the past events. But what exactly is a trace? At this point, it appears necessary to investigate more carefully the semiotic nature of the trace, in order to understand better what it means to be a trace of something. Is a trace something inscribed ‘naturally’ in a place, which we can naively take to be a self-evident notion, or we should challenge this naturally based, almost ontological, understanding? What does it actually mean to be a trace of something? Umberto Eco in his *A Theory of Semiotics*, which goes back to 1975, discusses this issue in his typology of semiotic modes of production, which is not just a typology of signs but of the type of semiotic work necessary to produce semiosis. Imprints are distinguished from other types of signs because they are produced through a semiotic process of *recognition*.

Recognition occurs when a given object or event, produced by nature or human action (intentionally or unintentionally), and existing in a world of facts as a fact among facts, comes to be viewed by an addressee as the expression of a

given content, either through a pre-existing and coded correlation or through the positing of a possible correlation by its addressee (Eco 1975: 221).

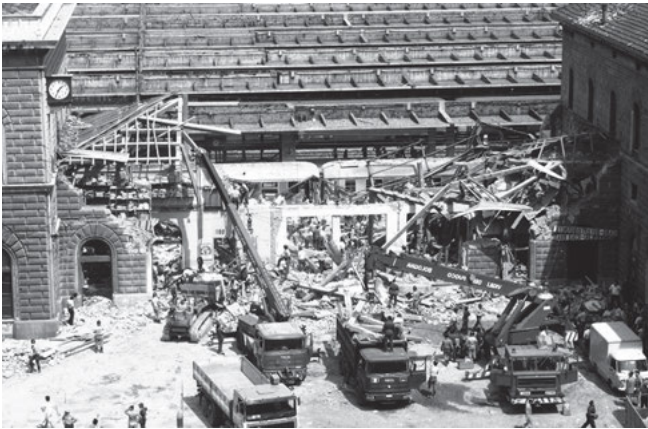
Thus, what makes imprints a very particular semiotic object is the fact that an imprint becomes a sign only in so far as it is *recognized as such by somebody*. In the absence of such a recognition process, an imprint does not exist as a semiotic entity, is only a “thing”, “a fact among facts” to use Eco’s words, that is not endowed with meaning. Imprints, Eco reminds us, are not immediately signs, but rather “objects to be inserted into a sign-function” (1975: 222).

I suggest referring to a trace as an imprint that has been recognized as something produced by somebody, i.e. as a direct causal result of some given event. The imprint is merely the signifier, or expression, of the sign-function that a trace represents, and whose content is the *cause* that produced the imprint as a material object. Because of this causal link, traces “can be taken as proof of past ‘contiguity’ with the agent”, which is precisely what happens at our sites, which function as indexes of the event that produced them and of which they have become witnesses.

Recognition is here a crucial step – a key concept – since it implies an important transformation from a physical object to a semiotic entity: if an imprint before being recognized, i.e. interpreted, is merely an entity in the world, like a rock or a tree, a trace is a semiotic entity, a kind of *index*, as I said, with reference to Peirce’s terminology.

But a trace is something more than just “a sign”, a simple unit of content, and this is a very important point for our analysis. The process of recognition implies the activation of a very rich narrative frame with all its intrinsic narrative roles: who actually produced the trace? Why? In which ways, for which purposes, with what effects? Each trace tells us a complex story and is, at least potentially, a full text, with its own embedded narrative framework.

At this point we face one intriguing aspect of traces. If traces are indexical signs only insofar as they are recognized as such, they are not “natural signs”, natural links to events or things, but they appear to be the result of a process of interpretation. That means that traces can be used to lie, and indeed, traces sometimes do lie. An example will be useful in order to illustrate this point. On August 2nd 1980 a bomb placed by a fascist group, with the probable complicity of the Italian secret services, exploded in the waiting room of the railway station in Bologna, killing 85 people and injuring more than 200. The whole left wing of the station complex was completely pulverized. Image 1 and 2 show how the station looked before the bomb and how it appeared after its destruction.



After the attack, the decision was taken to reconstruct the station exactly as it was originally, following a restoration *à l'identique*, as can be seen in Figure 3.

During the rebuilding, it was also decided to keep the crater made by the bomb, and above it a stone plate was mounted on the wall, with the names of all the victims (Figure 4). On the side wall of the waiting room today, a huge crack in the wall is visible (Figure 5).





Obviously this crack is not authentic, since the whole station wing was destroyed. Only the crater itself, from a rigorously philological point of view, represents an authentic indexical link to the event. But generally people do not pay attention to this, and take the crack to be authentic too, assuming that the whole place is an authentic remains of the original station, even when they know that the station was previously completely destroyed.

There is an interesting *semiotic* reason for people being so easily confused, and mixing up real and false traces. Semiotically speaking, traces, as we have seen, are not merely isolated units of content, single signs so to speak, they are *texts*. Now, in texts the meaning of each single element is integrated within a wider textual structure that governs the contextual signification of each element. A text can be seen as a holistic semiotic system endowed with an overall meaning that emerges from the relationships between all its components and where all

elements are intimately interrelated with one another. In our perspective, a site, a museum, a memorial, should also be considered to be a “text”, a larger unit where all elements that are present are closely interconnected.

This is precisely what happens in the case of the station in Bologna: there is a transfer of semantic features from one element to another, thus constructing an overall meaning of the text as a whole. The crater and the crack enter into a reciprocal meaning relationship based on semantic implication, where the crater transfers some of its features to the crack. What is transferred here is its indexical nature, and thus too, a semantic component pertaining to ‘truth’ or authenticity. The result, although spurious from a philological or archaeological reconstructive point of view, nevertheless becomes authentic as a part of the overall meaning of the site.

The Bologna station example shows very well how often trauma sites exhibit a mixture of real and false traces, and many more examples of this particular type of feature could be cited. However, it also reveals a more important theoretical point, i.e. that the sense of place is not naturally and unequivocally embedded in the place itself, but is rather the result of a complex, sometimes non-linear, process of meaning attribution.

Sites do not naturally provide testimony of the past, they have to be constructed as such. In a way, what happens to such places parallels the social construction of meaning that we already discussed in relation to traumatic events. We are back to the basic epistemological assumption of semiotic constructivism, which implies that our knowledge is always mediated, and that this mediation is precisely the space of interpretation and meaning construction. Between us and ‘reality’ there is always some kind of semiotic mediation and meaning is always an ongoing semiotic construction; no place, no fact nor event is ‘naturally’ and immediately endowed with it.

The distinction between event and sense, or place and sense in our specific case, is of course not a new one; as I mentioned before it refers back also to Jeffrey Alexander’s (2003, 2004) idea of cultural trauma, where trauma is seen as a construction and not as an immediate effect of some given event. Semiotics shares with this and similar positions, a constructivist approach to meaning which I would define as moderate constructivism. A moderate constructivism, the position I personally feel most committed to, does not claim, to use an all too famous slogan, that there are no facts, only interpretations, but rather that we can approach facts only through interpretation, which is to say that all our knowledge is always mediated, and that this mediation is precisely the space of interpretation and meaning construction. Between us and ‘reality’ there is always some kind of semiotic mediation.

What are the implications of a similar assumption in the case of trauma sites? Should we give up any assumption regarding the authenticity of these places, together with their indexical connections with historical events? I still believe authenticity plays a major role in defining the meaning of trauma sites, but in order to use such concept in a more theoretically appropriate way, the very notion of authenticity should be reformulated and substituted with that of *authenticity effects*. This is not a simple semantic ploy, but it implies an important shift from an *ontological* to a *semiotic* level of understanding. Authenticity is no longer seen as a propriety inherent in places themselves, but rather as a particular meaning effect that is the result, not the starting point, of an interpretational construction.

By way of such a move we make a shift from facts to *beliefs* shared about facts, which is to say to the meanings attributed to those facts. At this point it becomes less relevant to ask ourselves whether sites are completely authentic, or have been transformed, or even moved from their original location. Such questions, however extremely important they might be from the point of view of archaeological and historical reconstruction of sites, are less relevant if we are interested in the meanings sites acquire in some given society, and in the role they might play in the way traumatic memory is constructed, transmitted and, sometimes also, transformed.

In this perspective, we are more interested in the cultural and social functioning of these places than their actual ‘truth value’. This of course does not rule out the fact that for other purposes, or from different points of view, the issue of truth might be highly relevant and important. What I am suggesting here are blended complementarities of different approaches that enrich one another, and make interdisciplinary cooperation very interesting.

Authenticity effects can be interrogated at two main levels, according to two different perspectives focused either on production and enunciation processes or on interpretation processes. At the production level, they can be read as a *rhetoric of authenticity* embedded in the site through a series of different devices that include the kinds of objects exposed, for example ‘real’ personal belongings that are supposed to provide evidence of authenticity. Shoes and clothes often play a similar role of memory “authentication”, and may raise problematic questions not only regarding their questionable authenticity – as happens in the case of the controversy about the shoes displayed in the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington – but also regarding the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of such an exposure. More generally speaking, the very way in which a visit to a site is organized can be functional in emphasizing authenticity effects, which are often obtained by way of a strong emotional crescendo.

On the other hand, we can look at the beliefs and interpretative practices that a similar rhetoric produces and activates, also involving usage practices of such

places, from touristic visits to commemorative rituals. It is precisely because we believe in the authenticity of such places – as we believe something terrible actually happened there – that we actually visit them.

This explains why we can also visit places that are, at present, totally anonymous and do not bear any sign or trace of the past. In Chile and Argentina, most of the memory places that have been transformed into memory sites are in this sense totally nondescript. The regimes used as sites of imprisonment and torture anonymous apartments or small houses in the outskirts of cities, which did not possess any particular or special ‘morphological’ characteristics. Moreover, most of these places, after the fall of the dictatorships, were often used for different purposes, and all traces of atrocities perpetrated there were totally removed. Nevertheless, these places have been turned into memory sites; people visit them, they are included in official memory tours and are advertised in tourist book guides. Since they are totally indistinguishable from any other apartment or house close by, what actually makes the difference, and makes these places meaningful, is merely the beliefs we hold regarding their links to actual traumatic past events.

In these, and similar cases, there is an initial causal link to the traumatic event that, even if it has not left any visible trace, and even if the place itself has been modified, altered or even cancelled, still continues to produce an indexical authenticity effect that maintains the memory of the event, creating a link between the event and the space where it occurred. It is the belief that such a link once existed that makes trauma sites different from any other type of memory museum.

To say that the sense of trauma sites is constructed, and thus not given simply and ‘naturally’, opens up for the crucial question of the value of that place. Generally speaking, we can say that in memory places, whether they are museums, memorials or monuments, values are always inscribed into spaces, in order to conserve and transmit these values over time. While in the case of monuments we intentionally create value in a space by constructing a *lieu de memoir*, in the case of trauma sites we transform an existing place into a site endowed with some specific given value. This appears to be a specific instance of a more general phenomenon of transformation of documents into monuments, grounded on the very existence of material traces, or what is taken as being a material trace.

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Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril

Media coverage of the voices of Colombia's victims of dispossession

Abstract: This paper attempts to address the ways the voices of victims of land dispossession are incorporated in Colombian digital mass media, describing the resources and semiotic-discursive strategies that make those fundamental issues visible for an understanding of the social, political and economic life dynamics. Testimonial appropriation splits between the functionalization of the victimized subjects' voices and their disruptive potential, showing how semiotic components that structure the testimonial practice denunciation operate and what their possible political and social effects are. A video from *Semana.com*, entitled *Proyecto Víctimas: despojo de tierras* (*Victims project: land dispossession*), published in June 2, 2013 is analyzed in an exploratory fashion.

The corpus exploration takes the juncture of the implementation of Law 1448 of 2011, "Law of Victims and Land Restitution", as a reference point and the results of the research project *The media representation of dispossession in the Colombian digital press* as its socialization framework. This law, essential reference for the current transitional process, is seen as a problematic issue by different social sectors within the movement of victims of violence in Colombia, and it is considered as a mechanism of "reconciliation" that deepens impunity and inequality, and legalizes historical practices of dispossession. The relation between the semiotic-discursive units under analysis and political, social and cultural rights in emerging areas is verified by identifying how power relations operating through discourse are formulated.

Keywords: Dispossession, victims, discourse, semiotics, voices, testimony

1 Testimony and denunciation. Preliminary theoretical reflections

The political, social and cultural context of Colombia in the last sixty years is a scenario in which the testimony-denunciation (TD) (Yúdice 2002) has been proposed as a semiotic mechanism to tell counter-hegemonic stories, creating rup-

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tures with the interests of the dominant players involved in traditional political processes that have monopolized the means of representation. As Beverley (1992) notes, “the testimony has been not only a representation of forms of resistance and struggle but also a means and a model for them”. Testimony, from this perspective, is a discursive expression produced by subjects affected by different forms of marginalization, with self-awareness and knowledge of their socio-cultural reality and their position as subjects able to confront the hegemonic discourses with their own knowledge and experience itself. The TD requires the collection of the symbolic resources available and to resist and confront facts of inequality and injustice, which increase social tensions.

The discursive voice of the narrative actor expresses an evolution in constant enhancement, from which identity is formulated as a responsive reference to a dynamic and changing historicity. The TD points to reveal the versions of events being repressed or tamed, to emphasize colloquial/everyday expressions being part of the experiential achievements of the agents now visible and to allow new symbolic joints to break the way collective memory is politically appropriated and functionalized by powerful groups.

The documentary video of testimony-denunciation (DVTD), as a support and hybrid genre, serves as a communicative purpose of dialogue with social agents and exceeds the pre-set standards and patterns at the level of both the institutionalized forms of power operation and the socially legitimized forms of expression. It is, therefore, a more plural and less regulated expression having the potential to intervene on the stages of construction of the public issue, due to the developments of different information technologies. The DVTD is a still and moving image production, socializing narration collected with fieldwork techniques, in which the witness recounts the events s/he is denouncing. The journalistic video style also appears in those parts of the story production that have secondary, oral or written, sources and may form a filing system.

The media and discursive phenomenon expressed through the audiovisual testimony denunciation is a communicative, cultural and political practice which seeks the exercise of democracy and aspires to build social relationships and more equitable policies (Jelin and Lorenz 2004). The audiovisual testimony denunciation, associated with the struggle against impunity and forgetting, is a production of narratives, keeping alive the memory of an excluded and violated active community. Testimony, as a starting point to establish dialogue, allows the possibility of naming and creating an interaction that supports the memory of subordinate actors (Jelin 2002).

The DVTD is therefore a positioning mechanism of the interests and otherness of those victimized, with the purpose of creating a disruption in the social

consensus proposed by the power groups on the basis of the publication of particular experiences demystifying the institutionalized sense orders.

The expressed memory creates the relationship between the recalled past and the transformation of a state of affairs that will determine social transformations and invoke identity. Identity is understood as the result of complex representational, cultural and nominal processes that run between the institutionally stabilized mechanisms of subjectivity and the vanishing points that people in a position of subordination produce to exert power favoring social transformation. While the TD has articulated forms of visibility attempting to undermine the instituting traits of official consensus, especially in relation to forms of violence and marginalization of subjects historically subalternized, the commodified dynamics of the mass media has led to the undermining of the voices of the victims, reinforcing hegemonic narratives.

The political subject staging in the audiovisual speech includes the use of strategies and semiotic and technological resources. The latter are used by the video producer, who potentiates and gears the witness discursive exercise through those resources which are useful in defining the discursive proposal.

The DVTD is a multimodal speech act which coherently articulates the different sign systems available, in this case study, in an online paper which organizes the audiovisual production. This results in the recognition of a process of meaning-making that exceeds the discourse itself and articulates the technological resources involved; it also creates an aesthetic that grants specific features to discursive expressions.

Most recent practices in documentary video production, via the TD genre, potentially use the resource of intertextuality through the articulation of moving image and still/moving image, whose origins were not necessarily foreseen as part of the new unit of meaning. This visual aid is recognized by semiotics as *collage*. *Collage* combines semiotic systems, formats and resources of graphical representation, with the communicative purpose of creating a new sense in audiovisual materials from various sources and historical moments. The aim of the communicative proposal is to give a new meaning to issues and associated events to new economic, political, social and cultural conditions.

Music, ambient noise, still and moving image, verbal text (sound or graphic) or shapes are organized and edited from the perspective of those enunciating their testimony, which may or may not be directly related to the interests of the expert-producer of audiovisual material. This approach reveals that the DVTD, like any other semiotic object, is created from a subjective location of the speakers facing conflicting phenomena inherent in a community.

The staging of DVTD in the field of contemporary media highlights the paradox originating from, first, the potential of the semiotic action under the

logic of consumption associated with the process of globalization and, second, the disruptive potential characteristic of the semiotic hybrid involved in the TD. In this sense, even if the oligopolistic means establish patterns of action taking as reference the practices and market logics, the disruptive power of the communicative component articulates the impossibility of completely subordinating the constituent signs of TD to the immediate media interests. This communicative component, as an evocative sign unit with multiple interpretations, overflows the instrumental object which defines the media agents placed in the field of the multiple, discontinuous and fleeting, in order to de-absolutize the referents of order and linearity of the media action. Therefore the mediated TD, relatively independent of the meaning purposes circulating, is activated as a deconstructive and parodic unit, as a set of semiotic acts de-structuring the interactive coherence from meaning –which defines specific purposes– to interlocutors.

2 About the doings and their routes

The methodological procedure is developed in three phases: identification of the social issue, decoding of the speeches under analysis and social interpretation of resource use and discursive strategies identified. Multimodal speeches are associated and composed by various sign systems –the DVTD in this case, finished performances, mechanisms and strategies of power involved, as well as recognition of the aesthetical, ethical, political and social effects of these semiotic constructions. The analysis of the corpus video serves as a reference point for reflecting on the characteristics of the communication components and processes derived from the representation of media proposals.

Addressing the issue of land dispossession in DVTD to recognize the way the media discourse produces voices, identities and means implies providing explanations of how different types of resources and strategies in media communicative acts are combined. This reflection is in the field of critical studies of multimodal discourse and combines different categories that are part of a process of qualitative analysis, which aims to describe and explain the specificities of multimodal and multimedia discourses on *Semana.com*. The corpus of this research was collected between July 20, 2010 and July 20, 2012 from the video *Victims project: land dispossession*.

Analysis of the video links the discourses constructed to social and political conditions of its production and circulation, reconstructing the ways the conflicts are represented and the ways the discursive activity involves aspects such as identity, roles, social norms and semiotic mechanisms of social transforma-

tion staged by sub-alternized agents. Potential socio-political consequences of communicative events are presented, discussing the relationship between discursively constructed and reinforced symbolic universes with the exercise of power between different social actors.

3 The voices in the DVTD

On *Semana.com*, audiovisual production and distribution are controlled by those who, on behalf of the media, define the limits and scope of material that is staged. In the case of the DVTD *Proyecto Víctimas: despojo de tierras*, the authorship is collective and institutional (*Semana.com* and *Señal Colombia*¹) and the manager is anonymous. The situational context in which production takes place (June 1, 2013) corresponds to the deepening of discussions about the implementation of the Land Restitution and Victims Law between the pro-Uribe legislators and the new coalition government – which came to be called the government of “National Unity” – in the context of the implementation of regulatory decrees that give effect to the afore mentioned law. The recognition of the limits of Law 795/2005, (Ley de Justicia y Paz – Justice and Peace Law), which was one of the initiatives under former President Uribe, became one of the precedents for the deepening of tensions between the two disputing sectors, after it became obvious that the old paramilitary structures were still practicing violence even when they had supposedly demobilized.

The website of the video *Proyecto Víctimas: despojo de tierras*, is characterized by integrating different types of interactive resources such as videos, information tabs, statistical information for each item listed, photo galleries per item and related articles. It also includes an interactive timeline of events for which the criteria for their selection – from 1984 to 2013 – has not been established, and also an explicit resource of intertextuality using the links referring to articles and news *Semana* has produced about the events that are referenced in the timeline. The website makes the background and issues related to the Ley de Víctimas visible, photojournalism which aspires to cover problematic situations associ-

¹ *Señal Colombia* is a TV channel funded by the Colombian State, whose mission is to create, design, produce, implement, maintain and circulate cultural, educational and institutional content, and information for all kinds of consumption. *Señal Colombia*, as a public broadcaster, fits informative guidelines defined by the state and exposes contents that are functional to the realization of government policies. For more information see: <http://www.sistemasenalcolombia.gov.co/>

ated with acts of armed violence, images of the “emblematic victims” and art and cultural exhibitions on the armed conflict.

The production of the DVTD appropriates paratexts, like the cover, with interspersed still images under the title “Victims project”. The introduction – “An overwhelming reality” – contains still and moving pictures, and some stats and music, all combined in a verbal text that accompanies it independently. *Proyecto Víctimas: despojo de tierras* includes a cover in which, besides the title, a picture of a demonstration in which two banners standing with the message ‘LAND AND LIFE’² (Image 1) is observed. The video consists of a succession of six still images, moving images of a sequence ranging from 0:24.9 to 1:07.2 minute, and a background music throughout the video. Clicking the link displayed from the navigation menu in the “LAND DISPOSSESSION” section will provide more information about the discursive proposal from the witness-complainant. The photographic sequence, at the introductory section of the video has a contextualizing function. The video begins with a wipe transition effect expressed in the first image, gradually perceived as an image in which the sense of unveiling is displayed, associated with the vanishing of the black smoke initially hidden by the image.



Figure 1: first shot from *Victims project: land dispossession*

The music in the video is composed in a minor key, which is used, in this case, to evoke the sense of sadness and melancholy, and to denote precarious environments, discontent and gloom. Given that at the beginning the DVTD does not

² Tierra y Vida is a farmer association that was founded in 2004 in Uraba, aiming to become a complainant organization of land denuded by various legal and illegal actors responsible for this crime.

have a typical musical piece's rhythmic and harmonic sequencing, its purpose is to function as an environmental resource, building an indexical reference of despair and anguish. The first note at the start of the video is played with electronic instrumentation in which the drums use a noise filter that creates echo, usually used to generate musical environments of uncertainty, breadth and solitude, giving the feeling of indefinite repetition of the rhythmic structure. This environment is amplified if taken into account the organ-like electronic sound at the start of the video and the use of distortion filters.³

The sequence of still images (Figure 2) begins with a long shot showing peasants on horseback or walking through a mountainous country path and carrying white flags. The camera located from behind, in a lateral shot, reflects the testimonial photojournalism, not only reporting but creating a bond with the speaker who observes the problem of displacement and dispossession in Colombia. The thematic spotlight is placed from left to right, creating a sense of routine and continuity. The visual space gives a sense of prominence in a wild nature, whose visual texture suggests roughness, aridity and a warm weather that is explicit in the characters clothes. Later, a row of characters – men, women and children – appears below the horizontal center section of the screen, where the color, brightness and the vertical natural light is concentrated. The narrative tension built comes from the multiple views this journey imposes to those represented as anonymous peasants, whose progress is marked by the symbol of peace expressed in the white flags.

Using the fade effect, the first picture gives way to the third one showing the next digit and the sentence: “2,985,798 hectares of reclaimed land”. The picture identifies two issues inherent to the phenomenon of dispossession: first, the quantitative assertion about a dispossessed and reclaimed land, which, as in almost all dispossessed land statistics in Colombia, lacks a reputable source. Second, on the basis of statistical data, a destroyed place, in which the characters belong to the Afro-Colombian community that has been historically marginalized and victimized through the dispossession of their ancestral lands in the context of the armed conflict.

³ This analysis is supported by Suseih Cajamarca, linguistics student, National University of Colombia.



Figure 2: Introductory photographs sequence *Victims project: land dispossession*. *Semana.com*

The previous picture and the next fade again and they are recorded at a high angle view. This camera angle directly fits with the position of power of the photographer, not only in terms of what s/he knows, but with the ability to segment what s/he is showing. The photographer's view suggests potential media skills to represent, in a general way, the suffering experienced by victimized individuals who are presented in most of the images as patients. The camera movement creates the feeling of transition between what was previously expressed and what follows using zoom out, thus helping to accentuate the sense of generality. The characterization captures a waterway (river) mobilization of Afro-descendent people, emphasizing the photographer and is located in the bottom right.

The fourth picture fades with the aforementioned image and reconstructs an event that is identified through the banner: "TIERRA Y VIDA" (Land and life), a *leitmotif* proposed from the first shot. This time, the identity reiteration of the Afro-descendent is developed from a midshot, allowing the recognition of the first four faces of the protesters who assume responsibility for the exhibited slogan. The Afro-Colombian reiteration, besides suggesting transitivity between the condition of precariousness that is exposed and the group that is referenced semiotically, constitutes an attributive resource that can normalize the representation of marginality in relation to African communities by not including other groups also affected by the phenomenon of dispossession. The fade, the zoom out and the high angle view of the fifth photograph allow, first, the visualization of an empty focal point on a wooden floor and, second, the detachment from the reality represented.

The upper left of the fifth photograph shows the body of a girl whose head is out of the frame, the feet of an adult and the head of another girl. In the lower left section, the head of a seated person with a hand on his face can be seen, showing concern and anguish. In the upper right section, the body of a girl lying and the upper body and legs of an adult man carrying black shorts and flip flops can be observed. Poverty and vulnerability can be inferred from the positions of these bodies and clothes. In the lower right section two children are displayed: a baby being held by an adult woman and a girl with a red dress. The barefoot as symbol is reiterated throughout the picture, rebuilding the stereotypical imagery of “poor people”. The positions of the characters on display reflects a sense of inaction, abandonment, despair and expectation, attributed, in this case, to Afro-descendent people. Visual resources in the video production rebuild a hierarchical relationship of power.

Transition from the fifth to the sixth photograph sees the reiteration of the fourth image in which a scene of displacement is visible, focusing prominently and clearly on a wheelbarrow with someone's belongings. The presence of a person is implied; the foot size and height suggests it is a minor. The semantic value of the image leads to the right section of the photograph, in a medium long shot, in which a peasant woman carrying a cardboard box on her head is observed. At the bottom of the picture, two women and a man going along the path in the opposite direction are observed. Here, the truck becomes the icon of displacement.

The moving image, the second element of the video under analysis, begins with an identification section in which Carmen Palencia⁴ (Figure 3) is presented as an authoritative voice, because of her membership in the Asociación Nacional de Víctimas por la Restitución y el Acceso a la Tierra (National Association of Victims for the Restitution and the Access to Land). The identification includes a box with the map of Colombia and a red star on the northwestern region of the country –Apartadó, Urabá, Antioquia– which functions as a deictic resource and locates the witness-complainant geographically. The red star identifying the region establishes an inter-textual relationship attaching the territory of reference to a specific political positioning and also proposes, through colour, a sense of danger in a double allocation process that goes from the political to the violence described.

⁴ Carmen Palencia is the founder of Land and Life Association (2004) and the National Association of Victims for Restitution and Access to Land (2009), where she served as president until 2013. The National Association brings together farmer organizations fighting for the restitution of their lands



Figure 3: Moving image in the video *Victims project: land dispossession*

The design and production of TD videos is formulated from some conceptual considerations of *collage*. The amplifying semantic function of *collage* serves to expand its influence on the still and moving image, its relationship with temporality and the ways in which narrative is constructed. In the process of formulating a new unit of meaning, discourse proposes a representation that no longer refers to the fragment of external reality it represents, but a new updated version of the representation of the social problem. The collage's typical inter-textual relations have, in common with what happens in the production process of art and other cultural expressions, the following features: the appropriation of previously existing elements, whose fragments are reconfigured in the visual piece; and heterogeneous and eclectic works made from quotes and copied or extracted elements from unclear sources. Re-use of these semiotic materials, which had at some point particular but not necessarily similar purposes, transforms the processes of production of meaning, aesthetics and applications, modifying what had traditionally characterized the originality of the piece.

The new composition of the video under study reveals meanings by deliberate use of formal potentials along a process of contextualization/re-contextualization.⁵ The conceptual strategy and theoretical discourse that supports it have a representational value, which re-sizes the new visual expression and defines the exercise of power in the process of constructing new meaning. Anchoring to

⁵ The process of contextualization – recontextualization involves the activation of two semantic-pragmatic operations, in which the formal content is taken from an original piece – produced in a specific space and time – to update a set of knowledge that give a particular sense. Therefore, by being located in a new piece, the content generates new meanings that lead to new processes in which meaning is expanded, accentuated and transformed.

the new socio-historical and political context creates a symbolic-cultural product that makes reality and reflections on its particularities visible along with the contradictions that govern their legitimacy. *Collage*, from which the significance of the videos derives, generates a sense articulated to incongruencies, hesitations and fractures, which determine the specific functioning, in this case, of documentary videos. This articulatory mobility, inherent to the different sign expressions typified by its intertextuality, stages TDs anchored to verbal expressions in this case. This set is its visual-sound condition.

Carmen Palencia, putting the people victimized by the phenomenon of dispossession in Colombia on display, discusses with impunity, the inefficiency of the state and the crimes and murders committed against victimized populations. In the verbal aspect, the witness-complainant adopts the collective position and emphasizes her ability to denounce the state: “we have detected and we have told the government, to president Santos himself, we have told him very respectfully [...]”. On one hand, in the voice of Carmen Palencia, the victimized subjects constitute active subjects – “we see and detect” – to make a denunciation against impunity linked to the State action; on the other, she expresses the interest to denounce the perpetrators, placing them in a space and time. This first video amplifies the TD.

There are three major flaws we have detected and we have told the government, to president Santos himself, we have told him very respectfully, from our position as victims. One of the first flaws we see and we detected is the lack of results from the Attorney General's Office, on the subject of investigation, capture and prosecution of the perpetrators who are fully identified in all regions, in all departments, each one of them has up to forty criminal complaints, but nothing happens. And today, at this time, we find people in Urabá, in Montes de María, in Guajira, which are threatening and murdering peasants [...].

The shot of Carmen Palencia was filmed as a close-up with a static camera at the right of the frame. A lateral artificial light on the character gives volume to the face and emphasizes her expressions. The representation of reality of the DVTD appropriates the art of observation, keeping the camera still to give prominence to the witness-complainant. Using direct sound makes it impossible to identify the researcher-interviewer. The process of semiotic production of the video is characterized by the privileged selection and hierarchy of institutions presenting the documentary, so that the editing is guided by the principles of profitability, efficiency and impact which may arise with the video distribution.

The use of colour and lighting reflects specific semiotic dimensions that relate meanings, codes and values with specific socio-historical locations. In this case, the cold light on the witness-complainant face contributes to the construction of the sense of burden attributed as an inherent feature of a victimized subject. The

black suit and the striped blouse, a contrast of blue and white, reveals a cultural practice where black represents sadness/death, with a certain position and sense of elegance. Additionally, the image creates a sense of amalgamation between the body of the witness-complainant and the darkness of the inner/outer room environment where Carmen Palencia is. The amalgamation of black and shadows elides corporeality, creates a sense of commonality and produces an atmosphere of gloom providing transitivity between the darkness of the stage and the invisibility of the victim.

The use of colour evokes emotional states that constitute cognitive factors, guiding the interpretation process. Using a red filter for the image sequence before Palencia's testimony promotes a sense of unease and adversity, achieved when red colors are clarified and complementary colors are obscured, deepening the sense of contrast, which affects the interpretation the interlocutors make about Palencia's testimony. The dark background, visually framing Palencia's testimony, is proposed as a mechanism for focusing on the interlocutor and highlighting the seriousness and solemnity of what she exposes. The interview location is part of a set of semiotic choices made by Palencia's interviewer and is therefore linked to the communicative purposes of *Semana.com*.

The video closure, via the lexical unit "VÍCTIMAS" (victims), topicalizes the group victimized and collects the graphic resources of the opening video. This time, at the bottom, the label or hashtag "# ProyectoVíctimas ('Victims Project')" and the information of the products of the project "Conversatorio" (Discussion), "Libro" (Book), "Edición" (Edit), "Multimedia", "TV" and "Redes Sociales" (Social Media) can be observed. The video Proyecto Víctimas: Carmen Palencia (Victims Project: Carmen Palencia) is contextualized within the ten topics arising in the project addressing subjects such as "Conversatorio" – where the project is publicly presented and some members of civil society, representatives of the state and victimized people have a voice, "Ejecuciones extrajudiciales" (extrajudicial executions), "minas anti-personales" (anti-personnel mines), "reclutamiento infantil" (child recruitment), "violencia contra afros" (violence against afro-descendent), "torturas y amenazas" (torture and threats), "despojo de tierras" (land dispossession), "destrucción de pueblo" (destruction of the people), "desaparición forzada" (forced disappearance), "testimonio" (testimony), "con las víctimas" (with the victims), "heroes anónimos" (anonymous heroes), "víctimas ejemplares" (exemplary victims) and "Semana en vivo" (Semana live). The media proposal creates a scenario in which key issues of the Colombian armed conflict are assembled, segmenting the victimized communities in relation to each of the topics included in the problem of violence.



Figure 4: Context of the DVTD *Proyecto Víctimas: despojo de tierras*

In Figure 4, the hierarchical structuring of the problems of violence stemming from Colombia's armed conflict is juxtaposed with mechanisms of visual hierarchy so that the environment of the victimized group is verified. The hierarchical structuring the video section also includes a table of contents via a link in the top navigation bar or the links directing to the general contents of the project. Putting the video into context, the project's name – once institutionally linked to the colour yellow, which is cultural marker of alert in the West – can be observed on a black background. The graphic design of the project's name is characterized

by being split into two. First, on a rectangular image with a yellow background, whose lower limit mimics a toothed object, the word “PROYECTO” in black lettering appears. Secondly, the word “VÍCTIMAS” builds on the selected yellow to identify the project. The accent mark of the second word is between the second and third tooth, cognitively evoking the rustic sense of such tools similar to the characteristics of the image: hack saw, chain saw, hand saw, etc. The typography shows manipulation, with small spots and fractures in the letters, creating the feeling of deterioration. The institutional brand appears, immediately located in the center and colored red.

The purpose of institutionalizing the video is evident from minute 0:03.9 and 0:18.6, where the project identification and those represented as victimized are displayed: the witness-complainant and her institutional affiliation. The double victim identification is divided by a red line addressing the *Semana* magazine ID. Using the blur technique, from 0 to 19.5, the magazine ID appears and stands in place until the end of the video. The presence of the explicit reference to *Semana* magazine shows the place of authority that the magazine attributes to itself, as well as the attempt to capitalize on the TD in accordance with its media interests.

This contents of the video are located in a fragmented way in the two videos that make up the section whose theme is “Despojo de tierras” (Land dispossession). The video reiterates – between minutes 0:03.9 and 0:46.3 what – the person who assumes the victimized subjects’ voice expresses in the first video in the role of witness-complainant. The second part is conceptualized around five thematic groups: destruction of houses in La Guajira; collective displacement of Montes de María; breach of duty by the Attorney General’s Office; slow and insufficient actions by CI2RT⁶ and the Ministry of Justice; and corruption and crime in state agencies infiltrated by actors that contribute to the maintenance of the phenomenon of dispossession in Colombia. The closure is framed on a white background with the magazine logo.

There are three major flaws that we have detected and we have told the government, eh ... to president Santos himself, we have told him very respectfully, from our position as victims. One of the first flaws we see and we detected is the lack of results from the Attorney General’s Office, on the subject of investigation, capture and prosecution of the perpetrators

⁶ *Centro Integrado de Inteligencia para la Restitución de Tierras* (‘Integrated Intelligence for Land Restitution Center’), created in 2011 with the specific function of protecting the restitution process against the risk of capture, infiltration or pressure from illegal armed groups; coordinating State intelligence on security in areas of restitution and deploy intelligence of State in areas of restitution and security to provide protection to victims of dispossession that will benefit from the policy of land restitution.

who are fully identified in all regions, in all departments, each one of them has up to forty criminal complaints, but nothing happens. And today, we find people threatening and murdering peasants in Urabá, in Montes de María, in La Guajira, and ... For example, today, they went to La Guajira, to ... visit a group of settlers who lodged their complaints ... filed their complaints, and they (the perpetrators) destroyed all their ranches and threatened them. In Montes de María, last week... the whole members of Land and Life of Montes de María left. And it's happening all across the country because the prosecution is not acting, is not operating in that sense. Also another big problem is the difficulty with... the slowness with which the CI2RT and the Ministry of Defense are telling the Land Restitution Unit: "you can micro-focus here and not there". They are doing it very slowly, very parsimoniously, and that's one of the big spoke in the wheel of land restitution. The other difficulty is ... the ... lack of cleansings of institutions in the regions. Regions still have institutions that remain co-opted by the organized criminal apparatus of power that exists, which was set up to seize power and to legalize the dispossession.

The representative voice of victimized communities is the multimodal discursive expression, supported in a verbal narrative, in which the identity is constituted in subjective and inter-subjective practices, relationships and processes. The identity construction of victimized subjects is represented as a social and historical reality in which the victims' identities are produced, processed and discussed discursively. Video, as a cultural symbolic object, is understood as an identity narrative, which retrieves historical, cultural, economic and political conditions that account for a fundamental problem in Colombian society, marked by an internal armed conflict that has installed, aggravated and facilitated dispossession of land, of mainly rural, indigenous and Afro-descendent communities. The voice of the victimized subjects is the expression of active participation in the vindication of the rights and demands of socialization as part of a process of citizenship-building.

4 Conclusions

The potential of DVTD is reflected in the articulation of semiotic resources which make the voices of the subjects that have historically been victimized and marginalized from spaces of construction of the public visible. Although this hybridization of genres and formats allows for the inclusion of the main issues of Colombian social life in the public agenda – i.e. the issue of land dispossession – the inherent dynamic of commercial media activity has led to the functionalization of the testimonial practice of marginalized individuals. This is confirmed when victimized individuals are treated as passive individuals and the victim status is

asserted, dismissing the potential victimized individuals have to manage their own affairs and exercise rights that have been denied to them.

The DVTD, that gives voice to Palencia, creates a set of communicative conditions that strategically serve to build the sense of the ability of victimized subjects. This action allows them to deploy a type of social practice which refers to denouncing a state of violence against civil society, specifically against marginalized communities being violated in all spheres of social and cultural life, when they are addressed upon the issues of dispossession and displacement. The video creates the context for sociopolitical action in which a representative voice – a socio-culturally recognized victimized woman – accepts the responsibility to transform, first in the symbolic order and then in the practical aspect, the conditions of everyday life.

The media strategy built throughout the video documentary appears to be attached to a socio-economic strategy and policy aiming to change beliefs and opinions in regard to the action of confrontation in the armed conflict. The voice of the victimized communities' representative is located in a multimedia platform, involving the *Semana.com* website format, the paper magazine format and the national television (*Señal Colombia*) format. The multimedia offering serves to build the image of a victimized person whose presence exceeds, symbolically and materially, the reality of most people victimized due to land dispossession. The representation of victimization includes a potential for socio-political action, which is assignable only to the voice representing all victimized subjects, fragmenting a reality that surpasses what is represented.

The construction of the voices – and therefore the presence of discursive subjects – accounts for who effectively communicates or makes dialogue with web users, magazine readers or television viewers. The invisible presence of the expert/researcher/interviewer contributes to the construction of what is represented. Thus, not only does it effectively generate meaning when regulating and deciding how identities of those who are called victims are constructed, but it identifies production processes, design and distribution of meanings. These symbolic tissues are anchored to the positions adopted to interpret the socio-historical, political and cultural conditions that determine the value system it proposes. Consequently, cognitive frames of interpretation determined by socially stabilized knowledge systems associated with the differential access to technological resources involved are generated. The role of the invisible presence of the expert/researcher/interviewer serves the purpose of developing guiding strategies on the ways the mediated social problem is shown and constructed in order to make a public reality that brings into play interests, motivations and attitudes regarding the phenomenon of dispossession.

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Section 6:

Questioning the logic of semiotics

Ugo Volli

Sense beyond communication

Abstract: Ferdinand de Saussure assigned to semiotics the mission to study “the life of signs as part of social life” and the conception of Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotics was even more extensive. But, in fact, semiotics in recent decades has been mainly occupied by a much narrower class of signs, those whose main function is “referential” in the sense of Jakobson (including the reference to possible words, as happens in fiction, paintings, literature etc.). There is a wide range of signs, (or as we prefer to say today, emphasizing the complexity: of texts) that work in a very different way. They do not refer to some external reality, do not stay “for the other”, but communicate a sender’s identity (“expressive” function), invite recipients to treat him/her in a certain way (“phatic” function), attest and often even form some standing or relation. They are signs because they literally make sense and it is possible to lie through them, but they do not have the same structure and working which characterizes the “regular” texts. These signs are “self-effective” or performative, as Austin would say, or expressive; that means they work just for the fact of being used and put in action, as happens in cases as diverse as intrinsically coded acts, many religious and civil rites aimed at memory, in clothing, status symbols, nonverbal language etc.

Keywords: Appearance, communication, marking, semiotics, society

In this paper I draw attention to certain objects which pertain to the field of semiotics: their working is based upon sense effects, but which are usually not discussed in semiotic theory, nor thoroughly analyzed. They are expressive facts – richly widespread in daily life – where the common notions of sign, text, communications are inadequate. That difficulty of using the most basic notions of semiotics for them is the reason why they are often not even taken in account in the standard semiotic handbooks, though they are often quoted as communication devices. To do this I will have to return to discuss well known definitions and models, to become in a way again a naive semiotician, what Roland Barthes called once “un semioticien sauvage”. I apologize in advance if I will do it in a rather fast and sometimes disrespectful way and also exposing a rather unorthodox line of thought.

Like any other ideal-typical scheme that aims at understanding a complex social reality (but often also a number of *natural* realities), the traditional concep-

tualization of communication, namely that one which is often expressed with the scheme of Jakobson (1966), should not be considered naively as a simple description of empirical facts, but instead as a modelling, a simplification that in principle has a strong metaphorical nature, in the line we know from both epistemological studies (Montuschi 1993, Boyd 1993) and from cognitive theories (starting from classic Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In particular it is worth noting that the model of Jakobson for communication is built upon the metaphor of someone (a *sender*) delivering or selling or giving something – which in the more general case is thought as immaterial as information is – using for this purpose a *channel* (called so because of another not coordinated metaphor of barges sailing on the earth more or less smoothly through channels; but often mentioned only as a *medium* because of its intermediate position) and somehow reaching this way a *recipient* (again according to the metaphor of giving).

Following this metaphor, communication is a determined act that has the nature of gift or of sale or of shipping, which is a description more evocative than the cold analysis we could give in terms of the standard semiotic model: the issuer produces the fact that someone, the recipient, is put in conjunction with a meaning. Jakobson, as is known, elaborated this model departing from the classical theory of information, formulated within the framework of the engineering of telephone technology (Shannon and Weaver 1949), but considering also the Saussurean double-sided model of sign. So in this complex metaphoric system, what is transmitted (or given) is again a container, said *message*, that has itself the ability to deliver a *content* that Jakobson called improperly *context*, but clearly is a *meaning* or a *reference* – I will not discuss here the difference.

There are so the two levels of delivering (1. a message/container shipped by communication actors through a *social-technological process* and 2. a meaning/content shipped by the message through a *semiotic process*). In order to put the second one in action, there is necessarily the intervention of a new instance (and a third metaphoric field) the *code*. The original Latin meaning of this word used to be a collection of waxed tablets, hence a book, but over time, through legal terminology, “code” has become a translational device of correspondence. The book of the law prescribes that, if this or that fact happens, for example a crime, then another fact, for example a punishment, *must* happen. In the writing system, if you read a certain combination of characters, for example in a secret message, then you *must* understand a certain word or a concept. In this way, a “code” became the diffused metaphor for regulated and *mandatory* system of coupling, a list of signifiers (possibly devoid of intrinsic meaning) and a list of meanings, linked by a biunivocal relation – as it happens in some artificial system of transliteration, for instance the Morse or ASCII codes (for a more detailed analysis see Eco 1975). Using this metaphor implies that the meaningfulness in communication is regu-

lated in a rigid, biunivocal, compositional way. We know that this metaphor is not really efficient for such complex semiotic systems as natural language, let alone visual and cinematographic communication. Language is not a nomenclature, images are not decomposable in minimal entities listable in a code. Nevertheless, often the word “code” and the relative metaphor are freely used in semiotics.

There are more problems beyond the inadequacy of the “code”. All this complex metaphorical system (the transfer of a concrete object which somehow contains another abstract one) can be somehow adequate in the case of describing the working of a series of traditional communication tools, from the letter to discourse (in the sense of public speech), from the book to the paper to the movie, until the phone call and to SMS or email. Namely, in all these cases there is an action that can be easily categorized as the delivery of a certain more or less concrete object towards a recipient: an object as a written page or a modulated electromagnetic wave *directed by someone to someone else*. This object in turn somehow *contains* information that, in principle, could be detached from the support and conveyed otherwise. This possibility of detaching the content from its *container* is a basic condition both for a Greimassian semiotics, which studies supposed “deep levels” of significations and therefore considers secondary the material “surface” or “manifestation” of it; and for the Peircean one, where being translatable in another sign is a necessary condition for the signs being meaningful.

But this is not always the case. In fact in other classical communicative situations, such as music, fiction and poetry, that scheme is clearly poorly suited or completely wrong, since the ability to transmit a meaning independent from the materiality of the message is certainly doubtful, if even it is somehow present. The limits of this model were often detected, for example, by proposing the alternative metaphor of “pooling resource assets” (Pearce 1989, Volli 2008) and there is no need to return to the details of this point. But I will consider another class of communication.

Before doing so, it is worth mentioning two other time features of this metaphor that are usually not taken into account. On the one hand, in an act of transmission that is understood as a gift or transfer there must be in it an ‘aspectuality’ that looks always *punctual* (as opposed to *durative*), no matter the verbal tense and physical time that may be involved. All communication, according to this metaphor, is sent *at a certain time* – although the transmission may possibly be repeated several times, for example at each screening of a movie, but always following a *rather punctual timing*. It has also, in order to be qualified as a gift or a shipping, to be delivered in a *fairly narrow interval*. As a letter (in postal systems that work) must be delivered quickly enough to maintain its relevance, so any

communication can not last too long, at least if it is to stay in this metaphoric system.

Of course, the characteristic delay of writing, much loved by Derrida, is impossible to be included in this metaphorical field. When I read a plate with the name of a street, or a street sign, I cannot think that it is *given* or *addressed personally* to me; they speak to everybody happening to be in this place. It is not *as* a letter, but *as* music randomly diffused in the neighborhood of a radio.

On the other hand, the metaphor of giving necessarily implies an actantial system in three parts (in the traditional terminology: a sender, a message and a recipient), where the three are distinct not only logically, but also factually. That means that the issuer must be different from recipient – and especially different from the message. Although there are cases of giving that constitute an exception to this division of roles (for example selling himself “to the devil” out of interest, or making himself the gift of a vacation etc.), these cases are already to be considered different extensions of our metaphor that point to other directions without a real action of giving: in the first case what is given or promised is “the immortal soul”, as distinct from the empirical person making the deal, as is very clear in Goethe’s *Faust*; in the second nothing is really displaced, apart from the donor himself.

In the case of quotidian communication, the metaphor of shipping holds only if the tripartite division is fully respected, namely that three concrete actors for the three different actants are identifiable and distinguishable. In many cases, these features make sense: when you write a text message or call someone, the phone certainly is not the other person and the short message is clearly distinct from those who enter it on the phone. Other times, even in these classic cases, the distinction does not hold. “The Holocene man” in the novel of Max Frisch, is compelled to write countless notes addressed to himself and so does Beckett’s Krapp with audio tapes – as does anyone who writes a diary. This business of “self-communication” is necessarily practiced in varying degrees by everyone – and, thus, factually, sender and receiver can coincide, especially if the temporality of the event is not immediate, that is, if there is a *decalage* or dif / ference in the sense of Derrida (1967). But with the writing *decalage* we are already driven on a pretty far-fetched extension of the metaphor, which betrays its limits. It is not clear, in my opinion, that writing a journal is an act of communication.

But there is also a series of other extremely interesting cases in which the sender and the message at least partly coincide. These are the communications in which I am interested here. I mean the cases where the communicative phenomenon consists only *in the fact that someone or something is perceived in a certain way*: “elegant”, for example, or “female” or “wealthy” or “foreigner” or “human” etc. We understand these qualities coming from him or her; in some cases the

subject can have acted somehow in order to get this appearance; in other cases there is not this work of building up such a quality. But he or she actually is not *giving* us anything, not even abstract things such as words or gestures. The object of our observation just appears *in a certain way*. In this case obviously there is a more or less complete physical coincidence between issuer and message, because these *appearances* can be materialized in objects bought by him or her (clothing, jewelry, but also perfumes, makeup ...) or details of the body (hairstyles, piercings ...) in expressions, physical symptoms (pallor, swelling ...), general qualities (the shape of the body, etc.)

The right name for these features would probably be “expression”. Another name that would certainly be useful in this context, especially for its pragmatic content, is cognitive affordance, in the sense of Gibson (1979) and Norman (1988). But, again, in order not to create confusion with semiotic terminology I will systematically use the terminology of *appearance*. It is important to emphasize from the beginning that “appearance” of this kind is not necessarily denying or even covering a reality or a truth or substance that is somehow different from what is on the surface. It is just the necessary interface that everything in the world produces upon contact with its environment, in a more or less conscious, more or less artificial and with a more or less conventional decision. Appearances are not necessarily “masks” or lying devices; often they are “skins” protecting their content.

The first level of this is the simple appearance of a being, as the “flower of youth” of the female characters of Proust and Leopardi and many others, but also the colour and scent of the rose, the fur of animals, the attractiveness of a smile, the murmur of a stream, the gray hair of the elderly. All these are “appearances” in the sense just proposed, the meaning of which (the truth) is naturally filtered by the “recipient” or interpreter according to his Encyclopedia. Also what is called by Greimas “extasy” is an effect of appearance. Such appearances are, of course, very important for semiotics in the sense that they are very widely spread and involve a series of social phenomena that are often listed as “communication” – from zoosemiotics to fashion, from “body language” to “natural signs” such as smoke for fire or medical symptoms. Therefore they are of remarkable interest to semiotics.

In fact, the communicative power of all these examples is obvious, but mostly their semantic working is perplexing and challenges theory so that the study of these phenomena is usually poorly developed within semiotics. This happens not because they are too complicated: just the opposite. What makes it difficult to analyze forms of communication such as fashion, furniture, design, non-verbal communication, etc. is the poverty and the vagueness of the contents that appear to be conveyed by these communications, their self-referential character. There

is no message, no code, no delivery, no three classical actants of communication. There is just an appearance, made for all and for nobody, and a maintained appearance, not something *given* to somebody.

Let us try to understand this more fully. Very often, wearing vestments in a certain way, using some hairstyle, living in a certain house or using certain accessories, simply says that *the person behaving this way belongs to the social category that may or must lead to those appearances*. There are many cases well known for showing the means of working of this paradoxical way of meaning, for example that of jeans (Volli 1991). One can find only a vague connotative consonance among the uniform of low-skilled jobs of America at the turn of 1900, the typical leisure garment in Europe during the Nineties, the sign of youth revolt of the Sixties, the “legend” of Levis, the call to America and to freedom in Prague ‘68 and the same call made by the insurgents of Tiananmen Square three decades later, the school standard garment clothing that still holds, the different versions tailored, designed, signed fashioned with various shapes of leg and decorations and cuts that followed over time. Certainly the meaning of jeans was modulated because of certain technical characteristics of these trousers (their resistance, the “memory” of indigo, the low cost, the industrial technology) and the reference to sociocultural context. But for understanding their “message” it is necessary to look to social habits in every precise time and place: wearing jeans means just pretending to be a person of the category that, in this time and place, behaves this way.

This situation is by no means to be taken as a phenomenon similar to the “false friends” in translation sometimes caused by linguistic arbitrariness (for instance “burro” in Italian that means butter and Spanish “burro” meaning donkey). In these cases, it is true that there is no linguistic institution of a dictionary that simply solves the translation problem: instead, *the meaning of appearances always consists in the social circumstances of their use*, as had already been noticed by Roland Barthes (1969). The syntactic system of fashion, in his analysis, is organized in a very complex variations on three levels:

- (1) some object of some defined typology which has
- (2) a part or characteristic, or the “taxic level” in Floch’s (1995) classical analysis
- (3) made in a specific way (for instance (1) pants with a (3) wide (2) lapel; a (1) skirt whose (2) color is (3) purple)

This scheme seems to me to be less than theoretically impeccable: many objections could be raised. Yet the idea is quite clear and works – not only for clothes, but also for car design, architecture etc. Barthes argues that on this basis it is possible to build up a semiotics of clothes or – more precisely in this case – to rationalize in a syntactic structure the descriptions found in his corpus of fashion jour-

nals, invoking the principles of relevance and invariance to justify the analysis. In fact, Barthes' *Système de la Mode* succeeds in building up a syntactical scheme for the descriptions of clothing diffused in the fashion publications of the Sixties. Today the kind of detailed captions found by Barthes are not used anymore; but one can agree with Barthes in assuming a correspondence between the organizations of the *metalanguage semantics* (the written captions) and the *syntax of the object languages* (the clothes). In a situation of "normal fashion" (in the same meaning of Kuhn's 1962 "normal science") the evolution and the meaningfulness of clothing works through a *variation system*, which is well characterized in the Barthesian method of three levels in fashion captions.

Nevertheless, if one tries to investigate the semantic level of clothing, what these systems of communication ultimately mean for Barthes are merely circumstantial selections of use: an attire *for office, for evening, for ski-ing*, perhaps with the further selection to be *signed by* this or that label, to be *tied to* this or that time, or in a more general way *referring to* this or that social role, class, cultural background, personal identity. Hence, in the case of fashion, appearance (in the sense used in the present article) *points to the context in which this appearance is appropriate*, including the identity of the person. Uniforms add some minor symbolic (in Peircean terms) elements that recall, in a usually very basic way, functions and hierarchies: colours, arbitrary signs for military ranks, decorations etc.

All this, however, falls within the contextual specification of the appearances. But it is important to stress that we are not dealing here with a "communication" where we could distinguish the message from the issuer, because *that consists exactly in the appearance of this*. In formally settled cases, assuming the 'wrong' appearance (for instance dressing as a policeman without being one) can be a real crime. Nor is there a specific time or a specific duration of this "communication", since its effect comes together with all the activities or even the simple presence of whom (or what) is manifested in this appearance, the *actor*, for as long as he/she/it is, in the words of Goffman (1967, 1969) "staged".

From this view we are able to read more precisely the famous "axiom" of Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) that "it is impossible not to communicate": a consideration which appears empirically based, since in social life nothing is ever simply neutral. In other words, thinking *from the point of view of the "recipient"* of this kind of "communication" every thing or person, just in order to be perceived, *must* fall under some qualification (i.e. must be a "so and so") and therefore has to "say" something of himself, to "express" his/her/its appearance.

But, because of the considerations of temporality and actantial structure noted earlier, this "say" – examined with a little care – is a very inaccurate metaphor, as it would more precisely be the "pass" or "give" of the metaphorical regime from which we began. The point is that everything, in order to be really

something, *must* have a sufficient degree of perceptual salience and spatial definition, falling in some perceptual and cognitive category (must be a cat, a mountain, a girl, etc.) and therefore exhibit an appearance in the sense outlined. The more this appearance falls within the scope of encoded experience and thus in the Encyclopedia, namely in the shared and updated competence which is a condition for fully taking part in collective life, the more the appearance of it will be semantically rich and well defined. Also in this sense, of course, one can speak of “semiotics of the natural world” as Greimas did, as long as we take into account the fragility and poverty of this “natural” signification that is always missing articulation.

If we instead start *from the point of view of a possible “sender”* or organizer of some appearance, as everyone of us always is, these considerations allow us to understand the exposure to the world that is part of the human condition and in particular how the body functions as the interface of this exhibition. I cannot avoid communicating because I am not a disembodied subjectivity looking at the world from nowhere, but always I am a body, whose life and activities inevitably expose me to the eye and build up appearances. The necessary significance of human beings is a consequence of the materiality of their lives, of being (also) things exposed to the eye, “things” which not only think, but act, occupy certain material positions, have certain physical aspects, certain characteristics, surround themselves with other things that in turn represent them, maybe camouflage or hide behind them. All this material installation of the subject in the world, or at least an important part of it, can be subjected to decisions, preparations, planning. *The appearance in human beings is a matter of strategy.*

With these considerations we come to another theme often mentioned in semiotics, the relevance of which perhaps, has not yet been fully explored, that of the prosthesis (Eco 1997, § 6.10; Fontanille 2004, probably both developing an intuition of McLuhan 1964). Many objects, and in particular communication tools and media, can be conceived as body prostheses, able to expand as well as to replace the activities we exercise with our body. It is very common to consider not only glasses and the microscope, but also television as a prosthetic view, the phone as prosthetic hearing, the car as a substitute for the legs and so on. It is easy to see that the prosthesis and signs share some very important features: substitution/extension/time prolongation. I do not think that this approach is fully innocent, but this is not the place to discuss it. Let us take it as read that *many active prostheses surround our body and assist our actions*: technological objects, media, clothes etc.

If we accept this point of view, it seems to me quite out of the question that it could be expanded to include items that affect not only *doing* but also *being* and *being perceived*, so that clothes could be considered prosthetic skin not only

for protecting the body, but also for making it visible in this or that way. It is an obvious and often repeated consideration, indeed, that the function of clothes is not only the physical protection of the organism but also manipulation of the communicative body, exposing and hiding certain parts, inflating some organs or decreasing the evidence of others, carrying various types of signals that make sense in social and biological life. I mention above some cases of this *passive prosthetic functionality*. From this point of view we must conclude that clothes are also *prostheses of appearance*, that is, of the significant presence of the body. The same can be said about secondary accessories (handbags, jewelry) and further objects, thus establishing the existence of a second “communicative” functionality of the “active” prosthesis, such as cars, houses, phones etc. Of course, these prostheses of appearance work on the basis of different, more or less explicit and ambiguous, projects: looking sexy, authoritative, younger, Italian, or simply *appearing as one has to appear, being what he is*. In addition to appearance, I will speak in this case of *marking* (referring to the middle age Latin word “marcat-ura”), meaning by this an appearance built up for the purpose of its use. In the event that the marking is meta-linguistic – i.e. that it works on the categorical appearance of a sign – we could follow the suggestion of Agamben (2007, 2008) and call it *signature*:

a signature in the sense of Foucault and Melandri [... is] something that, in a sign or a concept, mark it and exceed it in order to connect it to a particular interpretation or a particular field, but not get out from the semiotic to form a new meaning or a new concept. The signatures move and displace the concepts and signs from one sphere to another [...] without redefine semantically them

The sense here is always made at least in part by an *index* (in the Peircean sense): the appearance says “I’m an x, I’m so and so, I am carrying out this function,” in certain cases “*now is this time (social), this circumstance*”, “*here it takes place this or that practice*”. Think for instance of the toga that makes solemn the court hearing or the graduation session, the cassock of the priest who says Mass, the ritual shawl (tallit), which envelops the person taking part in Hebrew prayers, the tail-coat of the music director, the wedding dress, the palaces, the limousine, the council halls, the churches, the luxury vacation resort, the brands.

There are more or less complex rules for the use of these objects, but ultimately they do not determine the activity: of course you can pray, judge, graduate, making music, marry, move, rest, eat, etc. without these appearances; they do not constitute the activity nor validate it. Instead they make it recognizable from the outside and dignify it, namely they help to give it *a proper shape*, often in the eyes not only of the external public but also of those who carry it.

Looking more closely at this self-communication, we see that *good* appearances associated to a practice do not transmit to those who carry it as new information about the circumstance, because in general the actors have prepared it knowing full well what they intend to do – more so if they have worked out also the appearance. Maybe the right appearance could continuously remind them of this meaning, confirm it, suggest an overall correct attitude (i.e. more appearance). In our terms appearance is not only vestimentary or architectural but also constituted by posture, kinesics, linguistic and paralinguistic choices and, generally by the mode of communication. Its supporting material is the articulation of the substance of expression of the main communication, but appearance often acquires in these cases an independent communicative power and therefore interacts with communication's form, its ability not to determine, but to support. In this work, *consistence* is crucial.

We have to consider again at this point the fundamental distinction between the *given* appearance (in some cases the *natural* appearance), for instance of a flower and of a ripe apple, or of the body tensed in a task or of a body that shows symptoms of a disease – from the *manipulation* of appearance, for example that of make-up on a face, of the bodywork of a car, of the clothes of a girl, of the facade of a house, the expression of an actor. It is worth repeating that *this opposition is not the one between truth and falsehood*, but *between what is given and what is done*, where often doing is mandatory (you cannot go out on the street without clothes, have a car without a bodywork, etc.).

The given appearance is a *prerequisite* for the significance of the world – or rather for the fact that we need to grasp certain states as significant, to build pertinences, gather clues, perform abductions, and so it is the basis of our ability to *inhabit a world* instead to be *abandoned* as objects in a crude reality with which we cannot interact, as it does not make sense for us.

This ability to transform rough reality into a significant world, by filtering it with biological pertinences, can be found very early in the history of life, since the level of unicellular beings indeed perhaps characterizes and defines from the beginning, as Konrad Lorenz (1977) shows, although of course the world exposed to a simple non-human animal is very different from ours and should be characterized according to its systems of perception and its biological needs (von Uexküll 1921).

What interests us most here is the ability of humans to emulate or simulate or modify or create a second artificial appearance, impressing the world and especially their own body with traits that appear significant according to rules of social sense but also of natural ones: this is the case, for example, of those who train not only to be but also to appear strong and healthy. The case of tanning is very significant in this regard. There are societal and social classes in these

societies (for example the nineteenth century bourgeoisie) who have tried to avoid tanning, in order to emphasize the fact of not working in the open air: in other societies, such as ours, the same phenomenon indicates a sporting life and acquires prestige and positive value, basically for the same reasons as having a tan was previously avoided.

Another important distinction should be proposed between *self-marking* and *hetero-marking*. I have provided abundant examples of self-marking, i.e. practices which aim to leave traces on the body and that can be interpreted as meaningful: tattoos, makeup, clothes etc. But it is quite obvious that you can also (hetero) mark objects: trademarks and logos and brands have this function; but at the most basic level this is also true for stains of paint or piles of stones that indicate a path for hikers and emphases of a book, for signatures and the “tags” applied for legal reasons or simply to emphasize a presence, for forms imposed on many goods, for plaques and barcodes etc. There is also hetero-marking of the bodies of other people, the burn marks imposed on slaves and criminals in certain societies (the lily engraved on the body of Milady in *The Three Musketeers*), the shaving of conscripts in military service etc. Many uniforms work this way: those of soldiers and those of prisoners, but also the uniform imposed for certain functions (waiters and employees of certain companies).

The basic operation of these examples of communication is their performative/ perlocutionary character. The cognitive content of a haircut, of the furnishing of a house, of a miniskirt etc. *is usually very impoverished*. If we would like to consider them as signs, we should admit that they are weakly so, with little capacity of information or communication; if we were to treat them as possible texts, we should note generally their delimitation is problematic, the “deep” organization is poor, the sense is heavily delegated to contextual variables and quite difficult to define; rather than in terms of enunciation (the story implicit in them), the narrative is gathered on the enunciational level (who and why chose to use this mark which is the object of value to which s/he aspires etc.).

However, what characterizes the operation of these communication devices is their ability to give “operating instructions” about whom or what brings them, in particular in terms of communication. Whoever dresses as a policeman or priest, whatever the picture that is signed with a name or the garment that bears a certain brand, the boy with blue punk-style hair or tattoos on the body, the book coming out in a certain collection, the concept moved from one area to another while maintaining the link with the name in its original domain (the signature of Agamben), the person smiling and the one running in sports uniform – these do not only communicate *that they are what they are* (of course rightly or wrongly, telling the truth or lying), but also give instructions, lead interpretations not only of themselves but of the meaning of what marks their behaviour.

Much of what is usually considered “communication” works in this way, and does not correspond to the scheme of Jakobson by which we began, not only for the detail of the actantial structure implied or for the metaphorical axes on which it can be conceptualized. On the contrary, the examples I have showed imply a completely different working of communication and direction. If the marking has the effect of *appearing as one should because one is what one is*, as I suggested, its meaning goes further; it lays an implicit claim *to be treated as one should be when one is what one looks through this marking*. The elegant dress asks to be approached with respect, the illustrated cover requires the suspension of disbelief, the miniskirt demands attention to sex appeal, the elegant home suggests respect or envy and so on. The net of markings holds together social life with a series of statements that are made evident by their salient / oppositional characteristics, but they act not so much according to a conceptual semantics, but mainly according to a ‘prototypes pragmatic’, highly sensitive to the context, to known examples, to the fine social, chronological, cultural oscillations of surrounding behavior.

The sense is, instead of a mysterious substance circulating in society, as suggested by many metaphors implicit in current semiotics, always already the result of an *interested* way of perceiving that systematically applies filters of relevance to reality (this is the *inter-esse*, the assumed *being between* that presupposes the interaction and the value system of the perceiver). This perceiving categorizes things according not only to their immediate, but also to their hypothetical, usefulness and danger – according to their appearance.

A certain configuration of stimuli is chosen from the background, thanks to certain specific appearances, and it assumes the meaning of a tree or a street, of an animal or of a human being of the opposite sex, of a house or of a book, on the basis of its ability to enter into various programs of use. Communication is produced by these appearances thanks to a process of marking and offers its object to the interest of the model user – of course, with different success depending on the case.

The most sophisticated structures that semioticians customarily analyze – signs and sign systems, codes, texts, etc. – are particularly complex developments of these mechanisms, that detach themselves and assume an independent value thanks to the abstraction from the context to which they are subjected. But before complicated and grammaticalized communications, before rich and consistent meanings of literature and art, before the subtle rules of social communication and the media, there is the *appearing as one should be for what one is*; the *claiming to be treated the way they should be treated as those that appear in that way*. Or, in a more direct fashion, there is the ability of the “recipient” of these “messages”, that is, of all human beings and even within different limits of the

animals, to capture these affordances in the middle of the immense richness of environmental stimulation, to isolate their salience and relevance as opposed to all the alternatives, to implicitly classify these perceptive emergencies in relation to prototypes, attributing to them implicit programs of use, to evaluate them in the thymic field – in short, to navigate the world and everyday social life. Semiotics of sign and of text arrives later on.

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Farouk Y. Seif

Semiotic paradoxes: Antinomies and ironies in a transmodern world

Abstract: Semiotic paradoxes are essential characteristics of a transmodern World. The diaphanous feature of transmodernity reveals contradictions among a wide range of polarities. The fundamental nature of life itself is paradoxical, and human existence feeds on these contradictory relations. Antinomies and ironies are inherent in the human condition and innate forces in cultural semiotics. Ironically, when societies face crises, there is a tendency to confuse paradoxical phenomena with problematical situations. This tendency seems to be generated by intolerance for those ambiguities and uncertainties that are unavoidable features of semiotic paradoxes. Although we are challenged by the tension among various conflicting forces, the manner in which we deal with the resulting paradoxes offers us the opportunity for fresh interpretations of a reality that we co-create and co-transform.

Key words: semiotics, paradoxes, antinomies, ironies, transmodernity

1 Introduction

We live in a transmodern world. Observing current world events and sociocultural experiences throughout the world, we might declare, with David Harvey (1989), that modern and postmodern eras seem to have become simply historical records of the past. Our social and cultural experiences have definitely highlighted the characteristics of our new age, the world of transmodernity, where paradoxes as forms of antinomies and ironies permeate our lives. Granted, human existence feeds on these contradictory relations throughout recorded history, but in a transmodern world, the phenomenon of semiotic paradoxes seem to be more prevalent features in our quotidian life. And therefore, it is essential to explore antinomies and ironies and their implications by relying on the inclusive characteristics of semiotics, particularly that of Charles Sanders Peirce's philosophy, which is indubitably a *transmodern* semiotics.

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Broadly speaking, all paradoxes are about conclusions that initially represent an air of absurdity, yet have arguments or aspects that sustain them. Paradoxes expose our unfounded biases and unconscious assumptions about that reality we think and perceive as absolute (Seif 2015). And yet, absolute reality does not exist. Semiotic paradoxes are neither true nor false. Transmodernity rejects the notion of absolute reality and the claim that that statement has to be true or false. Transmodernity discards modernity's insistence on autonomy and absoluteness; it also transcends postmodernity's inclination towards dualistic rationality and an either-or position (Seif 2009) and, consequently, ignores our paradoxical experiences, which are composed of the mutual complementarity of antinomies and ironies.

Following Willard Van Orman Quine (1962), we are aware of three distinguished classes of paradoxes: a "veridical paradox" which produces a result that appears absurd, but is demonstrated to be true, and its argument convinces us of its validity nevertheless; a "falsidical paradox" which establishes a proposition that not only appears false or self-contradictory, but also is false due to a fallacy in the demonstration; and an "intractable paradox", which is neither a veridical paradox nor a falsidical paradox, but an "antinomy" which reaches a self-contradictory result by properly applying accepted ways of reasoning.

Whether paradoxes are veridical and falsidical, it is reasonable to emphasize again that a paradox is just any conclusion that at first sounds absurd, but has an argument to sustain it. Nevertheless, the essence of antinomy is the case where an expression is true, if and only if, it is false. However, true or false is always attached to socially constructed formulations. Through mindful reframing, contradictions can lead to breakthroughs that let us participate in the imagination and actualization of a desirable reality.

The most startling of all paradoxes are not assignable to a veridical paradox or falsidical paradox, but to the category of antinomy. An antinomy "packs a surprise that can be accommodated by nothing less than a repudiation of part of our conceptual heritage" (Quine 1962: 7). Therefore, dealing with the category of antinomy requires a major shift in our conventional ways of perceiving contradictions. Rather than problematizing paradoxes, it is rewarding to reinterpret the negating opposites as a mutual complementary of ongoing semiosis. Not only can semiotics identify similarities and differences of categories, it can also reveal the mutuality of interdependent relations in all opposite forces – a task for semioticians to explore further. As John Deely (2001: 668) affirms, in his *Four Ages of Understanding*, "much of what needs to be said in semiotics has yet to be said."

Changing our conceptual heritage happens as a result of scientific advances and technological innovations, such as the Copernican revolution, the shift from Newtonian mechanics to Einstein's theory of relativity, and, more recently, the

sensational experience of hyperreality. Yet, no matter how convincing these radical shifts have been, antinomies continue to be perceived as unexplained phenomena. Take, for instance, the idea of the earth revolving around the sun, which was called the “Copernican paradox” even by the people who accepted it at the time; and ironically, this paradox continues to evoke a sense of wonder.

The shift in our way of perceiving depends on our way of using language. A case in point, we could assign characteristics (adjectives or attributes) to diverse things; what we would be cutting out is the actual association of characteristics with a particular entity or category, and we would be assigning these uttered adjectives or attributes to other entities or categories (Quine 1962). Indeed, we can attribute an adjective or attributes to many unrelated and diverse entities. To illustrate, a red apple, a red bell pepper, and human lips share the same characteristics of red, silky, round, aroma, etc. In other words, we have the choice to move from the strict mode of language to the seamless undifferentiated mode of imagination. Language is one of our systems of communication and signification, but it is not our highest ability for imagination, which Kant (1951) considers a faculty liberated from the standard common sense. A considerable portion of our mental activity is of a nonverbal character.

Although language makes it possible for us to think abstractly, we seem to ignore the use of integrative images in thinking. In the Heideggerian sense, thinking itself is not determined by spoken and written words. Thinking involves much more than words. Since “we think only in signs” (CP 2.302), and the “real thinking-process presumably begins at the very percepts,” where “a percept cannot be represented in words” (CP 2.227), our perception and understanding work by creating and integrating signs. And since imagination involves more than logical, linear operations, and depends on the acquisition, interpretation, and manipulation of images that are superimposed on each other, it does not fit neatly into the mainstream, conservative understanding of paradoxes. Paradoxes, as Gilles Deleuze (1994) says, are diametrically opposed to good sense and common sense. That is not to say that logical and linear operations are trivial, but rather to emphasize the need to transcend cause-effect disposition and to utilize *uncommon* sense, not just *common* sense. Common sense is based upon social norms and regulative synthesis that are neither constitutive nor aim at a deep understanding of antinomies and ironies; but uncommon sense is grounded in the integration and transparency of imaginative interpretations, which are thought provoking for appreciating the higher purpose of paradoxes.

All opposite categories – i.e. truth and lie, real and true, good and bad, love and hate, beauty and ugliness, to name a few – are always associated with social and cultural values; however, values should be relativized in a moral integrity that seeks an undivided whole, not just relying on the Aristotelian ethics, and

trapped by the parochial jeopardy. This moral integrity, which necessitates the move from absolutism to relativism, is attainable through paradoxical thinking. This kind of thinking is not “conceived merely as an activity that obeys norms and a scale of values” (Heidegger 1968: 161), but rather thinking that draws from the Old English word *thanc*, which means the core of the human heart that gives thanks for the gift of thought-provoking (Heidegger 1968).

Paradoxical thinking, which Heidegger hints at as poetic and philosophic, contains both rational and irrational elements (Gebser 1949) and is the only way to deal with, and persevere through, antinomies and ironies. That is why conventional ways of thinking and dualistic predisposition, which rely on cause-and-effect and problem-solving strategies, are extremely inadequate in dealing with paradoxes. We can engage in imaginative interpretation, which is intrinsic to paradoxical thinking, when we are able to make the distinction between paradoxes and problems.

2 Paradoxes are not problems

More often than not, paradoxes are perceived as a problematic dualism that must be fixed to favor one pole in a tensional pair over the other. When societies face crises, there is a tendency to substitute problem-solving strategies for paradoxical thinking, which is intrinsic to the semiotic process and design approach. This habitual cultural tendency seems to be generated by intolerance for those ambiguities and uncertainties that are unavoidable features of paradoxes. This is where relying on mere common sense seems inadequate.

It is really important to be aware of the distinction between what we perceive as problems and what we experience as paradoxes, and to be able to respond appropriately to each case. For whenever paradoxes are perceived as problems, they can never be solved or dissolved. Rather, sooner or later, apparent solutions are discovered to be illusions, leading to ever-more-tangled problems. Although paradoxes are embedded into our perception of reality, there seems to be a limited understanding of the nature of their antinomies and how we should deal with them. But there is a tendency to experience reality in a manner that enables us to perceive more of what we value.

Peirce tells us, “We live in two worlds, a world of fact and a world of fancy” (CP 1.321). In social systems, problems themselves are illusionary, or self-imposed fixations; to view social challenges as problems is to put ourselves in a wrong frame of mind, searching for solutions that do not exist. Most perceived problems do not exist in reality; surprisingly, they are conceptually constructed by the

human mind. There are many intellectuals desperately trying to find dualistic and reductionistic explanations to solve or resolve paradoxical phenomena, but they end up producing tricky situations and immense confusion. These explanations are an indicator of a misunderstanding of the nature of paradoxes. The difficulty of dealing with antinomies has much to do with our habitual ways of reasoning. It is sensible to say that whether self-imposed or imposed by others, problems can be reframed as challenges perceived as divine gifts received for calling out to transcend the familiar and to move out of our comfort zone.

Problem-solving strategies are ineffectual and derived from a mechanistic fallacy that is blind to the gift of paradoxes. Although a problem-solving strategy to social and individual challenges frequently arrives at provisional solutions to problems, it substitutes different and short-lived conditions that will sooner or later trigger crises and despair. The tendency to search for a solution as a means of resolving paradoxical predicaments is a desperate attempt to manipulate the phenomenological nature of paradox. The unintended consequences of this tendency are evident in almost all strategies to resolve social and cultural problems.

Problems can be tamed or wicked (Buchanan 1995). Wicked problems involve complex social and cultural systems, and in this sense, wicked problems are impregnated with paradoxes. Tamed problems, like technical and mechanical ones, are easy to fix through problem-solving strategies. The confusion arises, however, when we try to solve wicked problems by employing the same strategies we use to fix tamed problems. Using technical fixes in an attempt to solve wicked social problems is a myopic tactic we have repeatedly seen fail.

Thus, antinomies are wicked problems that cannot be solved or resolved, but can be dealt with only by paradoxical thinking, which offers a 'both-and' predisposition, transcending the 'either-or' inclination. Rather than perceiving contradictory tension between a pair of polarities as an anomalous characteristic of social and natural systems, it should be viewed as an inevitable outcome of an ongoing semiosis of tensional and opposite forces among human beings and between humans and their environments. Holding this tension and acquiring capacity for perseverance lead us to a fundamental shift in our perception of paradoxes (Seif 2015).

Granted, many oppositional relations are seen as negations; however, on a fundamental level, negation is implicit or explicit in all paradoxes – something is not what its meaning alleges it to be. We may say one thing and mean another, yet we are being understood correctly – a paradoxical reality that is a unique semiotic capacity of the human species. Even with their deceptive behavior, mimicry, and camouflage, other species, primates or nonprimates, do not, or seemingly do not, communicate through saying one thing and meaning another.

3 Telling the truth by lying!

Ever since the time of the Epimenides' "liar paradox", there have been a plethora of terminologies and hierarchies of lies – i.e. deceiving, exaggeration, bluffing for good reasons. In his ideal state, the *Republic*, Plato argued that leaders must tell lies to the populace for the good reason of paternalism. I am aware that lying produces all kinds of dissonance, religious admonition, criminal investigation, forensic analysis, legal ramifications and the like, however, my purpose here is to highlight the antinomies and ironies of telling the truth by lying. The distinction between truth and lying may seem simple, but simple distinctions are not always devoid of peculiarity.

Semiotics draws our attention to this paradoxical phenomenon of telling the truth by lying; signs are used in order to lie or tell the truth. Signs make lying and deception possible. The distinction between telling the truth and lying has been explored in "forensic semiotics" (Danesi 2013), where verbal signs and kinesics represent antinomies. Telling the truth by lying is a semiotic fallacy that has also been discussed by Winfried Nöth (1990), where, for instance, magicians use signs to deceive the audience to believe an illusion is a true experience for the purpose of entertainment. For Umberto Eco (1976), if semiotics cannot be used to tell a lie, it cannot be used to tell the truth. This is a significant antinomy; there is simultaneous condition for signifying the lie and yet revealing the truth. In a peculiar way, signs make lying and deception possible by juxtaposing and integrating truth and falsity.

Interestingly, when I was about 5-year old, I used to tell other children in the neighborhood imaginative stories with vivid images. My Christian parents never admonished me that lying is always wrong. But if lying is morally wrong, then, why is lying practiced so often? In my adolescence, I felt guilty about my untrue and fabricated stories, making other children believe every word I said! Surprisingly, however, most of what I had lied about in my childhood have turned out to be true happenings in my adult-life. Was this a form of telling the truth about happenings that were yet to come, or lying about events that never took place? Paradoxically, it is both. We all lie, but we do not like to admit it. Hypocrisy!

Lies and deception are the most fascinating and peculiar characteristics of signs that make it possible for human and other-than-human species to convey the existent of the nonexistent, or the nonexistence of the existent. Like many species that use camouflage to deceive each other, we deceive other species when we engage in hunting or fishing. The sign of disguise highlights the paradoxical phenomenon of appearance and reality, lie and truth, communication and signification. Ironically, "*semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie*. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, con-

versely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used ‘to tell’ at all” (Eco 1976: 7).

Even saying nothing can be a silent lie, leaving others to infer that one is telling the truth. That is why many of us believe silence is telling the truth. By the same token, most of us recall the awkward moment when we are actually telling the truth, but we are laughing so others think we are lying! The phenomenon of laughing, which has much to do with sense of humor, cannot exist without the juxtaposition and integration of lies and truths. Telling the truth by lying represents the pattern underlying humor that Arthur Koestler (1964) calls “bisociation” that integrates and juxtaposes two incompatible matrices in a paradoxical synthesis. The bisociation of lies and truths is the charming ability to break away from our stereotypical perceptions, conventional thoughts, and moral judgments.

Take for instance the mutual reciprocity of lying about an erotic encounter, while telling the truth about the potential for the sexual act. Telling the truth by lying about an erotic encounter is a reciprocal exchange of seductive desire and sexual act, where, as Georges Bataille (1957) puts it, the latter can be an addendum to the former. This is exemplified in Bill Clinton’s famous statement during the Lewinsky scandal in 1998, when he declared: “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.” If we consider his statement as half-truth, then it is true that he did not have sexual intercourse, but only an “inappropriate relationship” or fellatio. Ironically, Clinton escaped impeachment and did not lose much of his political admiration, while Lewinsky gained worldwide pop-culture celebrity status by speaking out against cyberbullying.

The scandal of this erotic encounter took place due to the intrusion of the public sphere into what was as a private matter. Is this telling a half-truth about sexual innuendos or a *mirabile dictu* of erotic encounter? Surely, an injurious lie is an uncommendable thing; so is an injurious truth, a fact that is recognized by the law of defamation (Twain 1885). Like the peculiar case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, lying and truth telling, good and evil, are two sides of the same entity – a duality of human nature.

Scandal becomes recognized when society relies on religious admonition and conclusive separation between good and bad, insisting on the redemption of personal sins. It is a moral dualism of which the benevolent and the malevolent are in eternal complement and conflict. Absolute righteousness about an erotic encounter is inherent in modernism and postmodernism, but has no place in transmodernity. Eroticization is not a moral self-contradiction or lack of integrity; rather, it is the desire that triumphs over social taboo (Bataille 1957). Self-scrutiny of one’s integrity, whether to lie or tell the truth, is at the core of understanding the humanity of others, and in this sense, integrity is ethical wholeness. There are people who think that they never lie, but this ignorance is one of the very

things that shames our civilization. We are all liars, every day, every hour awake or asleep, in our dreams, in our joys, in our erotic encounters, in our mourning ceremonies – and as much as in platitudes, sermons do lie. Even an unwieldy and illogical lie is often as ineffectual as the truth (Twain 1885).

The irony is that by juxtaposing or integrating unrelated two frames of reference of lies and truths, we create the punch line of humor that liberates us from self-righteousness and defensiveness. Astoundingly, when we integrate two different frames of reference, it is difficult to conceive that they existed as autonomously separate (Koestler 1964). “The same circumstances that makes the lie possible makes a truth possible. The same circumstances that makes deception possible makes truth possible” (Deely 2009: 183). Telling the truth by lying, or telling lies to tell the truth, is a semiotic therapy for liberating the quality of childhood that is overshadowed by the fictitious impression of adulthood.

But the charming irony of telling the truth by lying is also its time limitations. Its therapeutic effectiveness is dissolved once we laugh, we return from playfulness back to seriousness. Other than sarcasm and derision, telling the truth while laughing, or giving the impression of lying, conveys the paradoxical phenomena about the human condition that might otherwise be impossible to communicate by just telling the truth. In this sense, humor can afford an aloofness, tolerance for the ambiguity associated with telling the truth by lying – an ability to perceive situations in a humorous light, which is a playful trick learned while mastering the art of living (Frankl 1959). The humorous act of juxtaposing truths with lies encourages us to transform our perception of the grotesque into the beautiful and vice versa.

Moreover, telling the truth by lying is essential for falling in love. Why? Falling in love involves countless little lies we tell ourselves and avoidably tell the ones we love. Might we recall the self-deception when we perceive the first love experience as the only true love we ever had and the one we will never have again! We use courteous lying and deceive ourselves more often than not. As Mark Twain (1885) points out, courteous lying is a sweet and loving art that should be cultivated. For the highest perfection of politeness is a beautiful edifice of graceful and unselfish lying. Almost any little pleasant lie takes the irritation out of that troublesome but necessary expression of the truth. Indeed, we often lie to help others out of trouble or to avoid the unvarnished truth about their finality, as exemplified by medical doctors telling lies to their dying patients.

When falling in love, we play both roles: the seducer and the seduced. Seduction itself almost always involves manipulations, disguises, and even lies. Haven't we all heard of the notion, “tell me sweet little lies my love”, when we allow ourselves to be tricked by the ‘black horse of desire’ and seduced into a sexual act? Like in the allegory of the Chariot of Zeus, we seem to face the double-edge-sword

character of Eros, whether to engage in the blessing experience of love or the finality of erotic gratification. Both the seducer and the seduced must make the paradoxical choice between virtuous living and sexual experience. Ultimately, in erotic encounter, we are permitted to lie, as much as we are willing to tolerate being fooled by a little lie. We involve ourselves in lies and deceptions when we engage in an erotic encounter without the intention of harming the beloved. The irony is that if we insist on telling the truth, we will never fall in, or be fooled by, love. And if one of two lovers believes that his/her sexual fantasy is a kind of adulterous cheating, love relations and marriage would be almost impossible.

Epistemologically and ontologically, this paradoxical phenomenon of telling the truth by lying leads to a critical assessment of social and cultural change and advances an uncanny approach for human beings to use the plurality of lies and truth to trigger a sense of humor through antinomies and ironies. Deceiving or lying is not injurious. Rather, it is the kind of lie and deception that we tell and allow ourselves to believe that is at stake. Allowing ourselves to be deceived or tricked by the sign of a mirage in the vast desert is indeed an extreme disappointment – seeing is not always believing. Like in fiction, which lies to believe and which ones to reject both are insightful for our lives.

Lies and truths are significant semiotic phenomena in social relations. If truth provides the connection to the familiar reality, lying offers a trajectory toward an unfamiliar but desirable reality. The integration of lies and truths highlights the intimate and paradoxical connections between comedy and tragedy, between laughter and weeping. One can conjure that the antinomy of lies and truths is perhaps seen as a transcendental illusion (Deleuze 1994), where the real experience and the illusionary experience interchangeably masquerade.

4 What is real is not always true

Reality has become a hyperreality where human beings are unable to distinguish the physical and familiar existence from the unfamiliar and simulated ones in a world of multitudes of modalities. Many people believe that the “real” world seems to have been replaced by images that make themselves the epitome of reality, where the new technologies are viewed as a factitious god, making their own rules and aiming for nothing but themselves. In cyberspace, for instance, images appear in a diminution of space and time, where humans and digital apparatus intertwine in visual, virtual, and visceral constellations of sensational experiences (Seif 2014, 2016). In hyperreality, human beings are becom-

ing cyborgs capable of producing the reality they desire and mastering the art of interpretation necessary for tolerating the ambiguity of antinomies and ironies.

Although the real and the true can be inclusive, they are not synonymous with each other; however one cannot exist without the other. What we perceive is not reality itself but reality exposed to our way of perceiving. We know the truth or fact that the earth revolves about the sun, yet we experience the real event of the sun revolving about the earth. The stick in a body of water is not actually bent as it appears; nor is the movie a sequence of still pictures. And the perception of a body of water in the vast desert is a real experience, as a mirage is a true optical phenomenon.

Paradoxically, not only do we enjoy a perfect imitation, “we also enjoy the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it” (Eco 1986: 46). Jean Baudrillard (1994) also argues that the relation between reality and its representation has been reversed, where representation constitutes a hyperreality that is “more real than the real”, there is no such thing as reality. For him, simulacrum is not a copy or a simulation of the real; rather the reality of simulacrum becomes true in its own right. The concept of simulacrum challenges the subtle difference between the real and the false, between the real and the imaginary. Human beings cannot have the true without the false, truth without lies. Reality is based not on facts so much as on believing and imagining.

Unexpectedly, the real can become true as much as the true can become real. Again, before Galileo Galilei, the prevailing truth influenced humans to perceive a reality in which the earth was the center of the universe and the sun revolved around the standing-still, flat earth. This truth was based on the absolute common sense, and no one dared to imagine otherwise.

Contradictions in paradoxes should not be assessed on the grounds of true or false. The real and the true are not absolute notions; neither are they necessarily opposite poles. They are a spectrum. But even as a spectrum, if we perceive a straight line between two poles and imagine this line extended infinitely, we will be astonished to see that the two poles ultimately come together – the curve is indeed an infinite number of straight lines. This may seem like a hypertrophic simplicity, but human beings are no longer satisfied with facts or truths; they strive to discover ways to recreate their spatial and temporal reality. Again, cyberspace created sensational experiences by integrating the visual, the virtual, and the visceral; therefore, it has provided an opportunity for us to perceive tangible objects, physical environments, and real events that transcend the limitations of dualistic thinking. In a transmodern world, perceiving reality necessitates paradoxical thinking.

There is no reality entirely independent of thought (CP 7.346). The permeability between mind-independent being (*ens reale*) and mind-dependent being (*ens rationis*) is a two-way relation (Deely 1992). Charles S. Peirce's transmodern philosophy has changed the epistemological limitation and has penetrated the dead end of absolute reality, advancing a much broader and more commodious way of signs that cross the peculiar boundary of the real and the true. While many things seem to be cognitively real based on conventional common sense, they are fundamentally untrue in the imaginative realm of undifferentiated uncommon sense. Peirce's notion of "synechism", the doctrine of continuity, implies that in semiosis, discontinuities are themselves continua; semiosis is simultaneously differentiated and unified where the opposites are mutually reciprocal.

5 Mutuality of the opposites and polymathic experiences

All aspects of life rest essentially on the integration or composition of two opposite conditions, truth and lie, real and illusional, good and bad, change and continuity; without differences and similarities in any condition there would not be enough reliable constancy to recognize antinomies and ironies. Becoming judicious about the mutuality of the opposites in the transmodern world offers the reward of polymathic experiences. This is where semiotics is most helpful in dealing with antinomies. Since signs can cross all kind of perceived boundaries, they shift easily with context and over time; and the relation between the opposites seems to be mutually inseparable. As a triadic structure (representamen, object, and interpretant) sign is only at one semiotic moment of time; each element of the triad shifts its role and never permanently remains the same (Seif 2005). The interpretant is at the core of interpretation that renders signs transparent and integrative, revealing the mutuality of the opposites.

Although I have been favoring paradoxical thinking and disparaging dualistic rationality, both of these different ways of thinking are altogether indispensable. The irony is that in order to be capable of paradoxical thinking, one must be able to cogitate the opposite differences in the first place. In other words, differences and similarities are binary systems; each category cannot exist without the other. One cannot overcome rationality in favor of arationality, and break forth from mentality into diaphaneity (Gebser 1949) without being cogitate of rationality and arationality as a binary opposition. These two categories cannot exist one without the other – i.e. the two basic principles of yin and yang. Ironically, dualism would not be recognized with the diaphanous perception.

Indeed, this diaphanous perception of the mutuality of the opposites is significant for human beings to experience life polymathically. Not only is the boundary between the real and the true, between truth and lie, transparent, but also the boundary between good and evil, between beautiful and grotesque, among many others, becomes imaginary and illusive. Such is the paradox. The irony is that it is almost impossible for most humans to comprehend the whole spectrum of all paradoxical phenomena. The question is no longer is it a duck or is it a rabbit? It is both!

This diaphanous process embodies the quality of making the familiar strange and making the strange familiar. In this sense, there are constant opportunities of polymathic experiences for transmodern societies to look at the familiar in new ways and to notice the unfamiliar that they have been ignoring. The challenge is to perceive transparently and simultaneously the desire for meaningful prospects and for hanging on to the good-old days, to transcend the duality of good and bad, beauty and ugliness.

Human beings seem to reside somewhere between angels and beasts, between good and evil. We have a tendency toward constructing the good as sacred and the bad as profane, as a way of exclusion, by defining ourselves against others. In Judeo-Christian tradition, God is good and the devil is bad. And we often abandon our responsibilities by claiming that the devil made us do it! Because of this dualistic thinking and fragmented perception of paradoxical phenomena, we cannot understand how evil or devilish behavior adapted by an individual is considered good for others, and vice versa. A case in point is the Nazi conception of ethics for humanity (exemplified in the racially chosen few) was indeed the self-deceptive evil that masqueraded as good. Often societies discover afterwards that what was done by some individuals under the banner of good was profoundly evil. And yet, the devil, or evil, may take a positive perception as a skeptical entity for the sake of exploring further thought, exemplified in the slogan of the 'devil's advocate'. Ironically, the devil can be transformed into a beautiful thing!

Moreover, the connection between the devil and beauty goes back to the Biblical story, where the Serpent or Satan (devil) seduced beautiful Eve in the Garden of Eden. The difference between what is beautiful and ugly is more flexibly transparent than most of us want to admit. And yet, contemplating Picasso's well-known painting *Guernica* reveals the integration of the beautiful and the grotesque. Granted that the transformation from the grotesque to the beautiful, and vice versa, has been expressed eons ago in fairytales and myths, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, and the myth of *Isis and Osiris*, where the tears of love transformed the ugly Beast and the grotesque dismantled the body of Osiris into a beautiful whole. Nevertheless, these folktales and legends have been perceived as mere fables divorced from cultural practices in contemporary societies. What

was perceived as the duality of beautiful and ugly in modernity and postmodernity is reversed and turned into polymathic experiences in transmodernity.

With transmodernity, scholars become more aware of the transdisciplinary approach to being fully present in the world and capable of deep knowing, which opens the possibility for tolerating the ambiguity associated with antinomies and persevering through paradoxes of life. It is not contradictions among disciplines that are the issue, but precisely the differences among disciplines. Building on Deleuze's (1994) idea of differences, a polymathic experience would not have occurred by reducing differences among disciplines to mere contradictions of knowledge. The ability to think paradoxically and perceive transparently is indeed lifelong-learning.

Conventional perceptions are never the real moments of events and things, but are moments of our consciousness. The essential aptitude for integral consciousness encompasses the sense of perceiving and imparting eternal verity. This integrative consciousness, as a simultaneous integration of polymathic experiences, is necessary for the initiation of what Jean Gebser (1949) has envisioned as an "aperspectival world" – a world that is certainly transmodern.

6 Being in the world of transmodernity

Transmodernity, which embodies many diaphanous and integrative qualities, transcends the visual reality of modernity and the virtual reality of postmodernity into visceral experiences. Transmodernity is inclusive of modernity and postmodernity, and it does not reject the characteristics of either. This means that reality in the transmodern world not only integrates antinomies and ironies, but also cries for paradoxical thinking. This also means that hyperreality is the perfect condition, where integrative consciousness does not distinguish the real from the true, the lie from the truth – a consciousness that is at ease with transparent perception of opposites.

Clearly, postmodernity has been going through a subtle evolution, gradually dissolving itself into something different (Harvey 1989). Due to the constant influence of media technologies, and the rapid acceleration of sociocultural changes, the shift from postmodernity to transmodernity does not seem to be too striking. This subtlety may have encouraged many scholars to claim that we are still living in a postmodern epoch, where postmodernity seems like a convenient catchall for amalgamation in which anything can be labeled as postmodern. Others do not make a distinction between postmodernity and transmodernity, claiming that

transmodern thought that developed from modernism is a variant of postmodernity (Seif 2009).

Transparency (seeing through and beyond), as the hallmark of transmodernity, echoes the notion of “diaphanous perception” uttered by the Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser (1949). That is why transmodernity resonates with Gebser’s aperspectival consciousness. Both transmodernity and aperspectival consciousness share the same quality of transparency, which is at the heart of semiotics. I believe this idea of transparency is particularly significant not only in understanding and persevering through the semiotic paradoxes, but also in taking full responsibility of what Heidegger (1927) calls “being-in-the-world”.

“The Being of beings is the most apparent; and yet, we normally do not see it – and if we do, only with difficulty” (Heidegger 1968: 110). Being-in-the-world implies being present in the world and inhabiting a reality that allows us to move freely simultaneously and transparently. Being in a transmodern world involves dealing with a wide range of contradictions and being genuinely comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty. To *be* in the transmodern world is to adapt uncommon sense, which is based on integration and transparency. To be alive in a transmodern world, one must develop the capacity for perseverance through these contradictions in order not only to survive but also to thrive.

In a transmodern world, societies have an unparalleled opportunity to not only persevere through paradoxes, but also the ability to imaginatively interpret contradictions as complementarities. The paradoxical challenge for transmodern societies is to uncover the unfamiliar potential in the legacy of the familiar by perceiving transparency, thereby experiencing polymathic reality visually, virtually, and viscerally. More than any other scholars, semioticians should feel at home in this transmodern world, for they have the acumen skills to integrate and use knowledge from a wide spectrum of fields and disciplines. Although we are challenged by the tension among various conflicting forces, the manner in which we deal with the resulting paradoxes offers us the opportunity for fresh interpretations of a reality that not only we co-create, but also co-transform.

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Section 7:

Manifestoes for semiotics

John Deely

Semiosis and human understanding

Abstract: When we consider that “modern” (according to the OED) means “being in existence at this time; current, present”, while “to exist” is to have a duration that begins when our existence begins and ends when our existence ends, and “this time” depends throughout that duration on our interaction with our physical surroundings – an interaction (largely unconscious) without which our existence could not sustain itself, the conclusion is forced upon us that there is no other world than a “transmodern world”, i.e., the world through which each of us passes our duration with the marks of that passage inscribed by semiosis at every moment upon our bodies and psyches so as to weave a web that bears for all time the story of our existence, such as it was – a story for those to see provided only that they figure out how to read the signs. Human understanding consists in just that ability to discover the passage of being in time – a passage that concerns both the universe as a whole and each of the parts within that whole.

Keywords: Augustine, Eco, sign, relation, Aristotle, hylomorphism, synechism, thing, object, scholastic realism

1 Preamble

We come to know things only by the way that they act. If a thing didn't act at all, it would be unknowable. And we come to know things, originally, only through experience, and that's also where we come to know signs. But only quite late in the game did we come to understand that the whole of animal knowledge, not only the heights of human understanding (such as they are), but even the very possibility of experience in the first place, depends upon the action of signs. This was true from the beginning of human existence, and yet only late in the 4th century AD was a proposal formulated that provided a general notion of sign; that is to say, a notion that applied equally to realm of nature and the realm of human culture within that larger realm.

The proposal was made by Augustine of Hippo, the first major figure in the span of written history to develop philosophical understanding outside of and largely in ignorance of the Greek language. As a result of this ignorance, when

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Augustine proposed that a sign is anything, be it an artifact of civilization or a phenomenon of nature, which, on making an impression in sensation, brings into our awareness along with itself something other than itself, he did not realize that he was launching an intellectual revolution, for in the philosophy developed by his Greek predecessors there was no such general notion. In Greek thought, the notion of signs had been restricted to phenomena of nature – such as smoke telling us of something burning, symptoms of illness revealing some particular malady, or milk in a woman’s breasts being a sign of many things, child-bearing in particular, etc. Language of course was recognized as a symbolic system, but semiosis as the underlying commonality enabling animals to recognize developments in culture no less than in nature had not yet entered the realm of awareness. The Greek philosophers did not think of language as a system of signs.

The first time I heard this was from Umberto Eco, back in 1983;¹ and it was hard to believe – so much so, in fact, that had it not been coming from someone of Umberto’s stature I don’t think I would have believed it. When one reads the English translations of Greek philosophy, one finds “sign” read back into the ancients, like the 18th century term “Renaissance” which didn’t even exist in the Renaissance; but in the Greek that is not quite the story.

I don’t know Greek very well, because the first year I took Greek I finished the final exam early, which is always bad, so I thought about it, but couldn’t see anything else that needed to be said. So I walked up to hand in the exam and I suddenly remembered the aorist irregularity – hugely important in Greek; but before I could withdraw my hand with the paper still in it the professor reached up and grabbed it from me. I said “Wait a minute. I’m not finished.” And he said “Yes you are”. So I’d been getting an A, but now I got a D for the final grade, and

1 The occasion was his opening lecture for the May 30–June 24 “Historiographical Foundations of Semiotics” course presented as “team-taught” (Umberto taught the first two weeks, from Thales †c.545BC to Ockham †c.1349; Deely the 2nd two weeks, from Ockham to Peirce †1914) for the 1983 gathering of the International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies, organized by Paul Bouissac and held on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University. “Students” in this course were mostly themselves professors, or advanced graduate students. The talks were recorded on 26 cassettes, then transferred by Thomas Grasha to MP3 files in the 2013–14 academic year. I hope it may one day be possible to transcribe the whole and publish it as a book. That idea was proposed by some who were in the class to John Gallman, then-Director of the Indiana University Press, who proposed the idea to Eco. He answered that he was agreeable if his co-lecturer John Deely would prepare the transcription. To this end I applied to my college for a sabbatical, but the then-Vice President Fr. James Barta denied the application on the grounds that “such a book is of no relevance to undergraduate teaching” (Loras was an exclusively undergraduate college), which gives some indication of how long it is going to take for semiotics to be assimilated to the university curriculum! See Deely 2010 – dedicated to the semioticians of the 22nd century!

to take Greek a second semester I'd have to take it from that same professor. So I made the mistake of deciding "I'm not going to take any more course with that jerk" – one of the biggest mistakes of my life on the academic side. So now I can recognize the Greek alphabet and read some Greek text in a manner that seems I know what I'm reading, but I don't.

So Umberto said, in his lecture opening our 1983 course, that in ancient Greek philosophy – that is, all the way from Thales (BC624–543) to Proclus (AD412–485) – there is no general notion of sign.² Language in particular is not thought of as a system of signs. Sign is restricted to the order of what we would call natural signs, as noted above. No one in the ancient Greek context thought of language, although symbolic, as a system of signs. They presupposed a sharp distinction between signs and symbols, as between nature and culture.

2 “Introducing semiotic”

“The work of clearing and opening up what I” – citing Peirce himself³ – “call semiotic” is best traced to the first person to come up with a general notion of sign, and that, as I opened by mentioning, was Augustine of Hippo (AD 13 November 354–430 August 28), right around the time when the 5th century AD was about to dawn. Now the point Augustine made in introducing sign as a general notion was so obvious that it was perceived like wheeled luggage – something to be immediately and everywhere adopted. When I started to travel by plane, nobody had wheeled luggage. In fact, one day I paid a lot of money for a Tumi bag and expected to have it for life. Then around 1994 I came up from Mexico for the 19th Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America at the Radisson Airport Motel outside Philadelphia. As I was crossing the hotel lobby between sessions there was a long line of some nineteen airline personnel checking out, every one of whom had a wheeled bag, first time I'd seen such a thing. So I went out later that day and bought one, and my glamorous Tumi hasn't been used since. How could it be that someone hadn't thought of wheeled bags sooner than that? But they hadn't. Just so, semiotics as a discipline, under the name “doctrina signorum”, first became possible with Augustine.

² See Eco et. al. 1984 & 1986; but see esp. Manetti 1987, 1993, 2013, and Manetti Ed. 1996.

³ From c.1906: CP 5.488; see Section 4.2. below, p. 9.

Augustine comes along just as the 4th century AD is closing,⁴ not even knowing English (of course, since it didn't yet exist), and proposes that "*signum est quod praeter species quas ingerit sensibus aliquid aliud facit in cognitionem venire*" – a sign is anything, natural event or cultural artifact matters not a whit, that, upon making an impression on our senses, brings along with that impression something other than itself into our awareness. To perform this essential function of bringing something other than itself into awareness an object sensed may be an artifact or not; whence "being a sign" transcends the nature/culture divide, it is a "general" notion. The "essence of the matter", note, which even Augustine did not quite get, is not even "being sensible", i.e., not even being an object of awareness – of nature or artifact – able to make an impression upon the sense; it is the relation that is the heart of the matter, the relation whereby something other is made present in awareness. The essential thing is the relation to another.

3 Relation as the heart of the matter: no term more used or less analyzed

You really can't get very deep into semiotics without involving relations. And I tell you, in the history of philosophy, there is no concept more talked about and less thought about than relation. Consider the common case of so-called "sexual relations". What is meant by a "sexual relation"? Well, two people having sex, no?

No. Having sex is not a relation, it is an interaction; in Aristotle's categories, *agere et pati*, to act and be acted upon, an interaction, not relation. Relation rather is what results from the interaction. Just as a child may result from the interaction but does not reduce to the interaction, so does a relation result from but not reduce to the interaction. The relation, like the child conceived, is brought about by but survives or continues in its own existence after the interaction is a "thing of the past". Relations are the children of interactions, but not just of some interactions, but of every interaction. For every finite being bears in its body and in its form the traces of everywhere it has been, everything it has done, and everything that has been done to it; and it is from those traces that relations provenate, whether independently of the awareness of any finite mind (when the interactants continue alike as subjects of existence after the interaction) or dependently upon awareness (as when the forensic scientist becomes aware of what happened long after one or both of the interactants is no longer subjectively

⁴ For full details on Augustine's originality and heritage in this matter, see Deely 2009.

existing). Meanwhile, in “common usage”, relation continues to be mistaken reductively for the interaction itself from which relation arises.

The big problem with relations,⁵ by which I mean the feature which has made them so elusive in the consideration of philosophers and scientists alike, is the fact that they cannot be seen or touched. They cannot, unlike material things related, be directly instantiated to sense.⁶

3.1 The related individuals or “things” presupposed to relations

Consider Aristotle’s notion of substance, “first substance”, or that which exists (not that which is merely thought about) as a substance, the “natural individual” or subject of existence. My favorite quotation from Aristotle concerns this matter. The world, he says,⁷ is either one – monism, the view that the appearances of diversity are an illusion concealing that there is only one underlying reality the same for all – or there are many different things. But if there are many, in order for there to be many, there have to be “ones” within the many; for “of the many each is one”; and whatever be those “natural units” or “ones” comprising the many, Aristotle says, this is what I call substance. And the problem for natural philosophy or science (or, as I would rather now put it: the problem for cenoscopic and ideoscopic science alike), now and for time to come, is to investigate that, because you cannot find out what in nature is actually, not just apparently, an intrinsically unified whole or “one” except by investigation.⁸ For example, you

5 Peirce c.1903: CP 4.436: “the third category – the category of ... triadic relation , ... thirdness as such – is an essential ingredient of reality, yet does not by itself constitute reality, since this category (which in that cosmology appears as the element of habit) can have no concrete being without action, as a separate object on which to work its government”.

6 They may be said, thus, to be a directly spiritual component of the material world as ordinarily understood to consist of “what can be seen and touched” within “experience” – which itself turns out already to presuppose and consist in a web of semiotic relations. Cf. Aquinas’ sermon for Pentecost, “*Emitte Spiritum*”, apparently written i.1268–1272. Re the crucial role of relations in enabling human understand to provide intelligibility to the perceptible objects of animal experience (“*intellectus agens*”, as the Latins put it), see esp. Deely 2015?: “Uninstantiability”.

7 Aristotle c.348/7BC: *Metaphysics*, Book III, chapter 4, 1001b6.

8 Aristotle c.330aBC, *Metaphysics*, VII, ch. 1, 1028b1–7: “The question which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is ever the subject of doubt, viz. what being is, is just the question, what is substance? For it is this that some assert to be one, others more than one, and that some assert to be limited in number, others unlimited. And so we also must consider chiefly and primarily and almost exclusively what that is which is in this sense.” Cf. Aquinas c.1268–72:

are sitting in “one” chair, but it is made up of many different kinds of materials. And there are many things in nature which appear to be one but are not.

Even though substance, then, is an intellectual concept, by investigation you can find out, for example, stones which appear to be one but are actually a collection of many, and other stones which really are one kind of thing and not just a collection. Thus one pile of stones is one but not itself a substance; and the many stones in the pile necessarily involve substance (the fundamental natural units) but may not each of them be a substance. But to say that a substance is a natural unit is not at all to say that therefore substance is simple.

Consider yourself. I am not one thing, you may say; I have kidneys, I have lungs, I have liver, I have all kinds of different things making me up, yes: but that diversity in you is all ruled – as long as you succeed to live – by one formal cause, the so-called “substantial form”. How do you know? When you fall, your arms and hands automatically, “instinctively”, we might say, try to break your fall. If you get a cut or wound in your body, the body automatically responds as best it can to minimize the damage.

So Aristotle reasoned that in order to understand these substances as they form natural units, whether simple or complex (the internally maintained unity being the key), three principles – not two, as commonly implied by the expression misleading in this regard which characterizes the view as “hylomorphism”⁹ – are indispensable: matter, understood as the basic potentiality; form, which makes for this kind of thing rather than another; privation, which is the accumulation of adjustments a substance has to make in maintaining its unity over time as environmental factors affect the individual in ways which tend to undermine its substantial existence.

Privation gets more or less swept aside in the history of philosophy, as is clear in the common name for Aristotle’s view as “hylomorphism” – *ύλη* for matter,

In VII Met., lect. 1, esp. nn. 1246 and 1260–1264. (This is far from to say that the formal subject of Metaphysics is *ens per se* or *substantia*, rather than *ens commune*. But that is not an issue that concerns me here.)

⁹ My abduction would be that the dualist expression “hylomorphism” caught on, despite the explicitly trimorphic insistence of both Aristotle and Aquinas that substantial change requires three principles of explanation was the assumption tacit in their view of the universe as unchangingly governed by the unchanging matter of the celestial spheres that privation is an operative principle only regarding individual substances on earth, not the species to which those individuals belonged. For the immediate question re substantial change on earth, see Deely 2001: See Deely 1969: “What is, what could be, and what should be different”, 67–70; for the larger evolutionary picture, see further Deely 1969; “The Philosophical Dimensions of the Origin of Species”.

μορφή for form, “matter-form dualism”. But this dismissiveness toward understanding the nature of privation as essential to the understanding of substance is sustainable (if at all) only in the context of the ancient view of the universe as unchanging in its specific structures, a view we now know to be illusory.

Aristotle’s view, however, is not dualistic but triadic, and precisely privation constitutes the third principle essential for understanding substantial change in the context of a universe evolutionary as we now know it to be, for privation names precisely that accumulation in the material substance of the environmental influences which trace its passage through time as eventually resulting in its final corruption, its “ceasing to be”. Yet even in a non-evolutionary universe privation is essentially at work, as evidenced in the aging of individuals so clear to the eye in a human social context, for example. As the individual substance ineluctably goes through time, it is in constant interaction with its environment, interactions that we are not even aware of over a great extent of the range of environmental forces at play. Thus the 14.5 lbs per square inch of atmospheric pressure upon our bodies we have no direct awareness of, yet without that pressure we would explode, just as by increasing it too much we would implode.

3.2 Why individuals stand within and as products of the process of evolution

So the big change in the universe as we know it and the universe as it was thought to be in the time of Aristotle or Aquinas was the discovery as false of the ancient view that terrestrial matter alone is subject to substantial change, in contrast to celestial matter which changes only by moving in circles. Even though, as Aquinas and no doubt Aristotle recognized, the reality of prime matter on earth opens the way in principle to the evolution of species, the unchanging environment of the heavens as controlling change in the sphere below the moon (i.e., on earth) ensured that chance events could not get far enough in their consequences to facilitate species change even in this realm of “terrestrial matter”.¹⁰

Starting with Galileo’s turning of the telescope to the heavens, we began to discover that matter is the same throughout the universe. And not only the same, but everywhere subject to the interactions out of which arise relations (the basis of what Peirce called his “synechism”), and everywhere today is everywhere, from top to bottom, the product of evolution, an evolutionary product.

¹⁰ See Aquinas c.1272/3: *In libros de coelo et mundo*; commentary in Deely 1969.

4 The role of semiosis in making understanding possible also underlies cosmic evolution

Now this talk is supposed to be about semiosis and human understanding. We have come to know that the acting of things upon our senses is the beginning, so far as we are concerned, of semiosis, inasmuch as the action of signs for us begins with the action of something upon our senses which makes us aware of something besides itself, like seeing a clock tells us the time, or a traffic light that tells us be sure there's no cop around before proceeding on through, and so on. Well, I don't know when exactly he wrote this, but in 1632, just months before the condemnation of Galileo, a man of Portuguese birth named Poinot published a *Treatise on Signs* in which he raised the question whether the sign involves one relation or two relations, the relation of sign to mind as distinct from the relation of sign to object. And he answers that the relation which makes a sign a sign is one single relation of an irreducibly triadic nature.¹¹

4.1 How, despite the development of semiotics from Augustine to Poinot, the “way of signs” in philosophy came to be blocked in the 17th century

Now “modern philosophy” tends to specialize in historical ignorance, ever since that period of Galileo and Descartes when the Latin Scholastics in effect lost all credibility in consequence of their support for the condemnation of empirical attempts to investigate nature on its own terms rather than as filtered through books (including the Bible). Descartes saw himself as a pioneer of science in the modern sense, Poinot saw himself rather as a synthesizer for future generations of the Latin development, especially in the four centuries between Aquinas and his own work; but both men in their own way were horrified by the outcome of the trial of Galileo. At the time of the condemnation, both men, Descartes and Poinot, had a book in press, to be published about astronomy; and both men, on learning of the condemnation, yanked their books from publication to avoid confrontation with the Inquisition. Descartes as a result set out to find a whole new way of doing philosophy that would be safe from the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. In this regard, his most famous maxim came to be “*Cogito ergo sum*”;

¹¹ Poinot 1632: *Tractatus de Signis*, Book I, Question 3.

but by far his most successful maxim rather was his warning¹² that, in reading “the ancients” – by which he seemed to mean particularly everyone who had written before the 17th century in Latin – “there is a great danger lest in a too absorbed study of these works we should become infected with their errors, guard against them as we may”; so that “we must wholly refrain from ever mixing up conjectures with our pronouncements on the truth of things”.

Poinsot’s motivation in pulling his astronomy from press was completely different, based as far as we can tell on his horror at the judges in the trial treating merely probable views (their own) as if they were demonstrative; and based also on a determination to dissociate his own work from the disastrous outcome so falsely based. But Poinsot had no influence on what became the early modern development of philosophy, while Descartes had a decisive influence, particularly with his advice to beware of reading the Latin scholastic development. For generally speaking the mainstream modern philosophers did quit reading the Latins. When you get down to Charles Sanders Peirce in the late 19th–early 20th century you encounter not only the first serious modern to thoroughly reject Descartes’ advice regarding the Latins, but also the first and so far only American philosopher at the level of Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas and Scotus, Kant and Hegel. Yet to this day (it is changing, but very slowly) when people think about “American philosophy” the first names to come to mind are William James and John Dewey. Peirce was the teacher, the mentor, of James and Dewey; and more crucially he did not like the way that they developed his original suggestion for “pragmatism”, till at a certain point he said “You know, my position is not pragmatism but pragmaticism, a word I choose both for its ugliness (making it unlikely to be kidnapped as ‘pragmatism’ has been) and to express the contrast between my own views which are not, and the views of Prof. James and others which are, compatible with nominalism.”¹³

But James in particular was a very good friend of Peirce and helped him profoundly in many academic circumstances particularly. So I by no means mean to belittle James. Peirce moreover admired James’ success in the academic world, where “pragmatism” had come to be widely adopted and James’ attribution of the term’s origin to Peirce was well known. So, as Nathan Houser in particular has

¹² Descartes 1628: 6.

¹³ I paraphrase, despite the quotation marks; but cf. Peirce : CP 1905: 5.414: “the writer, finding his bantling ‘pragmatism’ so promoted, feels that it is time to kiss his child good-by and relinquish it to its higher destiny; while to serve the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, he begs to announce the birth of the word ‘pragmaticism,’ which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnapers.” And Deely 2001: 616–628.

pointed out,¹⁴ even after his introduction of pragmatism to name and distinguish his own position, Peirce never wholly abandoned using the original spelling of the term.

But the difference between Peirce's thought and what turned out to be the "mainstream" pragmatist development came down exactly to the views of William of Ockham (c.1287–1347) on the matter of relation. You know that Ockham is considered to be the father of "nominalism", not such an easy notion to characterize in full,¹⁵ and usually discussed in terms of whether "universals" are "real" or not; yet that is not the essence of nominalism. Peirce got it right: the essence of nominalism is the denial of a mind- or awareness-independent reality of relation as such. Ockham considered that only in the mind's comparison of things do relations formally and positively arise. Apart from awareness there are only the individual things. For them to be "similar" or "dissimilar", etc., they must be compared in awareness, in thought. Now every one of the mainstream founders of modern philosophy¹⁶ – Hobbes (5 April 1588–), Locke (29 August 1632–1704 October 28), Berkeley (12 March 1685–1753 January 14), Hume (26 April 1711–1776 August 25), Descartes (31 March 1596–1650 February 11), Spinoza (24 November 1632–1677 February 21), Leibniz (1 July 1646–1716 November 14), Kant¹⁷ (22 April 1724–1804 February 12) – accepted Ockham's position on relation as mind-dependent in nature.

That position in the end makes impossible an understanding of semiotics, because it makes communication impossible. The moderns didn't think about this, but we must now. Each of us has tried to communicate with someone else, and we have found that sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail. But if anyone has ever succeeded in communicating Ockham's view of relation, the Nominalist view, has to be wrong.

14 Houser 2006: "Pragmaschism?"

15 Gilson 1944: 657: *"Nous penetrons ici sur un terrain doctrinal mal connu, extrêmement complexe et dont on sait du moins déjà ceci, que le terme de nominalisme ne suffit aucunement à le définir."*

16 See Weinberg 1965.

17 Properly pronounced "Can't": the British mispronounce this name. The original family name was "Cant"; but the French regularly mispronounced the "C" sibilantly, and to avoid this Immanuel had the spelling legally changed to "K". Had he known English, the simple addition of an apostrophe before the final "t" might have achieved the desired result (i.e., precluding sibilant pronunciation of the "C"); and it would have made the name consistent with the philosophy of the one named: you can't know God, the soul, or the world, only the results of mental representation within the knower. See Deely 2001: 554, comment on Höfding 1900: II, 32, following Borowski 1804.

4.2 “The work of clearing and opening up what I call semiotic”

Late in the modern game along comes Charles Peirce (10 September 1839–1914 April 19), with his Pragmaticism.¹⁸ You can look at Peirce in two ways:¹⁹ trans-modernly, where you study mainly the influences upon him from the context of modern philosophy, in which case you speak of his “pragmatism”, but in so doing you leave his work associated primarily with the nominalist development of the term through James and Dewey; or postmodernly, where he proposes, by contrast, “pragmaticism” as a term stipulated to align rather with scholastic realism than with nominalism – in particular as concerns the scholastic doctrine (derived from Aristotle²⁰) that there are relations in the world quite independently of awareness by some finite mind. Regarded from this latter, postmodern standpoint, Peirce’s main predecessor and link to scholastic realism proves to be John Poinot (9 June 1589–1644 June 17),²¹ a thinker whose work Peirce never got to know, even though Poinot wrote his semiotic treatise contemporaneously with Galileo as founder of modern science and Descartes as founder of “modern philosophy”.

For it is in terms of relation in general and triadic relation in particular that Poinot’s work published in 1632 picks up on the notion of sign in general.²² The sign, he points out, has to consist in a relation (and indeed a triadic relation at that), but pay attention in particular to the reason he gives as to why signs must consist in relations:²³ because relation is the only form of being which is indifferent to the distinction within being between what depends upon and what is independent of the awareness of finite mind.

18 Citation from Peirce c.1906: “A Survey of Pragmaticism”, CP 5.488.

19 See Deely 2014: Section 8, “concerning Transmodern and Postmodern approaches to Peirce”.

20 See Deely 1985: “*The Secundum Dici–Secundum Esse Couplet*”, Section 3.D.1., 472–479, esp. 472–473 text and notes 112, 113, and 114 for the original Greek texts on the point.

21 See Beuchot and Deely 1995: “Common Sources for the Semiotic of Charles Peirce and John Poinot”.

22 Deely 1994: Poinot, “A Morning and Evening Star”, the latter respecting the Latin Age development after Augustine, the former respecting semiotics in intellectual culture after Peirce – and Sebeok (see Cobley et al.: 2011; and Deely 2010).

23 Poinot 1632: TDS Book I, Question 1, 117/28–118/18.

5 How relation as the formal being of signs makes semiosis possible in nature and culture

How so?²⁴ Because, Peirce goes on to point out, what makes a relation real in whatever sense or fictional in whatever sense is nothing but the circumstances within which the relation is provenanted. The circumstances alone, not the positive being proper to the relation itself as relation, determine its status as independent of awareness, regardless of whether it also exists or only exists within awareness. Thus, when it comes to signs, you have to be able to understand and distinguish between natural signs and artificial signs, natural signs and social signs, cultural signs, and you've got to be able to explain the lie.

Probably no one in this room has ever told a lie. There is a great difference between telling a lie and getting away with it, and telling a lie and getting caught. What's the difference?

Well, what you do when you tell a lie is try to get someone to accept as real what is in fact fictional. And when you succeed in telling the lie you succeed in getting them to accept what is fictional for what is real. What makes this possible, Peirce points out, is the singularity of relation in having a suprasubjective being which connects you from within your subjectivity to an other-than-yourself object which may or may not have a subjective dimension to its being as terminating the relation, depending upon circumstances alone.

Supposing that you and I have an appointment to meet for dinner in the main hotel restaurant tonight at 23:00 hours, and you show up and I don't (or the other way around). The one who shows wonders what happened with the one who didn't? It could turn out that a meteor killed the other on the way to the restaurant, and that's why the "no show". At that moment the meteor struck, I (or you) ceased to exist as a material subject. At the moment the meteor struck the relation between you and I which was intersubjective ceased to be, intersubjectively, yet without in any way ceasing as a relation, i.e., suprasubjectively connecting me (or you) to an "other" than myself (or yourself). The relation at that moment changed from real to fictional, if you like (although that is a bit of an oversimplified way to put the matter). The loss materially of my subjective existence made no difference to my status for your mind as an object "other than and not reducible to yourself".

²⁴ Peirce 1904: CP 8.332: "Thirdness is the triadic relation ... considered as constituting the mode of being of a sign." Cf. Deely 2002: "A Body Is Never Enough To Complete Semiosis".

5.1 ‘Existing in awareness’ does not reduce to ‘awareness dependent’

So one of the very first things essential for understanding any semiosis is the distinction between things and objects as between what may or may not and what does necessarily terminate a relation to some finite mind; and you have to be careful here because in the modern national languages²⁵ “thing” and “object” are considered as basically synonymous, two different ways of “saying the same thing”, which is the case when the relation obtains intersubjectively but not necessarily the case at all as far as concerns the suprasubjective being which is what is fundamental to the relation as such. Being suprasubjective is what makes a relation a relation, within or without awareness; without awareness being involved, however, a relation to be *ens reale* must be intersubjective as well. The synonymy of the words “thing” and “object” in “common English usage today” is nothing less than the sedimentation down to the level of ordinary speech of the early philosophical views of Descartes and Locke collapsing objects as supra-subjectively terminating relations into ideas as subjectively founding those relations, by way of missing the point that relations as relations are neither fundamentals nor termini but something positively “over and above” both (making them to be what they are).

Even so, however misleading the “common usage” has become under the long-term influence of philosophy’s “turn to the subject” and “way of ideas” after Descartes, the difference between object and thing is as simple as the difference between a piece of luggage with and without wheels: a thing exists whether or not it has any relation to a finite mind; an object exists when and only when and insofar as it has a relation to a finite mind. And the first and primary way that things come into relation with finite minds is through sensation, the physical interaction between at least two bodies at least one of which has organs proportioned to the interaction in such a way as to provenate an awareness whereby the one body comes into relation cognitively and cathectically as well as intersubjectively with that other body or bodies with which the animal body is here and now in physical interaction (*agere et pati*).

²⁵ Dictionary-based analysis in Deely 2009a.

5.2 The origins of awareness

And when did sensation, this possibility of direct physical interaction, giving rise to an awareness of the interactants, arise? We get into some pretty interesting stories with this question. We know that our physical universe goes back in time some fifteen billion or so years. We know that the planet we live on goes back only five billion or so. We know that life on earth goes back only three billion or so. When did life emerge as animal life? And how long since human animals entered the scene? Fully exact answers to these questions as yet escape us (but my opinion is that human life goes back between one and one-and-a-half million years).

Be all that as it may, sensation came into existence as the distinguishing feature *sic et non* of animal life. Oftentimes Darwinian biology gets presented as reducing all differences to a matter of degree, as in Hume's argument of 1740 that alloanimals²⁶ differ in reasoning from human animals only as a matter of degree; for there is no way that you can watch animal behavior and come away denying that animals that are not human think just as do humans. Reasoning, problem-solving, is found throughout the animal realm, not only among human animals. When it comes to awareness, Hume argued²⁷ that there is only a difference of degree separating human animals from the alloanimals.

But of course there are in nature differences in kind, differences that are "either/or", like pregnancy. It is not the fertilization of egg by sperm that makes a pregnancy, but only the implanting of such an egg in the womb (which fails to occur in upwards of 42% of fertilizations, we discover²⁸): only then is there a pregnancy. I think that it is possible to demonstrate on scientific grounds that the human animal, when it comes into existence, does so precisely on an "either/or" basis. The first article I ever had accepted for publication addressed this very point

26 What the philosophers of Hume's time, like the Latin scholastics earlier, called "brute animals" – the animals, all of them, other-than-human, possessed of "reason" in the sense of problem-solving estimative power but not of "reason" in the intellectual sense of being able in principle to separate objects from things. (We will see more of this in what follows; but see in particular Deely 1971: "Animal Intelligence and Concept-Formation".) My attention was called to the term "alloanimals", as used in the work of Count 1973 (and others) to mean all the animals other than human animals, by Myrdene Anderson. The term bears exactly the sense of the Latin "brute animals" (*animalia bruta*), but without the unhelpful pejorative connotations that attach to the adjective "brute" in modern languages.

27 Hume 1739–1740: Book I, Chap. 3, Section 16.

28 Perhaps this is why "Limbo" got closed down in recent years: they ran out of room for unbaptized souls.

under the title “The Emergence of Man”.²⁹ I should have called it (and would, if I had it to do over) “The Emergence of Human Being: the role of natural selection in the making of human beings”. It was a philosophical analysis but it was all based on modern biology and genetics. The basic argument came down to the fact that, prior to implantation, when an egg is fertilized, what is fixed in the zygote at that point is the reaction range. And that reaction range as the ovum develops into a child and into an adult is the constant at play in the interaction between organism and environment, inside and outside the womb, while the phenotype is the process of development, which, if it veers outside the reaction range will result in the organism’s death. So the reaction range, fixed in the zygote at fertilization, in the human case embraces or enfolds what Sebeok, late in his career, came to characterize as the “primary modeling system”.³⁰

5.3 From sensation to Umwelt

Sebeok was criticizing the Estonians, Lotman in particular, for thinking that language as linguistic communication is the primary modeling system. I can never forget the time he was lecturing at the University of Toronto and said “You know, when people hear about language they immediately think of communication. But language has nothing to do with communication,” and went on in his talk. When it came to the question period, the first question was “Professor Sebeok, you said that language has nothing to do with communication. Why did you say that?” “Because it doesn’t”, Sebeok answered. “Next question.”

Sebeok would come up with his novel ideas, each one of which took on the average three years to mature, similar to the time when he opened a session of the Semiotic Society of America saying “I am going to demonstrate to you that all these people talking about animal language, like Jane Goodall, are either frauds or charlatans.” Three years later he held a big conference in New York³¹ which put a serious crimp in government funding for animal “language” research.³² I met

29 Deely 1966.

30 See Sebeok 1987, 1991, inter alia ; also Deely 2007, 2012.

31 See Sebeok and Rosenthal, 1981. See also *The New Yorker’s* “Talk of the Town” for May 26, 1980.

32 In Tabbot’s article “Birdbrain”, in the 12 May 2008 issue of *The New Yorker*, Diana Reiss, a dolphin researcher, is reported as remembering the 1980 “Clever Hans” conference “as a strange and disheartening gathering, in which ‘Sebeok started off by saying that asking whether animals had language was like asking if elephants could fly’.” In any event, the article continues, “In the aftermath of the conference, an aura of failure and even chicanery clung to animal-language

Jane Goodall, in passing, at that conference, and I said to her “Well, you know, you can argue with another person whether angels exist or whether God exists but you can’t do that with animals”; to which she replied flatly “Oh yes you can”. Where do you go from there?! We went our separate ways.

5.4 From Umwelt as generically animal to Lebenswelt as Umwelt species-specifically human

But the questions of angels or God are kind of beside the point, because where the difference between linguistic communication within anthroposemiosis and zoösemiotic communications enters in is with the human ability to deal directly with relations in their difference from related things. It starts with relations. The human mind – understanding, if you like, in contrast with estimation – differs from the mind of alloanimals only in this one particular, that the human mind is able to objectify, to consider as objects, things that cannot be instantiated to sense. And this is actually the basis not of “language” in the generic sense of communications within various species by whatever means but of linguistic communication which is species-specifically human. Linguistic communication is a much more accurate term than “language”. There is a sense in which you can argue that all animals have “language” in that they communicate both within their species and often with other species members. Various researchers, for example, have decided what some sound or visual image “means” and then provide rewards to the animal till it responds to the sound or image in the way that they want it to respond, then to claim and think that they have taught the animal “the meaning of a word”.

To all this Sebeok responded with his famous article (1978) about “Looking in the destination for what should have been sought in the source”. These researchers are deceiving themselves in thinking that they have taught the linguistic meaning of a sound or symbol, if by “language” is meant the species-specifically human form of communication that is verbal language,³³ because, Sebeok points

studies”, somewhat unfortunately in that “The ape- language projects, however flawed, had [at least] demonstrated abilities that ‘had not been previously suspected and about which it would be exciting to learn more’.”

33 In his Sebeok Fellow Lecture, Paul Cobley (2014: 197) comments: “it is evident from Sebeok’s simple observation on human modelling (1979: 8) – which is so often repressed that it has to be repeated like a mantra – that ‘The authentic singularity of man consists of this, that he alone disposes over a pair of communicative codes’: the uniquely human verbal and the cross-species nonverbal (or averbal)”, which latter has “a substrate in the activities of other animals” – hence

out, the distinctively human primary modeling system (as also the generically animal modeling system first of all) belongs not to the Umwelt but to the Innenwelt, or what the Scholastics used to call “*phantasiari*” (the ability of memory, imagination, and estimation to form concepts organizing the realm of awareness in terms of what is good [+], bad [-] or safe for the animal to ignore [0]) together with in the human animal case alone “*intelligere*” (the ability of understanding to view the objectified world of animal interaction under a relation of self-identity revealing objects to have a dimension which is independent of their +, -, 0 status as things which are what they are independently of my evaluation of them).³⁴

So Sebeok recurred³⁵ to von Uexküll’s basic insight that as an animal becomes aware of its environment through sensation, that awareness by itself is not enough for it has to be organized by the animal in terms of its own needs to survive and flourish – and errors in that organization always carry a price, from injury to death. Hence too is nature filled with deception because predators want to deceive their prey into not recognizing the danger until it is too late, that is, until what is bad for the prey has become good for the predator. But the human animal comes along the evolutionary path and goes one step further in being able to ask “Regardless of the relation to me as +/-/0, what is that thing I am aware of?”

Consider even such strongly negative cases as cancer or Ebola, something we want to eliminate. How can we do that? Only by finding out what the thing is first can we then cure it. As Aquinas, following Aristotle, put it:³⁶ “the speculative intellect becomes practical by extension”. But notice that, when it comes to the question of “what something is” or “the nature of whatever”, the animal +/-/0 classification becomes, as such, irrelevant.

(Deely 1980) “the nonverbal inlay in linguistic communication” resulting in what Cobley describes as “the fuzzy ‘back and forth’ picture of Lamarckian adaptation and Darwinian selection” in cultural evolution.

³⁴ See notes 2 & 3, pp. 240–241, in Poinot 1632. Also Deely 1971: “Animal intelligence and concept-formation”.

³⁵ A reviewer (Fr. Edward James Baenziger, CSB) challenged this usage of “recur” as “non-understandable”, so in case there are any readers who share his befuddlement, let me cite here the OED, which gives as its very first entry for “recur” exactly what I mean in the text above: “To resort or have recourse to a person or other agent for assistance or argument.”

³⁶ Aquinas 1266: *Summa theologiae* I, q. 79, art. 11, *sed contra (et alibi)*; cf. Aristotle c.330BC: *On the Soul*, Book III, ch. 10, 433a15.

6 How modern philosophy came to block the way of inquiry

So this is where you come to the knowledge of “things in themselves”, impossible according to Kant but as a matter of fact precisely the knowledge which distinguishes human understanding from animal estimation and the matter of fact which leads Peirce – who was, he tells us, “raised on the udders of Kant” only to “come to want something more substantial”³⁷ – to dismiss the Kantian view as “meaningless surplussage”,³⁸ “nonsense”³⁹ (American English for “rubbish”).

And yet Kant was the “Master of the Moderns”, synthesizer of the early modern Rationalist and Empiricist lines on the basis of their common commitment to, in a word, solipsism.⁴⁰ The modern philosophers started out arm in arm, hand in hand, with the early modern scientists, with those turning toward the development of science in ideoscopic, rather than cenoscopic, terms, as had perforce characterized the intellectual cultures of ancient Greece and Latin Age scholasticism. But as things developed, the modern philosophical line began to realize that, in terms of their starting point in the conflation of objects to ideas, the “things” the scientists are studying are not things as independent of mind at all, for there is no way to bridge the chasm between images in the mind and things in the world! – the “problem of the bridge”, *problema pontis*. The assumption of “common sense” that mental images in me are caused by things outside me proves to be just that – an assumption, an assumption which, moreover, turns out to be unwarrantable (given the Ockhamite doctrine of relation). How can you get, given the nominalist assumption that there are no relations except within awareness, from an awareness of an object as within the mind to that same object as also a thing outside the mind? You can’t (or “Kant”? – see note 18 above).

The conclusion is unacceptable to most people, it’s unacceptable to “common sense”, but it is for all that an inevitable logical consequent of the modern starting point both on the Rationalist side and on the Empiricist side. The “way of ideas” turns out to be a cul-de-sac; the “way of inquiry” presupposes “the way of signs”!

³⁷ Peirce c.1902: CP 2.114.

³⁸ Peirce c.1905: CP 5.525.

³⁹ Peirce c.1885: CP 8.43.

⁴⁰ A point that, prior to Kant, Leibniz (1704, 1714) on the Rationalist side and Berkeley (1710) in the Empiricist line explicitly realized: see Deely 2013.

7 Why Peirce had to become a “backwoodsman” in order to reopen “the way of signs”

Along comes Peirce,⁴¹ and he’s the first one (and so far not even the Peirceans follow his advice or example on this point) to actually go back and read the Latin scholastics, Duns Scotus in particular (c.1266–1308 November 8), but also Aquinas earlier (c.1225–1274 March 7)⁴² and the Conimbricenses later (volume published i.1591–1606), these last authors having been the principal university professors under whom Poinset studied.⁴³ Many of Peirce’s basic ideas about the doctrine of signs can be traced to these sources, most notably perhaps the realization that “all thought is in signs”,⁴⁴ a doctrine that Peirce also ascribes to Berkeley. But perhaps most crucial is the “Scholastic realist” position on relations that Peirce adopts against Ockham, for it is precisely Ockham’s position on relations that constitutes the essence of Nominalism.⁴⁵ With Peirce on the subject of relations, this is where “postmodern” thought – as far as philosophy goes – begins.⁴⁶

Postmodern philosophy begins with Peirce and his doctrine of categories, his “new list”. When you look at the history of philosophy overall, you find three basic doctrines of categories: that of Aristotle, that of Kant, and now of Peirce. And what’s the difference between the three?

Aristotle’s categories are an attempt to list the ways in which things can exist independently of awareness, and in this regard reduce essentially to six: substance, quantity, quality, action, passion, relation. (His longest list adds four

41 c.1906: CP 5.488: “I am, as far as I know, a pioneer, or rather a backwoodsman, in the work of clearing and opening up what I call semiotic, that is, the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis; and I find the field too vast, the labor too great, for a first-comer.”; CP 5.475: “The problem of what the ‘meaning’ of an intellectual concept is can only be solved by the study of the interpretants, or proper significate effects, of signs.”

42 After his death, Peirce’s widow Juliette disposed of his library, letters, and manuscripts in various ways, but finally burned what was left over, among which materials (I was told by Max Fisch) was Peirce’s annotated copy of the 1266–1273 *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. On Aquinas’s role in the Latin semiotic development, which embraces, however, vastly more than the just-mentioned *Summa* read by Peirce, see Deely 2004.

43 See Beuchot and Deely 1995.

44 Conimbricenses 1607: *Tractatus de Signis*, Qu. II, Art. 3, Sect. 3; tr. Doyle, pp. 86 (Latin) and 87 (English).

45 See the detailed entry “Nominalism” in the Index to Deely 2001: 941–942; and the remarks in Section 4.1. above.

46 Here I rely on my thousand-plus page definition of “postmodern” as a positive term in philosophy, by which I mean the content *in toto* of the Deely 2001 volume.

more, but these all depend upon relation.⁴⁷) Kant's categories are classifications of the way things can exist only in awareness, because on his view "things in themselves" – the very focus, note, of Aristotle's categories – are unknowable: rubbish, because you cannot actually know the things that Aristotle thought you could! Peirce's categories are distinctive, being neither those of Aristotle nor of Kant: Peirce's categories attempt to lay out the way that the human mind and the surrounding world interact to result in experience and knowledge, thus overcoming, or, rather, removing – placing "under erasure" (on the basis of relation as a suprasubjective mode) – the *problema pontis*.

8 Seeing how semiosis subtends awareness: Peirce's main contribution

Now. Semiosis.⁴⁸ Even as late as Mats Bergman (2009) and back through the Peirce literature concerning semiotics, we are told time and again that the originality of Peirce lay in his discovery of the triadic relation as essential to the being of signs. Yet as we saw above⁴⁹ that is not what's original to Peirce. That was well-established in 1632 by those Latins that (besides Peirce) very few trained in modern (especially "Analytic") philosophy bother to read in depth. Peirce's original contribution to the doctrine of signs was not at all his idea that sign-relations are irreducibly triadic but rather his idea that the "third" under the sign relation need not be mental.⁵⁰ This is the move that opened the way to our coming to realize that semiosis is at work in the world of plants interacting among themselves as well as with animals ("phytosemiosis"); and it is the move that opens the way also to our coming to realize that evolution itself as leading or "building up to" life in the first place involves semiosis ("physiosesemiosis").

⁴⁷ See Deely 2001: 73–78, esp. the full diagram on p. 77.

⁴⁸ From the *OED*: "To exist or extend beneath the superficial aspect of; to underlie."

⁴⁹ See 7 above.

⁵⁰ Peirce c.1906a: CP 5.473: "For the proper significante outcome of a sign, I propose the name, the interpretant of the sign. ... it need not be of a mental mode of being."

8.1 How dyadic physical relations become triadic

Now in the triadic relation, the interpretant is always an indirect effect or outcome, a kind of unanticipated result from the side of any dyadic interaction.⁵¹ So there is a sense in which you get full formed or sustained (“genuine”) triadic relations only in the world of living things. But you do also get pregenerate triadic relations in nature prior to the advent of life. Think about it. The universe started out with no living things. And not only with no living things, but there is no living thing such as we know that you could introduce into the universe at that early stage that would survive a microsecond. So how did the universe get from lifeless and incapable of supporting life to capable of supporting life, let alone actually supporting life? There had to be a lot of stages where, in the dyadic interactions of physical bodies, an unexpected side-event or consequence came to be indirectly produced, an occurrence which moved the universe closer to being able to support life. The moment of such occurrences would involve an irreducibly triadic relation: you have the two “nothing but” interacting, and now you have this “something more” state indirectly resulting which moves the universe closer to, or in the direction of, being able to support life. Slow by slow, step by step, the universe becomes more and more capable of supporting life, and then begins actually to support life, at which point the flame of semiosis, the triadic relation, becomes a constant rather than intermittent feature of the cosmos.

There have been a number of discussions on the Peirce-L website over the months leading up to the 2014 July 16–19 “Charles S. Peirce International Centennial Congress Invigorating Philosophy for the 21st Century” held at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell. One of the participants, Helmut Raulien, wrote that this all seems to come down to the problem of relation – relation, triadic relation, and triadic sign relation. Are all triadic relations sign relations?

Peirce has a strange saying to the effect that for interpretants a “being in futuro” will suffice.⁵² When something happens in a “nothing but lifeless and

⁵¹ For details on this key point see my discussion of “Aristotle’s Triangle and the Triadic Sign” (Deely 2008).

⁵² Peirce c.1902: CP 1.218–219: “If you ask what mode of being is supposed to belong to an idea that is in no mind, the reply will come that undoubtedly the idea must be embodied (or ensouled – it is all one) in order to attain complete being, and that if, at any moment, it should happen that an idea ... was quite unconceived by any living being, then its mode of being (supposing that it was not altogether dead) would consist precisely in this, namely, that it was about to receive embodiment (or ensoulment) and to work in the world. This would be a mere potential being, a being in futuro; but it would not be the utter nothingness which would befall matter (or spirit) if it were to be deprived of the governance of ideas, and thus were to have no regularity in

incapable of supporting life” universe that moves that universe, however slightly, in the direction of being able to support life, you have precisely “something more from nothing but”. That “something more” is precisely the production of an interpretant. And in the case of the non-living (or “pre-living”) universe that interpretant is anticipatory of what is to come, life as “a being in futuro”. One of the things – perhaps, indeed, the main thing – that turns out to be distinctive about the action of signs is that it proves to be the only causal interaction where the interactants don’t have to all exist at the time of the action.

If semiosis consists in this production of triadic relations where there is this indirect side-effect, the interpretant needs to be carefully understood. Sometimes Peirce says that the relationship of the interpretant to the significate is exactly the same as that of the representamen to the significate; but at other times he makes it clear that it may be at a different level; and I have come to think that it is almost always at a different level. For example, there is a dyadic relationship between clouds and rain; but clouds under that dyad are not yet representamens, save virtually. No animal is born with the knowledge or “awareness” that certain types of cloud formation indicate rain. Yet many animals come to learn that in the course of experience. The relationship between clouds and rain is a result of pure physical interaction. But in the semiotic web of animal experience that relation is assimilated within a triadic relation by the acquisition of an interpretant conveying, from the clouds, “Aha! Better get into some shelter. Rain is coming”. Then and there the clouds actually become representamens.

8.2 “The universe” – not just the living world – “is perfused with signs”

If⁵³ the production of that indirect “third arm” making an originally dyadic relation become part rather of a triad is what semiosis consists in, then what distin-

its action, so that throughout no fraction of a second could it steadily act in any general way. For matter would thus not only not actually exist, but it would not have even a potential existence, since potentiality is an affair of ideas. It would be just downright Nothing.

“What I do insist upon is ... that every idea has in some measure, in the same sense that those are supposed to have it in unlimited measure, the power to work out physical and psychical results. They have life, generative life.”

53 Peirce 1906a: EP 2.394: “... the entire universe – not merely the universe of existents, but all that wider universe, embracing the universe of existents as a part, the universe which we are all accustomed to refer to as ‘the truth’ – ... all this universe is perfused with signs ... Let us note this in passing as having a bearing upon the question of pragmatism.”

guishes human understanding? Not semiosis, but the possibility of recognizing semiosis by reason of the species-specifically distinctive feature whereby human understanding, by being able to objectify what cannot be directly instantiated to sense, can come to know directly relations in their difference from related things, and can then further (for this same reason) come to understand the process which the singularity of relations in nature makes possible in the first place, namely, semiosis. Semiosis become aware of itself – metasemiosis, or “semiotics”⁵⁴ – is a consequence of what distinguishes human understanding from the estimations in perception common to most (perhaps all) alloanimals.

All animals, all of life, and indeed all of nature as an evolutionary product, depends upon semiosis. The lifeless universe of dyadic interactions through triadic side-effects became a universe capable of supporting life. And life, we learn more and more, proves to be impossible without this thirdness occurring within otherwise physical interactions. We learn this more and more, the deeper we go into biology and physics. How many cells make up our body – uncountable trillions; and how many different kinds? And all the different parts of our body? Yet the individual is maintained as a whole.

Peirce has this saying which is my favorite: “this universe is perfused with signs”. A book has just come out, *Peirce in His Own Words*,⁵⁵ where the contributors were asked first to give their favorite quotation from Peirce, and then to write an essay around the quote. I haven’t had a chance to look through the book carefully to see if these words are included, but if I had participated in the book the quotation I would have commented on would have been Peirce’s observation that “all this universe is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs”.⁵⁶

8.3 From physical universe to the objective world (Umwelt) of animals

Well, the universe doesn’t consist exclusively of signs. Many things, many physical interactions, in their very occurrence are not signs; but everything in the universe is capable of becoming a sign, and certainly every object within expe-

54 See the Index entry “metasemiosis” in Deely 2009: 292. The conclusions in this matter, including the realization that “metasemiotics” would be an oxymoron, were reached through discussions with Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio.

55 Thellefsen and Sørensen 2014.

56 Peirce 1906: 5.448 note 1, ¶5 (penultimate) on p. 300; EP 2.394. Text cited in note 54 above.

rience depends upon semiosis to become an object in the first place, let alone to sooner or later (usually sooner) become itself a “signifying object” or representamen actually in its own right, which is why the universe is – inevitably and inescapably – perfused with signs.⁵⁷ The passage from physical environment of things to the objects of the Umwelt via the “modeling system” or Innenwelt makes for an inevitable “perfusion of signs”. And what is species-specifically distinctive about the human Innenwelt is this capacity objectively to grasp relations in their difference from related objects or things. This is what makes mathematics possible, makes linguistic communication possible, makes lying (in contrast to mere deception, pervasive in the animal world) possible. The human mind, by adding a relation of self-identity to the objects as comprising the Umwelt, makes the human animal live in a world of “objects as things”, whereas the alloanimals, knowing only related things as objectified, has no way to distinguish between objects and things: for the alloanimals, their objective world is all there is and there is no way for them to contrast it with the species-specifically human notion of “physical environment”.

Even so, for all animals the physical environment, while not known as such in contrast to but only as intruding within Umwelt (through the sensations determined by its bodily type) is something the animal becomes partially aware of, as wholly assimilated to and not as distinguished from (or within) the objects comprising its Umwelt. Bats, mosquitos, butterflies do not see that there is a meaning of “environment” which applies to everything within the universe. No. They see only the objective world that is meaningful to them. There is no question of “things-in-themselves”, only of objects-related-to-me as $+/-/0$. (And notice that these categories are not entirely fixed; they do not reduce simply to “instinct” but involve some estimation on the part of the alloanimals, the moreso the higher we ascend the evolutionary “tree”. A dog of course likes food, and will see something edible as desirable [$+$] when it is hungry, but may see that same item with indifference [0] when it is not hungry, or even as something to avoid [$-$] when it feels ill.)

So common to all animals is sensation as presenting in awareness some parts of the physical surroundings nascently objectified, and perception as construing or interpreting (organizing) those objects now presented as $+/-/0$; but the further stage of intellection presenting the world objectified as having a dimension which makes of them this or that sort of thing regardless of their objective status as $+/-/0$ is achieved only by the semiotic animal, thanks to what distin-

57 And keep in mind that the passage from all physical environments incapable of sustaining life to some physical environments sustaining life already involves semiosis.

guishes human understanding from animal estimation. Concepts are necessary to interpret sensations, but intellectual concepts alone enable a recognition of things as irreducible to objects even when partially included within them. Error enters the picture when mistaken perceptions arise; but truth becomes an issue only on the basis of intellectual concepts. Errors arise through perceptual interactions, but truth, like falsity (in generic contrast to alloanimal deception), arises in intellectual thought alone.

So the animal becomes aware of only part of its physical surroundings in sensation and organizes that awareness at the level of perception, which is where concepts come in and error first becomes possible. An animal goes searching for water, because water as present to the animal objectively will enable that animal to recognize when water becomes present through sensation as well, and water as present to sensation (water as physically existing here and now) is what the animal is in search of. But what is water apart from something to satisfy thirst – the possibility to discover that it is H₂O, for example – is not a question that concerns perception alone. With perceptual concepts alone the question cannot even be posed.

8.4 From the “a-priori forms” of Kant and the “intellectus agens” of Aquinas to the Lebenswelt

So⁵⁸ the objective world or Umwelt within zoösemiosis consists wholly of objects in relation to me and my needs as animal. Only when viewed under a relation of self-identity added to the Umwelt by the activity of intellect (“intellectus agens”, the Latins came to call the process of transforming “objects” into investigatable “things”) does the Umwelt become rather Lebenswelt (I exapt the term from Husserl 1936 to signify the generic Umwelt as species-specifically human, providing the answer to Heidegger’s question⁵⁹ as to “Why”, for the human animal, “does Being get ‘conceived’ ‘proximally’ in terms of the present-at-hand and not

⁵⁸ Aquinas and Kant held in common that the objects of sensation have to be made intelligible by the human mind’s own action. For Kant this was the question of the a-priori forms of reason, for Aquinas it was the question of the “*intellectus agens*”. Where they differed was in Aquinas’s realization that bodies as sensible become sensed objects through physical interaction without any direct involvement of mental representations, while Kant conceived sensed objects as a phenomenal veil whereby mental representation conceals the thing sensed from any direct conscious awareness.

⁵⁹ Heidegger 1927: 437.

in terms of the ready-to-hand, which indeed” – inasmuch as we are animals⁶⁰ – “lies closer to us?”).

All animals depend upon the surrounding physical environment, but they live in an Umwelt, a ‘meaningful’ world of objects which includes something of but does not reduce to the physical environment, the cosmos. Within this Umwelt, only the human animal comes to recognize that there are things which do not reduce to the Umwelt, to the world as meaningful-to-us. We – human animals – come to recognize that the world of things, the physical universe, existed before we came into being, it exists independently of our being in being, and will continue after we are dead. What we do not recognize without reflection is that, within our experience as humans, objects precede things and things are derived from objects. That recognition is what distinguishes the Lebenswelt as Umwelt-species-specifically-human from the Umwelt-as-generically-common-to-all-animals. All animals live in a world of objects rendered meaningful according to their bodily type. But only human animals come to see this world of objects as a world of things. Thus, just as it is the distinction between phantasiari and sentire that explains the difference between Umwelt and physical surroundings, so further is it the distinction between intelligere and phantasiari that explains why objects in a human Umwelt “get conceived proximally in terms of present-at-hand rather than simply ready- to-hand”, rather than simply as the +/-0 of von Uexküll.

8.5 From the *phantasiari* of animal perception to the *intelligere* of human understanding

When Thomas Aquinas speaks of the formal objects of the different sense-powers first external and then internal, he goes on to speak of being as first known (“*ens primum cognitum*”) as the formal object of the human intellect: just as the differentiation of light we call ‘color’ accompanies everything that we see, so the perspective on the animal objective world of having a dimension independent of relevance to us accompanies everything we as humans know. By contrast, the Neothomists of the 20th century generally and wrongly assume that *ens primum cognitum* means *ens reale*, which is a mistake consequential indeed. The transformation of the animal Umwelt into a Lebenswelt where the difference between

⁶⁰ “Human understanding recognizes the animal before it recognizes what is human within the animal” (“*prius occurrit intellectui nostro cognoscere animal quam cognoscere hominem*”) – Aquinas c.1266: Summa theologiae I, Q. 85 corpus.

things and objects becomes knowable is what is meant by *ens ut primum cognitum*.

Do we no longer burn witches because our ancestors got them all, or because we have learned that the notion of witches is a confusion of *ens rationis* with *ens reale*? Most today think that the fact of the matter is that witches were a fictional being mistaken to be real. There are many differences between Napoleon and Hamlet as between French Emperor and Danish Prince, as between the husband of Josephine and the prospective husband of Ophelia, etc.; but in the end all the differences come down to this, that there was a time when you could shake hands with Napoleon, there was never a time you could shake hands with Hamlet.

So when Heidegger starts out *Sein und Zeit* by saying that he is concerned with Being prior to the categories, the categories of *ens reale*, he is telling us that he is concerned with the role in human life of that distinctively human awareness of things that precedes even the recognition of the difference between being and nonbeing, *ens reale* and *ens rationis*.

There are many things over the course of human culture that were thought to be real but turn out to be fictions. Scientific research and investigation is focused on this point. What would be interesting would be a history of science – if I were younger, and knew then what I have learned since, I would like to write this history – from the point of view of objects once thought to be real that turned out to be unreal, and conversely. Phlogiston would be a good example; the discovery very early in the 20th century of a planet of our solar system interior to the orbit of Mercury would be another. Exactly the problem with human understanding is that we don't always get things right; truth is elusive but sometimes attainable. What gives us the possibility to sometimes “get things right” is at bottom the possibility unique to intellect to deal with objects that admit of no direct sensory instantiation, beginning with relations in their difference from related objects and things which can be directly instantiated to sense – that is, beginning from relations as the first components of material being experienced which have no subjective qualities by which they would become directly sensible. Relations unconsciously and preconsciously handled in their difference from related things is what makes linguistic communication in the first place possible; conscious arguments about gods, angels and demons come later!

9 How and why through human understanding semiosis becomes metasemiosis – “semiotics”

So! For all animals, knowledge – awareness – starts with sensation. And sensation is differentiated from perception because sensation necessarily involves interaction between the animal body and the bodies surrounding it. When you come to interpret the objectivities resultant from that interaction you enter the realm of perception, which differs from the realm of sensation by reason of involving psychological states which necessarily give rise to relations; and the two together – sensation within perception – provenate an “objective world” or Umwelt. Now objects, as we have seen above, in contrast to things, are the terms of cognitive relations, in both sensation and perception. But since perception is differentiated and defined by the involvement of psychological states as necessarily giving rise to or “provenating” relations (in contrast to sensation as *patis* respecting the physical surroundings), objects can be presented or “known” even when they are not physically part of our environmental surroundings as physically interacting without bodies here and now – and, it turns out, sometimes even when they don’t exist at all in the physical world.

Sorting out what is real and unreal in perception is not directly possible for the alloanimals. They can of course correct perceptual misinterpretations through the further involvement of directly sensory interaction. But the idea of an object as purely fictional, such as the person of Hamlet, or the prospective marriage of Hamlet and Ophelia, etc., is beyond the formative powers of animal estimation or “reasoning”. Sorting out what is real and unreal brings us to the boundary between perception and intellectual awareness, human understanding as irreducible to alloanimal estimation. Unreal objects are operative in perception, but the identification of them as such requires intellection, the involvement of concepts able to present objects “ready-to-hand” (+/-/0/) as if simply “present-at-hand – “things” having in their existence a dimension which is indifferent to the perceptual presentation as +/-/0/. So within semiosis the human animal is the only animal capable of becoming aware of semiosis, for the reason that semiosis essentially consists in the creation of relations triadic in type which, like all relations, cannot be sensed and so cannot be directly instantiated for perception, but can be objectified directly for intellection. (I am sure that the direct imperceptibility of relations is the reason why Ockham – who was not the first, but became the most influential – and his followers settled on the view that it is only in and by awareness that relations become actual as modes of being, with the resultant understanding that came to be known as Nominalism.)

Precisely the imperceptibility of relation resultant upon its having no sensory dimension to its proper being as over and above subjectivity, as “suprasubjective”, together with its consequent indifference to distance or location in space, is what makes possible in the first place semiosis (both in nature and in culture) as an influence of the future operative in present circumstances as alone determining whether a given relation exists in the physical order or depends here and now for its formal being upon an awareness by finite mind.

10 Ending with an illustrative tale

Let me end with a story illustrative of the point that circumstances alone determine the truth status of any given relation. Two students enrolled in class under a very strict professor feel ready enough for the final to take some time off and go out together to a bar, wherein their confidence of being well-prepared for the final allows them to have a drink, then, as it turns out, “one too many”. The next morning the alarm goes off when it’s time to leave for the final, but only one of the two awakens and can’t get the other to wake up. Not having much time (the professor locks the door when the exam begins), the student races to the classroom and the professor immediately asks where’s his room-mate. Somewhat panicked the student explains that just as they were leaving the dorm his room-mate passed out in the hall and was taken away by ambulance. “Oh”, says the professor, “that explains why you look so anxious. Well, don’t worry, I’ll arrange a make-up. Here”, he concludes, handing the student the final exam questions and notebook.

Down sits the student and begins the exam, trembling with worry that his friend will arrive and the professor will find out that he has lied. To avoid this disaster, the student races through the exam as quickly as he can and then rushes back to make sure his room-mate arranges with the professor a make-up for the final based on their common story about the fainting.

Then, to his increased horror, he arrives back to their room to find the room-mate gone! “Oh, no”, he thinks, “when that professor finds out I lied we’re both going to be in real trouble.” He rushes next door and asks the neighbor “Do you know where Charlie is?”. “Yes”, the neighbor replies, “about ten minutes after you left this morning he came out of the room in a panic and before he could get to the main door he passed out and they had to take him away unconscious in an ambulance. I hope he’ll be alright!”

So the first student thought he had lied to avoid having the strict professor flunk his friend for tardiness, but it turned out that he had come much closer,

unwittingly, to telling what would (as a “being in futuro”) turn out to be the truth. That’s semiosis within human understanding.

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- The designation EP** abbreviates *The essential Peirce (1867–1893), Volume 1*, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992); *The essential Peirce (1893–1913), Volume 2*, ed. Nathan Houser, André De Tienne, Jonathan R. Eller, Cathy L. Clark, Albert C. Lewis, D. Bront Davis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998). Volume 1 duplicate materials from CP, but volume 2 consists of previously unpublished manuscripts. The abbreviation EP followed by volume and page number(s) is a standardized reference form.
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Eero Tarasti

Culture and transcendence – the concept of transcendence through the ages

Abstract: The notion of transcendence is perhaps the most provocative new issue which existential semiotics tries to launch for theoretical reflection in contemporary semiotics and philosophy. The following paper lays out three species of transcendence in existential semiotics: *empirical, existential and radical*. Empirical means elements in our living world which are abstract, intelligible aspects as in the sense of the German understanding of sociology. The existential means that we leave our four-part 'zemic' universe by a reflection, either as negation or affirmation. That constitutes the supra-zemic level. The radical one is beyond all temporality, narrativity, etc. a purely conceptual state, of which we can speak only by metaphors. Either transcendence can be naturalized as an aspiration to something more complete than our deficient *Dasein*. Or it is seen as the ultimate principle which emanates its influence on earth as in theological doctrines. It depends on the epistemic choice which standpoint we adopt. Thus we have views on transcendence through the ages from Plato to Sufi thinkers, Ibn Arabi and Avicenna through Thomas Aquinas and Dante reaching Kant, Hegel and other philosophers.

Ultimately, the goal discussed in this paper is the elaboration of a trans-cultural theory of transcendence whereby we could construct a metalanguage to deal with different conceptions of transcendence. Such a theory would have far-reaching pragmatic consequences.

Keywords: Semiotics, transcendence, transcendental, philosophy, mystics

1 Transcendence

The notion of transcendence is probably the most challenging new term that the existential semiotics tries to launch into the semiotic discussion. Such a word is not found in any official dictionary or encyclopedia of semiotics – yet. However, I have used it in all phases of my theory, albeit always from a somewhat different point of view, beginning from its prominence in *Existential Semiotics* (Tarasti

2000). During a decade and half, the theory has developed and the concept of transcendence has gained new definitions and nuances. Empirically-minded semioticians may find it alien; but, on the other hand, by way of transcendence we can create a bridge not only to the tradition of European philosophy but also to epistemological views of other cultures. Therefore this essay seeks to elucidate transcendence as the continuation of another study “Culture and Transcendence” which already appeared in my book *Sein und Schein* (Tarasti 2015: 182–209). Nevertheless, at the same time, what is involved is a reinterpretation of classical philosophers in the light of existential semiotics.

Many of the previous philosophers who may have remained incomprehensible – from Aristotle to Plato, from Avicenna and Ibn Arabi to Hegel, Emerson and Husserl – obtain now in my mind a new shape and meaning. I would no longer call these reflections ‘neosemiotics’, which term I have tried to launch and which figured in the title of the last World Congress of the IASS in Sofia in 2014. Neosemiotics has rather eschewed contemporary profit-driven ‘innovation’ whereby semiotics only studies brands, marketing and management. I would rather call my endeavour ‘perpetual semiotics’, a return to central, classical problems, to what constitutes over the centuries the *grand discours* of semiotics.

My theory is based upon the articulation of the real empirical existence in *Dasein* as the so-called zemic world, which has four entities: body, person, praxis and values (Moi1, Moi2, Soi2 and Soi1). The model postulates two semiotic movements within it: the gradual sublimation of the body or Moi1 towards values, and on the other hand, the gradual embodiment or ‘corporisation’ of abstract values or Soi1 towards Moi1. Some have argued that my notion of transcendence means just the mode of Soi1, i.e. values and norms of a society or culture ‘as invisible categories’. This is quite right: it is indeed one species of transcendence and I call it *empirical transcendence*. To this class belongs much else – the German ‘understanding’ sociologists have pondered it, from Alfred Schütz to Thomas Luckmann (1994). The easiest definition of transcendence in this case is: it is whatever is absent – but present in our minds.

Yet, the aforementioned zemic process can be arrested in moments we call existential. Our subject is not at the mercy of a blind organic zemic process but can stop it either by negation or affirmation. S/he can move to the worlds of the supra-zemic, which is above *Dasein*, on a level in which we reflect and judge our being in its various modes. It is just on this level that many philosophical concepts like the *Geist* of Hegel, the oversoul of Emerson, the transcendental ego of Husserl and the one of Sartre, are situated. Even this is transcending and I call it *existential transcendence*.

Nevertheless, the movement of transcending does not stop even here, since behind all is *das Ding an sich* of Kant, of which we cannot know anything directly,

or the absolute of Hegel, which we either cannot determine, but which appears as continuous process, as an actualisation towards *Dasein* and history. I call this third transcendence **radical transcendence**. Now also many theologically oriented reflections of classical philosophers become understandable; they concern this final, ultimate and ‘highest’ form of transcendence. The term ‘highest’ or supreme is misleading in the sense that we would incessantly think that transcendence is somewhere ‘up’ and thus it may fall down upon us. From an early stage, Kant distinguished the transcendental – which was an epistemological category or *das Ding an sich* – from the transcendent which had the usual religious type tinge of meaning as something which is beyond the extremities of life and death. Of radical transcendence we can only speak by way of metaphors and symbols. It is most challenging but also most far reaching.

To apply Kant we could, moreover, speak about *a priori* and *a posteriori* transcendence. The latter kind of *a posteriori* emerges after our experience. This is a definition we meet for instance in existentialism: as our whole empirical *Dasein* is so incomplete and insufficient as it is, we reason that there must be somewhere something better i.e. we transcend. Sartre (2003), *inter alia*, defines transcendence like this. Yet another species, *a priori*, comes before any experience. When such knowledge changes from mere analytic into synthetic, i.e. becomes concrete in our experience, we encounter the appearance of radical transcendence in the world of the zemic. Some argue that what is involved is the phenomenon of theophany i.e. announcement – portrayed, especially impressively, by Renaissance and Baroque paintings.

Therefore, we are now in the moment of an epistemic choice: on the one hand, our starting point and the only ‘certain’ and evident thing is our empirical reality. Yet, because other species of transcendence unfold and emerge, we have to legitimate their occurrence by the arguments of empirical science like semiotics. The title of the book of the Finnish philosopher Sami Pihlström reveals what is involved. *Naturalizing the Transcendental* – i.e. the transcendental has to be rendered ‘natural’ i.e. empirical (Pihlström 2003). Such arguments proceed from the tradition of pragmatism or pragmaticism. But why do Anglo-analytic philosophers consider transcendence so important that it has to be ‘naturalized’? Obviously they have to admit that there are in the speech and behaviour of humans’ expressions, which cannot be by-passed with mere reduction into behaviorist issues.

On the other hand: what if our epistemic choice was an opposed one – radical transcendence as the only and ultimate kind of reality, anything else being merely a pale and gradually vanishing reflection as when one becomes distanced from the deepest source of being in transcendence. Such a choice has been made by many philosophers in Arabia, Persia and Europe (from Plato to Dante). I leave the question open which standpoint is ‘right’, but nevertheless I accept that it is

a relevant choice. The next task concerns whether semiotic discourses are able to deal with so broad a variety of diverse world views and theories. Accordingly we are again at the transcultural theory of transcendence. As Emerson argues in his essay *The Over-Soul*:

...We are often made to feel that there is another youth and age than that which is measured from the year of our natural birth. Some thoughts always find us young and keep us so. ... produce a volume of Plato or Shakespeare or remind us of their names, and instantly we come into feeling of longevity. See how the deep divine thought reduces centuries and millenniums and makes itself present through all ages. ... Before the revelations of the soul, Time, Space and Nature shrink away. ... The things we now esteem fixed shall one by one, detach themselves like ripe fruit from our experience and fall. ... The landscape, the figures, Boston, London, are facts as fugitive as any institution past, or any whiff of mist or smoke, and so is society, and so is the world. The soul looketh steadily forwards, creating a world before her, leaving worlds behind her. ... The soul knows only the soul; the web of events is the flowing robe in which she is clothed“ (Emerson 1940: 264–265)

In my own interpretation Emerson puts his ‘soul’ just in the supra-zemic level and it represents existential transcendence. In this phase we can already scrutinize it at the same level with most varied theories. Transcendence can thus occur vertically in two directions:

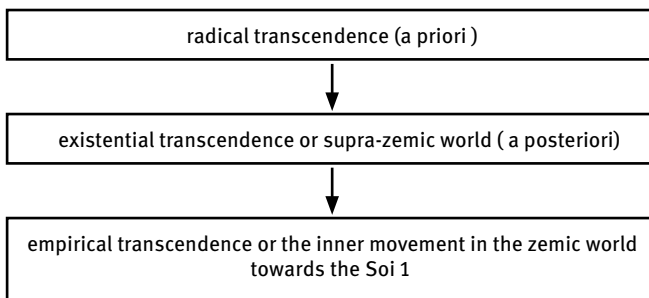


Figure 1: Different kinds of transcendence

- radical transcendence (*a priori*)
- existential transcendence or supra-zemic world (a posteriori)
- empirical transcendence or the inner movement in the zemic world towards the Soi 1
- either from ‘up’ till ‘down’ or from ‘down’ till ‘up’.

2 A fragment from the ‘metaphysical diary’

Now I change the type of discourse for a while and shift to diary notes à la Gabriel Marcel (*Journal métaphysique*, Marcel 1927). I find the following note on Feb 5, 2015:

Thoughts in the night. When I wake up mid-Night, I do not get worried. I think: this is phantastic, I still exist! I realize that this undeniable fact is not my act, it is not the result and achievement of my existential choices – although it partly is it – but is based upon some incomprehensible and irrational. It is called at least in the Lutheran theology by the term *Gnade*, grace. I live, I breathe, only thanks to some other ‘force’ or unnamed principle. My fate is to live at the mercy of this grace, upon that which the mercy gives me as a gift and what I do with the help of it. This feeling is probably the foundation of all inner religion. Sufi mystics spoke about the death of the lower ego and its disappearance into higher ego. What is involved is man’s blending into the infinite grace of being. Yet, the grace can also disappear from the *Dasein*. There is collective destruction in which whole nations lose their connection to the grace and vanish. Therefore grace appears to them as negation, *Das Nichts* or *le néant*?

On the other hand, the religions are immense fictive narratives which generate various texts and systems, for instance such creations like Dante’s *Divina commedia*, and the theological metaphysics of Ibn Arabi, painting, architecture, music, literature, theatre. But they constitute outer religion, they are ‘particular’ sign phenomena. They are metaphors of this other transcendental region. If, then, Hegel’s *Geist* lives and dwells in us, could it be just that transcendental ego of Sartre and Husserl? Is *Geist* perhaps the core of every zemic mode? Then humans discover *Geist* and transcendental ego at the centre of every mode or exactly like Goethe said: *Wende sofort nach innen, ein Zentrum findest du darinnen den kein Edel zweifeln mag*. In Hegel’s phenomenology the development of the *Geist* is a series of projects of recognition in which new forms of consciousness are discovered.

How, then, do *Ausfaltung* or movement and *das Werden*, first from body to person and then to a professional actor which finally realizes values, occur? Is it an automatic and free growth resorting to *Geist* or a series of choices, existential decisions and leaps from one mode to another? At the same time, it is possible to stop that movement and make a negation or affirmation i.e. either reject, abandon or devote, exalt to live – either in the ecstasy of being or in eternal conflict. What is the disappearance of sufi mystics in its various modes? Body (*Moi1*) – ascese, the mortification of the body like the monks, wandering sufis, hermits; Person (*Moi2*) – giving up the egoism, altruism, *Mitleid*, compassion, making good to other persons – although as a consequence, mostly, others then destroy this benevolent person, what is quite normal in this context; Professional

man, actor (*Soi2*) – exceeding the professional skills, super-art and -knowledge, the subject does not have any mandate, but represents all (Schiller); Disappearance of values (*Soi1*) – all particular, arbitrary, conventional contracts of societies and codes prove to be apparent, one is deliberated from them, they vanish in the bright light of transcendence, which is almost dazzling.

What kind of movements, then, take place in the zemic model:

- i. organic, natural movement: *Bildung* (cultivation); shift, *Ausfaltung* from M1 to S1
- ii. the transcending of this movement and interrupting it by returning to the centre of each mode (Goethe; or like in the novel by the Persian writer Attari *The Voyage of the Birds*, published in the year 1200: birds leave for a journey to search for their *simurgh* i.e. leader – but note at the end that *simurgh* already were in themselves as the inner principle!)
- iii. the relation of each mode to another or the modes of other subjects or how my Self communicates with other selves – or is the other always alien, authoritarian speech compared to mine (Bakhtin). If the zemic is a dialogue with an other zemic, the end result is unpredictable.
- iv. does the centre of zemic, the ‘core ego’ (see a.o. Finnish philosophers Sven Krohn, Lauri Rauhala) communicate with the lower ego of the other zemic, or does it reach its centre, core? There is, accordingly, communication among the super-zemic, from the core zemic to surface zemic and among the zemic centres.
- v. if two zemic subjects disagree about everything, who decides which one is right? In general: what is true? Is it like in the slogan by the multiple world champion at ski jumping: Matti Nykänen: “Real is really real”.

I wrote in a letter to Tuukka Brunila on Feb 22, 2015:

Therefore the following concepts are interlinked:

- the higher ego by Ibn Arabi – kosmos, transcendence vs the lower ego – the vanishing, destructed zemic ego
- Sartre’s Ego transcendental = higher ego
- Hegel: *Geist* which lives in us

Transcendence is a geno-concept, i.e. it becomes understandable only in a certain process, in a certain phase of it, as a part of temporality. Anything else is only ‘pheno-‘ or *Schein*.

What is involved is the turn upside down of the being. We shall no longer ask how transcendence is justified, possible and defensible. It is a self-evident point of departure. What is problematic is how *Dasein* goes on, how the world contin-

ues its blind existence, it could not be there any moment without transcendental grace. Is this Lutheran? Yet, it was stated earlier by sufi mystics!

From these theoretical and intuitive points I can proceed to observe different transcendences and variations of ‘the zemic’ through ages and cultures.

3 Plato

The dialogues of Plato are astounding in the sense that, probably for the first time in the history of humankind, philosophical questions were presented not as a ready-made doctrine or system, but in a conversation, in continuous argumentation, in which the reader can never anticipate where it finally goes. According to Holger Thesleff, Plato’s thought is based upon a two-level model (Thesleff 1989: 96–102) – but we could as well here speak about a three-level-model. In the dialogue *Parmenides*, what is pondered is the origin of being, its unity and multiplicity. Hegel later took this model as an example of a genuine dialectics. Here Aristotle answers when Parmenides asks:

If one is, what must be the affections of the others? Let us ask that question:., Must not the one be distinct from the others, and the others from the one? – Why so? Why because, there is nothing else besides them which is distinct from both of them; for the expression ‘one and the others’ includes all thing. – Yes, all things. Then we cannot suppose that there is anything different from them in which both the one and the others might exist? – There is nothing. Then the one and the others are never in the same? – True. Then they are separated from each other? – Yes. And we surely cannot say that what is truly one has parts? Impossible. Then the one will not be in the others as a whole, nor as a part, if it be separated from the others and has no parts? – Impossible. Then there is a way in which the others can partake of the one, if they do not partake either in whole or in part? – It would seem not. Then there is no way in which the others are one, or have in themselves any unity? – There is not. Nor are the other many; for if they were many, each part of them would be one part of the whole; but now the others, not partaking in any way of the one, are neither one nor many, neither whole nor part – True (Plato 1953: 707).

So, the conversation continues and after a while it comes to ponder the existence of one:

Then the one which is not, if it is to maintain itself, must have the being of not-being as the bond of not-being, just as being must have as a bond the not-being in order to perfect its own being; for the truest assertion of the being of being and the not-being of not-being is when being partakes of being, since it is and also of not-being, since to ensure the perfection of being there must not be not-being; and when not-being partakes both of not-being, since it is not, and of being, because in order to ensure the perfection of not-being, not-being must

be.- Most true... But can anything which is in a certain state not be in that state without changing? – Impossible. Then everything which is and is not in a certain state, implies change? – Certainly. And change is motion – we may say that? – Yes, motion ... (Plato op cit. p. 713).

How can this be interpreted? Conversation seems to constitute an endless discourse, whose direction constantly varies. Is it possible to think that ‘one’ means the transcendental principle of supra-zemic which then manifests in *Dasein* in many levels as ‘many’? Or is the ‘one’ the same as the beginning of all in radical transcendence?

In any case the same problem of one and multiplicity recurs in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle:

Previously it has been argued ... that the word ‘one’ has several different uses. Yet although this term is used in many ways, primarily and in fact and not accidentally the things which are called one are that in four different ways. That is one which is continuous either in general or particularly by its nature and not by any contact or connection... Still more one is that which is a whole and has a certain shape and form, and especially the one which is like it by itself and not by any external force.... Something is therefore one as continuous or as whole and something again because its definition is one. Such those entities whose thinking is one, and such are those whose thought is indivisible and, if the thing is by its form or number indivisible... One and many are opposition of each other in many ways of which one is opposition to indivisible and divisible, because that which has been divided or is to be divided is called a kind of multiplicity, and which cannot be divided or what has not been divided, is called one” (Aristotle 2012: 168 and 173, my translation from Finnish).

If one therefore thinks that in transcendence some principle, for instance, beauty or truth is ‘one’, then it is so that in the world of the zemic it appears in many ways as multiplicity. But one only needs to open *Mille plateau* by Deleuze and Guattari and one encounters just the same inference in the famous theory of rhizome, which is a kind of appraisal of multiplicity:

Principle of multiplicity: it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive ‘multiplicity’ that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world. Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and exposed ... there is not unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort in the object or ‘return’ in the subject. Multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing... We do not have unit of measurer, only multiplicities or varieties of measurements... (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 8).

This is exactly the same type of philosophical reasoning as in Plato and Aristotle, although the conclusion is different: Deleuze emphasizes the multiplicity

of the zemic world, for which there is no common standard in the level of the suprazemic.

However, in the dialogue *Phaedros* by Plato we find a metaphor for the essential distinction between *Moi* and *Soi* of the zemic level. This is the same as the view about transcendence at the origin of the souls. To begin with, Plato provides us with a definition via Socrates about ‘radical transcendence’:

But of the heaven which is above heavens, what earthly poet ever did or ever will sing worthily?... There abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul ... real knowledge really present where true being is (Plato 1953: 154).

However, in Plato’s theory the soul of man can raise to this sphere because it is immortal.

The soul through all her being is immortal, for that which is ever in motion, is immortal; but that which moves another and is moved by another in ceasing to move ceases also to live. Only the self-moving – since it cannot depart from itself – never ceases to move, and is the fountain and beginning of motion to all that moves besides. Now the beginning is unbegotten for that which is begotten must have a beginning; but since it is unbegotten it must also be indestructible (ibid. 152)

Yet, what follows in the dialogue is a metaphor to soul:

Let soul be compared to a pair of winged horses and charioteer joined in natural union. Now the horses and the charioteers of the gods are all of them noble and of noble descent, but those of other races are mixed. First you must know that the human charioteer drives a pair; and that one of his horses is noble and of noble breed, and the other is ignoble and of ignoble breed (ibid p. 153)”

According to Plato all that is soul turns around in the universe and in diverse forms, if appearing:

If the soul is perfect and winged it keeps in the height and rules over the whole world; but if it has lost its wings it sinks until meets something steady, there it settles and takes a worldly shape. This seems to move by itself although in reality it is move by the force of the soul; this unity formed by soul and body is called a living being. (ibid).

In Plato’s theory, souls sink down from radical transcendence, they charge the reason on the supra-zemic level to guide them and get transformed into a corporeal *Moi/Soi* entity in the zemic world. Exactly the same theory is then repeated by Avicenna in his poem of the soul, which in his ‘zemic’ world is like a bird

imprisoned in a cage, a winged being who is longing to return back to its origin in transcendence.

Here we have all the ingredients for a theory of love. When the charioteer or soul sees the beloved person and

has his whole soul warmed through sense, and is full of the prickings and tickling of desire, the obedient steed then as always under the government of shame, refrains from leaping on the beloved; but the other heedless of the pricks and of the blows of the whip, plunges and runs away, giving all manner of trouble to his companion and the charioteer, whom he forces to approach the beloved and to remember the joys of love... and now they are at the spot and behold the flashing beauty of the beloved; which when charioteer sees, his memory is carried to the true beauty, whom he beholds in company with Modesty like an image placed upon holy pedestal. He sees her but he is afraid and falls backwards in adoration ... the one willing and unresisting, the unruly one very unwilling; and when they have gone back a little, the one is overcome with shame and wonder and his whole soul is bathed in perspiration ... (idem)

So continues the fight between good and bad horse, desire and reason. In existential theory what is involved is, of course, struggle between *Moi* and *Soi*. The corporeal *Moi* wants to realize his desire, whereas *Soi*, the reason, tries to moderate and prevent. Very early on, Plato realized that the life of a subject is a continuous conflict between *Moi* and *Soi*. Often *Soi* is stronger in one's mind than one can imagine. Oscar Parland, the Finnish psychiatrist and semiotician said in his novel *Changes (Förvandlingar, in Swedish)* that finally ethical factors – *Soi* – determine the human's life more than anything else.

4 Persian and Arabian philosophy: sufi mysticism

For existential theory, the most fascinating phenomenon in this 'oriental' paradigm is sufi mysticism and philosophy. For most people the first contact with this world, which has its own view on subject and transcendence, is poetry. Perhaps best known is Hafiz, who gained celebrity in the West via Goethe who, in his late years, discovered him, translated him and created his own paraphrase in his poem collection the *West-oriental Divan*. One understands the enthusiasm of Goethe if one reads only a pair of lines by Hafiz; he has that quality of perpetual novelty and freshness, more than any other of the poets of his time; he talks directly to the modern person. Hafiz does this even more than another sufi-based poet, Malwana Rumi, who is famous also in the West. In contemporary Persia – Iran – Hafiz is the greatest poet, his tomb in Shiraz is an object of pilgrimage. People search for advice on their lives by taking a book by Hafiz, opening it at

random and putting a finger at some point. The answer can be read there. The Finnish specialist Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila has said in the postface to his Hafiz translation:

The love in Arabian and Persian love poetry is destructive and consuming. The beloved is conscious of his beauty, sometimes cruel and his lover is the abandoning victim of the love. Love is a strike of fate. But for a mystic this illness is healthy. In general man lives one's own life satisfied with small issues of his world. The perfume which expands from the God reminds him of the fact that the worldly life is not all, but man's origin is elsewhere (Hafiz/Hämeen-Anttila 2004: 240–241).

This may not occur to one's mind, yet, directly when one reads Hafiz. The semi-otician Henri Broms has studied Hafiz and Goethe in his dissertation (Broms 1968). He remarks that the more continuous discursive and philosophical poems of Hafiz are rare. However, he has his transcendental dimension.

A typical Hafiz poem is based upon ghazali verse and can be like this:

You eternally proud of yourself!/You are forgiven,/because you have been left without love.//Do not go around here,/at the crazy of love, /you have received celebrity/due to your sharp reason!/The drunkenness of love/does not blur your mind./Go away,/you are only drunk of wine.//Pale face, dolorous sigh/are for lovers/a medicament to pain. (Hafiz 2004, my translation from Finnish)

It is hard to see anything particularly 'philosophical' here – unless one knows the background theory of sufism about the disappearance of the zemic world, which is possible via *Rausch*, caused by love and being drunk. According to Broms, some scholars consider Hafiz a philosopher and pantheist (Broms 1968: 17). But the boundary between an emotional aesthetic reflection and thought in the proper sense is ambiguous. Later Hafiz develops however towards a continuous discourse and his poems become like counterpoint. One scholar equates him to the late Beethoven – each of them tries to transgress his limits (op cit 14–15).

Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila has, in his study *Jumalasta juopuneet, Drunk by the God, Handbook of Islamic mysticism* (Hämeen-Anttila 2002), introduced the history and essence of Sufism. It was launched in the 8th century in the ascetic movements of Arabia, which are reminiscent of similar phenomena in the Christian world. Soon brotherhoods with their own doctrines emerged from these movements. The central idea was the same in Plato i.e. man's soul was from the Heavens and longs to return there. Man has anamnesis or an image of that primal state and he only needs to return it to his mind. Therefore their starting point is the abovementioned concept of 'radical transcendence' which is in this case the same as God. The grace of God is radiating continuously to humankind. It would

cease existing if that grace would finish even for a moment (the same view was later typical of Thomas Aquinas i.e. the work of creation was perpetual).

The subject is central in sufi mysticism since the human reaches radical transcendence by disappearance. Although Sufism grows from the Koran and Islam (some think its origin was in Christianity and Indian philosophy), it abandons the sunna or the laws of earthly life. The disappearance means apathia but also a state of not-will, which is reached step by step by 'positions' or 'stations' and within them in 'states'. What is involved is the disappearance of ego, *Moi* and *Soi* into radical transcendence. The sufists soon came into conflict with official Islamic thought and they were persecuted as heretic. The disappearance happens in ecstasy, among other phenomena, or what is involved is the Nietzschean doctrine of *Rausch*.

Dance was one means to reach the illuminated state of a mystic. Many poems by the famous Mawlana Rumi have been written for dance. It makes one drunk like love. The drunkenness leads into disappearance, which is the goal. Many sufis gave up the sharia, the law; they were antinomists who, by their behavior, aimed to upset the bourgeois (*épater le bourgeois*), especially in the countries of Eastern Islam, in Iran, Turkey and Central Asia where they appeared as wandering qalandars dressed in wool. Sufism has been equated to a kind of free thinking of Islam like the religious sects in the Christian world. The sufi psychology is ternary; there are body, the lower soul and higher soul – what corresponds to our distinction among zemic, suprazemic and transcendence. On the other hand, they distinguish between subject seven spiritual realities or, as we could say in semiotics, actantial roles, which are the savage (Caliban), the irreligious man, the Muslim, the believer, the saint, the prophet and Muhammad or the complete man. These levels coincide with the seven prophets of salvation history: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad.

Sufism likewise adopted body technics in its ritual: *dhikr* or incantation with the profession *la iaha illa Allah* the mystic pronounced in four parts: the negative word *la* breathed out from the upper part of the navel, the word *ilaha* breathed in to the right side of lungs, the word *illa* breathed outside from right to left and the word *Allah* breathed into the heart. This can be illustrated by the following diagram:

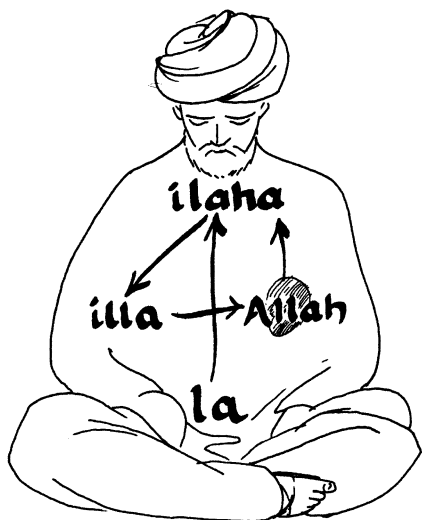


Figure 2: Sufi breathing technics or how it appears in *Moi1*

In other words, as early as the level of zemic world or *Moi1* the mystic can move to radical transcendence when s/he loses her/his lower soul by repeating the *dhikr*. The dancing dervishes are another example of corporeal conduct as a movement towards transcendence.

People started to call sufi sacred men by the term *wali*, saint. Yet, a saint did not need to know himself whether he was a saint. This would correspond in the theory of angels to the idea that there can be an angel *malgré lui*, without knowing it and even against their will. Until the 15th century, however, different sufi schools emerged and brotherhoods of which some were socially very critical. Some had their own hierarchies even up to the highest sufi master. The Mongol invasion strengthened Sufism as a religion which was easy to adopt. One part of Turkish sufi organisations combined religiosity and military career; Suhrawardi was the director of the Bagdad sufis in the turn of 12th and 13th centuries. The Safawiyas were a shia-influenced brotherhood which used as their sign a red hat; it acted in Persia and caused the shias to become a dynasty which ruled over Persia to the 18th century and made it a shia society. However, some functioned outside schools and were satisfied with a mystic philosophy.

5 The philosophy of Ibn-Arabi

One of the best known sufi philosophers Ibn Arabi functioned outside a specific school. The philosophy he developed, called ‘*irfan*’, is still central in Iran in the teaching of philosophy. He was born in Murcia, Spain in 1165 and died in Damascus in 1240. His tomb there is still a place of pilgrimage for sufists. The essential turning point in his life was his visit to Mecca where he had a religious vision. He stayed there for three years and travelled in 1204 to Bagdad and in 1206 to Cairo. In these journeys he came into open conflict with fundamentalists. Ibn Arabi was befriended by Ibn Rushdi who was the most illustrious philosopher of Islam by his other name, Averroes. He was a theoretician and he doubted many visions of Ibn Arabi and asked whether they were compatible with the philosophy. Ibn Arabi answered: Yes and no... and between yes and no, according to him, the soul flew behind the matter.

Ibn Arabi considered his major task to build a bridge among different religions and philosophies, having considered Greek philosophy and Plato. He emphasized tolerance; sufism was the most tolerant doctrine in the Middle Ages, at the same time as Thomas Aquinas attacked the pagans. Ibn Arabi thus already represented a kind of transcultural theory of transcendence; many of his ideas can be interpreted in terms of existential semiotics. One of the most remarkable specialists on Ibn Arabi was the Henri Corbin (1903–1978), whose major work is *L’Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d’Ibn Arabi* (1958). Corbin starts from the point that all that is apparent is exoteric; all that is hidden, spiritual and inner is esoteric. One could say that the zemic sees the world from an inside or esoteric point of view, whereas the zetic is seen as outer behaviorism; this distinction corresponds to the concepts of endo- and exosigns in the existential semiotics.

The intelligence is the emanation of archangel Logos according to Corbin; upon it is based *intelligentia spiritualis* (Hegel’s *Vernunft*, Reason). It is also the *pleroma* of archangels or appearance (Corbin 1958: 100–101). What is involved is the reflection of the inner world into external world. Ibn Arabi repeats the same remarks as archangel Gabriel to a handsome Arab youth Dahya Kalb. As the organ of theophanic observation he serves the theophanic imagination. Theophany means the appearance of divinity on earth (i.e. the manifestation of radical transcendence). This capacity provides visible shapes with theophanic contents and constitutes prophetic hermeneutics. For Ibn Arabi, the fights between nominalists and realists are comical because his prophetic philosophy moves on the historicity of pure theophany, in the inner time of the soul, the external events being the history of man’s spirituality. For him, history does not appear as linear but vertical between the height and depth.

Ibn Arabi uses the term *Soi* in the sense of self-knowledge. According to Henri Corbin, the leitmotifs of Ibn Arabi’s Sufism are

- 1) the encounter of the prophetic and the mystic: they differ from each other and spirituality develops into that which Corbin calls theophany. It is the same as the manifestation of radical transcendence on the earth, it leads into *unio mystica* and *unio sympathetica*. It belongs to the secrets of the dialectics of love; what is involved is the meeting of physical and spiritual love. Mystic love is the religion of Beauty, since beauty is the secret of the theophanies and mystic love is far afield from negative ascetism;
- 2) imagination and theophany. Since the Creation is divine imagination, how does it appears in being? At the centre there is the special organ or ‘heart’, or *Moi*, we could say.

To the same sufi philosophy of Ibn Arabi’s time belongs, in a way, also Avicenna, the most famous of all Persian philosophers (d. 1037), also known by the name Ibn Sina. He called the mystic part of his philosophy ‘Eastern philosophy’ as the opposition to the Aristotelian or Western part. In his thought and in that of Suhrawardi (d. 1191) the East is the home of Light, and the West of darkness. Yet, Avicenna mastered all Greek philosophy and the heritage of antiquity by heart. He studied and wrote incessantly; he read ten times the metaphysics of Aristotle and translated the antique philosophers into Arabian. He never slept but kept himself awake by drinking coffee (Hämeen-Anttila op cit p. 195).

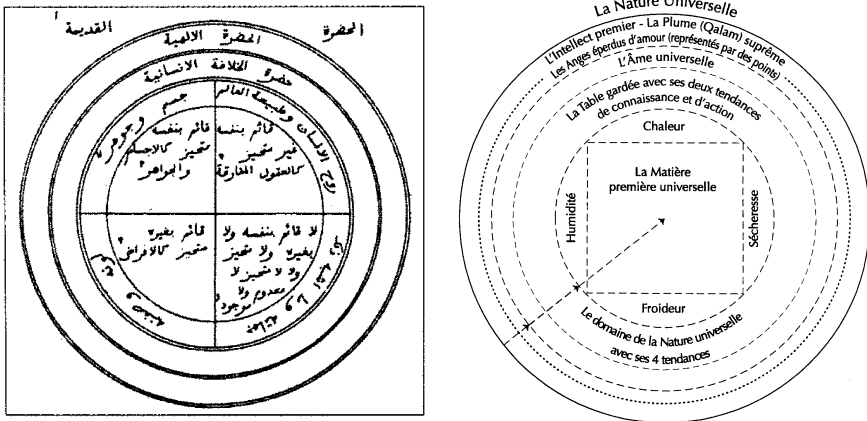


Figure 3: The structure of the universe according to Ibn-Arabi

6 Avicenna or Ibn-Sina

Jari Kaukua, a Finnish philosopher, has published a remarkable study entitled *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy. Avicenna and Beyond* (2015). He ponders the epistemology of Avicenna whose famous metaphor of a ‘floating man’ preceded Descartes by hundreds of years. The man who floats in space without any sensory perceptions of his body, however, experiences that he exists. Accordingly he does not need any sensory perceptions to prove his existence. Kaukua has a critical view on Henri Corbin and considers him an eccentric thinker who developed his own phenomenological interpretation and abandoned the rigour of historical method. A scholar had by his imagination revitalized the ideas about his object. In Corbin’s view, symbols and myths are foregrounded in an extravagant manner; thus he creates bridges between Christian and Islamic philosophies without a historic connection: onto these he maps such men as Jakob Böhme and Emmanuel Swedenborg (Kaukua op. cit p 7–8). In Kaukua’s mind, Avicenna’s idea is to find an existential basis for his argument that man’s soul is independent from a body and therefore an immaterial substance (ibid p. 37). One could thus formalize Avicenna’s reasoning. If non-A i.e. non-*Moi1* then B, or if non-A of the body then B = soul; on the other hand, since in that state of floating the man also lacks memories and knowledge, then how has he arrived in such a state and how is all the functioning of intellects possible or If non-*Moi2*, then B.

Is then Avicenna’s view about self-awareness the same as Husserl and Sartre’s transcendental ego? What is involved, here, is the concept of the essential or essence. The floating man neither has any direct access to himself nor is he aware of his existence, nor fully conscious of his personal existence (*Moi2*). Yet, he admits the existence of his core identity, his essence – but not that of his body. On what grounds can he argue that one is aware of one’s essence? The thesis of existentialism was that existence precedes essence. This is dealt with by Kaukua in the chapter of his book entitled ‘The problem of incorporeal individuality’. All corporeal entities are divided without limits into subparties (M1, M2, S2 and S1 a.o.) and then into completely new modes of being for instance: *Toi1*, *Toi2* etc. Accordingly, when I am aware of myself it does not mean necessarily that I am conscious of my modes M1, M2 ... The zemic world is not a creation or act of the subjects himself, but it comes from elsewhere; it is rather illusory and vanishing. I am perhaps despairing, but it is sweet, since I still know I am here albeit totally irrationally (*jenseits der Vernunft*), thanks to some ground. When I ponder this I am already in the level of the suprazemic; I am therefore fully aware of myself but at the same time I belong to something else: transcendence only manifests and embodies in me. Hence soul is a suprazemic concept.

From this viewpoint Kaukua reasons the problem of immortality of soul at Avicenna. Does the soul exist when the zemic has been destroyed and died? If the soul is immaterial it is hard to imagine in this epistemic choice that it would cease existing. Avicenna proposes that to be related to one's body is a property of the soul independently of whether there would exist any actual body. This is undeniably a central problem in existential semiotics from its first model of *Dasein* and the transcendental journeys of the subject: how can anything spiritual or soul-like exist without the concreteness of the *Dasein*? However, Avicenna is convinced that the soul appears as various temperaments in various acts, which distinguish them from the acts of another soul. This is linked, in his mind, to the so-called moral configuration (Kaukua op. cit. p.46). Hence, there are individualizing properties, passions, intellects... but altogether the solution of the problem is in the fact that the soul is a meta-modal entity, and does not dwell in any temperamental or modal level in the zemic. In the Sufi philosophy again, all is a gift from elsewhere, rays of radical transcendence, and then, paradoxically, humans have to mourn their good acts because they did not take place thanks to themselves. It does not matter by whom goodness enters the world, the main thing is that it enters.

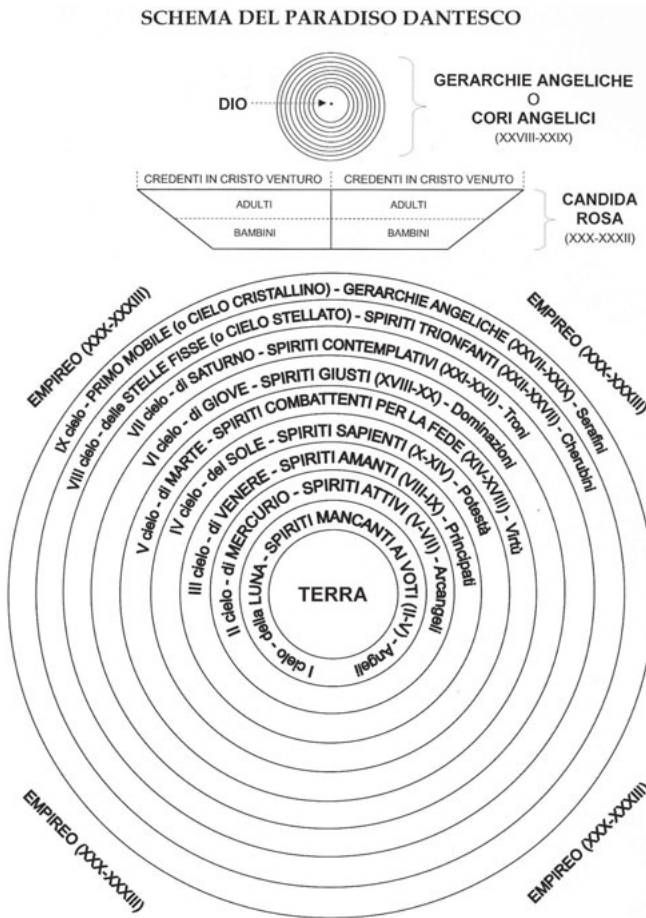
7 Thomas Aquinas and Dante

Summa totius theologiae by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) naturally contains quite essential things in the definition of transcendence. He ponders the relationship between soul and body dividing the problem among seven subspecies. Is the soul a body (or the object of *Dasein*), is the human soul something existing independently, are the souls of unintelligent animals existing independently, is man the soul or is man a combination of soul and body, is the human soul imperishable, is the soul of the same species as an angel? These are all questions of zemic modes of *Moi/Soi* but elevated to the supra-zemic level. Yet, before this chapter he gives reflections on the existence of 'radical transcendence' or existence of God, of which he states that it is 'known by itself' or something whose knowledge is natural – therefore *a priori*. Thomas makes dense reference to the metaphysics of Aristotle and his whole reasoning stems from Greek philosophy. Continuing, he asks whether the existence of God can be proved and he states that it cannot. However, there are two kinds of proofs, either one goes from cause to consequence or vice versa. In the latter case, we therefore think that in the *Dasein* something occurs which cannot be explained in another way than postulating transcendence behind it. To this reasoning we still return later in this essay. In what follows, Thomas discusses the problem of the evil, i.e. how God can exist if there is evilness.

Particularly interesting are the aesthetic theories of Thomas Aquinas, especially as studied by Umberto Eco (1988). Aquinas believed that beauty was a transcendental, a constant property of being (Eco 1988: 46). But what did this mean? The transcendental for medieval thinkers adds nothing to being. Nor do they in any way diminish its totality and extension. The transcendental can be discerned in every being. Therefore the transcendental led back to a metaphysical issue of great importance in Scholasticism. Aristotle's speech about the one and multiplicity was their starting point. "If beauty is considered to be a transcendental, it acquires a metaphysical worth, an unchanging objectivity and an extension which is universal" (ibid 22). Aquinas noticed that beauty could be perceived in every being. His universe was a hierarchical structure and all beauty was good. And beauty like the good was based upon form; form again was the reason why something was actual. In our model of transcendence this means that beauty as a quality found in the zemic world was based on the form of its signs, therefore there is beauty of body, person, practice and values themselves.

Doubtless Aquinas had an impact upon Dante, whose vision of the spheres of transcendence in the *Divina commedia* is one of the most powerful in the history of our culture. If in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* the main topic was the historic man and his wanderings in time, in *Paradiso* (Mondadori 1994, commento di Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi) the object is timeless reality, to which man aspires as his supreme destination. Images of this reality are light, luminous, spacious; stars and music appear. Even the language is refined by its vocabulary and by its sound, sublime due to its Latinisms and neologisms and Bible citations. In *Paradiso* one goes through physical skies. There one sees various places, but Dante has imagined his view on paradise as 'ascese', it manifests at the same time as sensual and intellectual vision; there occurs erudition in Boetius, Avicenna and the whole medieval and neoplatonic cosmology. Through the Platonic cosmos a mortal man is passing, Dante carries along in his body to the immobile heavens all his needs, desires, memories, which exist only in time. His person is the only acting person, but via it all that is multiple and dramatic enters. As early as in the middle of the first song, a central event occurs: man has transgressed his own nature, he has been transhumanized. The story goes on in the transcendental sphere, which can be called metahistoric: he enters the heavens where pure spirits dwell, angels and saints of God. Consequently the idea is that *Moi1* and *Moi2* have entered radical transcendence and portray that phenomenon from the corporeal point of view. Just this invention, that the body raises into heavens, lets the poet describe that world in a sensible form and describe the paradise, i.e. radical transcendence. This idea is made possible, of course, by the Christian doctrine of resurrection of the flesh, according to which the body has to follow the soul to paradise as transformed, transhumanised and transfigured in order

to evoke the glorified body of the Christ, as St. Paul describes it in the Corinthian letter (1:13). One also hears music, but it is not produced by instruments; it is mystic and produced by the harmony of the spheres. The theme of the poem is thus to show how all things return to God, as their harbour, the Fatherland, which appears on the road described by the poet. One sees there different symbols like a snake or the sea or a bow. Here occurs also the splendid order of the world, just as it has been portrayed from pseudo-Diogenes to Boethius. It can be illustrated by a diagram:



N.B. Per ciascun cielo sono indicati, nell'ordine: la posizione occupata, il pianeta che lo governa, gli spiriti che vi compaiono, i canti in cui è trattato (tra parentesi), le intelligenze che lo muovono.

Figure 4: Dante's view on paradise

This is very much like the drawings by Ibn Arabi. The influences have passed through culture in many directions.

8 What Kant said in his *Critique of Pure Reason*

We now pass over centuries to the *Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant. German speculative philosophers open in a new manner our reading of the model of zemic/supra-zemic. Kant starts from the transcendental judgement which is innate: “The judgement capacity is a particular capacity which cannot be taught at all but only used” (Kant 2013: 128). No school can replace it. Although the schools would teach rules, the ability to use or apply these rules must be in the pupil himself. This holds true for all schools, including scientific ones. For instance, the Paris school of semiotics is an abstract and complex construction of rules, but how it is assumed and used, when, how, far, when it is stopped etc. – none of these was ever taught by Greimas. According to Kant, a doctor, judge, statesman or person of zemic *S2* can have a lot of rules, but still s/he can fail in their application when her/his art of judgement is deficient. In a footnote Kant, openly says: the lack of judgement is in fact what we call stupidity and such cannot be helped (Kant *ibid*, see also Bankov 1999).

Yet, Kant argues that it is characteristic of transcendental philosophy that in addition to a rule it can also show *a priori* a case to which a rule has to be applied. Its concepts are due to its objects *a priori* and their objective validity cannot be shown *a posteriori*. What is involved is how the concepts of transcendental virtuality are chosen by a subject and actualized in the world of *Dasein*. Truly this is a major problem: how do we know which concept of pure understanding fits to each case of *Dasein*? Kant speaks about transcendental time determination which enables the application of the category to the empirical world (p. 130). If values and ideas are in transcendence ‘timeless’ there must be a kind of innate time sense which tells what fits to which case in the history of the zemic world, both on micro and macro level. Kant speaks about the ‘stream’ of appearances. They are regulated by the deduction of *a priori* concepts, which sets them to serve as the possibilities of experiences. If intuitions are realizations of the supra-zemic level, they are, according to Kant, nothing more than representations of those appearances. An *a priori* concept is like a pre-sign, its manifestation in the zemic level is an act-sign and its impact the post-sign. A crucial addition which Kant brings here to the discussion of transcendence is whether we approach it as *a priori* or *a posteriori*. The movement from radical transcendence ‘down’ to the supra-zemic level of our intuitions, and from there to the zemic level represents

a priori transcendence. Instead, the movement from zemic upwards towards the highest species of transcendence is *a posteriori transcendence*.

Is semiotics an *a priori* or *a posteriori* science? In order to be *a priori* there should not be anything empirical (op. cit. p. 63) and *a priori* cognition must be completely pure. Transcendental philosophy is philosophy of pure speculative reason. Can semiotics and especially existential semiotics attain such a level? Yes, namely in the latter's notion of radical transcendence. Yet, all practicalities refer to emotion following Kant, emotions which belong to empirical sources of cognition. Simply: either transcendence opens from experience in the empirical *Dasein* zemic world, which we start to reflect in the level of the supra-zemic, for instance when we experience something as insufficient, and we start to search for the complete thing and thereby we infer that if such exists it must be transcendental, for instance, the concept of immortality of the soul. Or: we start from *a priori* transcendence which gradually appears in its journey towards the zemic.

Now, we come to the important distinction made by Kant between the transcendental and transcendent. He says (p. 61): "I call all such cognition transcendental which is not so much doing with objects than with our *a priori* concepts. Such a system of concepts would be called a transcendental philosophy" (Kant op cit p. 214). It would thus contain both analytic (logical) and synthetic *a priori* elements. Nevertheless, there appears a clear distinction between the aforementioned concepts. Kant speaks about transcendental 'illusion' or 'appearance' (how we say it depends on how we translate the German term *Schein*, which is perhaps a little too abrupt; what is involved is indeed appearance, phenomenon, which is of course more or less illusory in relation to the transcendental categories). We are facing here such a natural and inevitable illusion which is based upon basic subjective statements and masking them into objective ones. For instance note the illusion in the phrase 'World must have a beginning in time'. This maintains an illusion about extension of understanding. Such phrases which are possible within the limits of experience Kant calls immanent (or being inside the zemic), whereas those which exceed these boundaries are transcendental. They cannot be held as transcendental categories.

Some theological system of Dante or Ibn Arabi could be an illusory system of *Schein*; for instance, the portrayal of paradise from the viewpoint of empirical sensations of a poet. The fault lies in the fact that one does not notice the borderlines of the field wherein pure understanding (i.e. immanent reasoning) has room. The basic statements of pure understanding must be in their use merely empirical and not transcendental, therefore transgressing the boundaries of experience. Yet, the basic statement which eliminates these limits and even orders us to exceed them is called transcendent. Consequently, the term transcendental has been reserved exclusively for his philosophic-epistemic use and it should not be

confused with the extension of the empirical world into the ‘transcendent’ which theology represents.

From this point of view, it seems as if Kant would abandon the aforementioned *a posteriori* transcendence, which raises and grows from man’s zemic world into its heights just like a Gothic cathedral or the linear art of polyphonic music in the 16th and 17th centuries. Existential transcendence à la Sartre – i.e. transcendence as the continuation of the incompleteness of the zemic world – does not fit with the Kantian vision. The *a posteriori* transcendence which emerges from the deficiency and lack of empirical experience is indeed really *Schein* for Kant, illusion from which one has to get free with truly transcendental logic.

9 Hegel and Phenomenology of the Spirit

Hegel is the central thinker in this context since behind the modes of our zemic model loom the categories of *an-sich-sein* and *für-sich-sein* from *Wissenschaft der Logik* published in 1812. Yet in Hegel’s previous work *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hegel 1952 [1807]), which has been considered a prelude to the Science of Logic, we encounter the idea of transcendence, namely in the form of the concepts of ‘absolute knowledge’ (*Wissen*). *Phänomenologie* is a very difficult work but one should not get scared. Sometimes it is worthwhile to read persistently something without understanding all, if one is convinced of the message of the text. The Finnish reader is much helped by the *Introduction to Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* edited (in Finnish) by Susanna Lindberg (2012), and particularly the essay written by herself there as well as by others. Now the power of our zemic model appears perhaps in the interpretation of this work which is to provide an existential semiotic framework. If we pick up the core concepts here they are situated in our model of transcendence as follows:

- radical transcendence = the absolute
- suprazemic level (existential transcendence) = *Geist, Wesen* (Spirit, essence)
- zemic level (empirical transcendence) = individual, people

The most important chapter is the last one, *Das absolute Wissen*. Hegel says there: the content of cognition (*Vorstellen*) is the absolute spirit, although it appears in an objectal form. The object is the immediate being. It partly appears at the level of the zemic as being to others, as *für-sich-sein*; partly it occurs as some kind of general essence – in the level of suprazemic reflection. Hegel declares: *Das Ding ist Ich* (p. 551). In other words: the unreachable Kantian *das Ding an sich* starts to move from its locker, it refutes and is refuted always in its subsequent forms

of appearance at different levels. This process he calls *Bildung*. In fact as early as in our zemic model there is refutation or annulment when shifting from one mode to another; from M1 to M2 and S2 and S1, it is all horizontal *Aufhebung*, refuting. This reconciliation of the awareness with self-awareness (pondered already by Avicenna) appears in two forms; on the one hand, as religious Spirit, as in the theological reflections above; and on the other hand as awareness in itself. These were Kant's transcendent – which for him was to be doomed as mere *Schein* – and transcendental. In Hegel in self-awareness the pure knowledge recognizes itself as pure *In-sich-sein* (p. 554) and Spirit. The ego or the self leads one through these phases into the life of the absolute Spirit (p. 554). Yet, the Spirit has to unfold in time. Time as a concept exists before the awareness. Therefore the Spirit necessarily appears in time (Hegel op. cit. p. 558). In fact, one cannot know anything unless it is first an experienced knowledge i.e. *gefühlte*, felt truth, inner-manifested, eternal. The experience is namely the object and substance of awareness. This substance which is the same as Spirit, is its becoming into what it is as such, in itself (*an-sich*). Every *an-sich* has to change into *für-sich* (see in the zemic model the movement from M1 to M2 or from S1 to S2); the substance has to become subject, the object of knowledge into object of self-awareness as a circle returning to itself (*Kreis*), which must have its beginning but which it reaches only at the end. Unless the Spirit gets realized and completed as World Spirit, it cannot be fulfilled as a self-conscious Spirit. From this follows that *absolute knowledge is a continuous process whose result is seen only at the end*. This is a standpoint differing radically from Kant, for whom transcendental logic operates in a kind of timeless sphere of *das Ding an sich*. As Susann Lindberg argues: the human does not immediately recognize the absolute in its experience. There, so-called natural awareness (zemic) has to first pass through a long and difficult way of doubt and despair, which educates it into the absolute (this is its *Bildung*, Lindberg 2012: 24). Spirit is not a supra-zemic entity detached from reality, but it is the movement of the formation of reality itself. The phenomenology of Spirit just inquires into this gradual formation of the spirit. Each phase is refuted in the next one via its inner conflicts. In the ruins of contradiction and aporia emerges the next form of consciousness. Yet, the forms, once passed by and annulled, are not forgotten; they are preserved as a part of absolute awareness in memory and they are returned to (Lindberg p. 21). Then comes perhaps the most interesting phrase in the essay by Lindberg: “A little bit sharpening one might say that spirit is just the history of its own failures... it remember its own crises.”

Here one could at once throw out a question: why does the Absolute have to sink down from its ‘heights’ and why is it forced to experience the crises, humiliations and annulments of the lower levels? This all belongs to the coherence of the Hegelian system. Only the *end* of the system justifies its beginning. In the zemic

model one could think horizontally that M1 is the beginning and S1 is the end i.e. when the body has been sublimated into values and ideas. Or vertically: the world of the zemic, *Dasein* is the beginning and the highest transcendence – the end, or vice versa. Human action in the world is continuous negation. Humans are not satisfied with mere being, enjoying life but desiring realization and to change the world. Yet, unfortunately this desire never leads to satisfaction. The work, the product, leads always into disappointment according to Hegel (as interpreted by Lindberg). It does not express what the human wanted it to express, and others do not hear what the human says. Therefore humans are alienated. Yet, the absolute spirit does not appear to the world from a kind of transcendental place in which it would have been so far looming, but it manifests itself in human works and communities. The absolute is present in art works (not in any old art works but as we could add here, only in the existential ones) and in other representations such as metaphors.

In many chapters of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* Hegel presents ideas which can be interpreted easily in our zemic model, like the world of the self-alienated Spirit. The estrangement entails two separate worlds of the spirit. What is involved is not a negation towards radical transcendence as the self-awareness of the absolute essence, for instance in religion; it is, rather, belief insofar as it is an escape from the real zemic world and not for itself or being for oneself, i.e. a shift on the supra-zemic level (p. 350). In the subchapter of this passage *Bildung* and its realm, Hegel speaks about reality as based upon a movement in which self-awareness abandons personality (i.e. M2). Self-awareness is real only if it alienates from itself. The alienation or estrangement has to be interpreted as the negation of existential semiotics or affirmation when the subject steps outside *Dasein* mentally. The spiritless generality – for instance, in the idea of justice – covers all natural habits whose essence is in the *Dasein*. Yet the generality which is valid here is generality which has become something, i.e. behind it there is experience and that is why it is real.

An individual obtains validity just via *Bildung*. Its true nature and substance is the spirit of alienation from the natural being. This abandoning is the purpose of the existence. S1 has to be reached via its preceding modes; what is involved is alienation in the zemic world (p. 351). Yet, the self is real only as refuted, annulled. We have here the spiritualization (*Begeisterung*) of the moments of *Dasein*. Hegel has several concepts which can be explained semiotically like *Allgemeinheit*, generality = S2, heart, *Herz* = M2 which is elevated into S2.

10 Jaspers and Husserl – the transcendental ego

Jaspers has been introduced in the semiotic context in many of my earlier works but he has also offered a synthesizing theory of transcendence in his treatise *Die Philosophie* (Jaspers 1948). His approach would belong to the Kantian *a posteriori* transcendences since his starting point, as with Sartre, is ‘dissatisfaction with any being which is not transcendental’.

Existence cannot hold alone. It starts to search for something else. Here the search reaches what one can know in order to abandon it again (the Hegelian refutation). It leaves for the world in order to orient in it. In this avenue it notices the possible existence or it awakens from mere being in the world into self-fulfillment and action and experiences the illumination of the existence; at the end it changes into metaphysics. The proper transcending, however, means the transgression of the thing’s likeness or it is always enacted when we are aware or it means something general, albeit surprising, not at all a self-evident fact of everyday life. Yet, it also signifies that a word has its particular weight and even splendour, as if it would manifest the secret of being. Transcending is not any fact which is given with existence, but it is the possibility of freedom in it. The human can transcend – or leave it undone. Living as such, happy with everything, is living without transcendence. Transcending is the movement in the real *Dasein*, but this movement does not exist without thinking. Is transcendence the same as playing with possible worlds? Jaspers ponders Kant’s definition and accepts Kant’s transcendent/transcendental. By transcending I do not reach any knowledge but the content of my knowledge becomes different; a change takes place in myself which changes all my relations to the objectal world. Awareness as existence is not in any way as such transcending but the possibility of it emerging from the freedom. In the metalanguage of existential semiotics the human is not only *an-mir-sein* of the mere *zemic*. It must have someone else to whom the subject reveals its secret. Or it has to be refuted into *für-mich-sein*. In playing music: if there is only one listener then the body (*Moi!*) functions in a different manner than when one is alone.

However, Jaspers cannot think of transcendence as absolute; it rather appears as negation of what it is not. Transcendence is being which is not existence (*Dasein*) nor awareness but transcends all of them. It is the absolute opposition to finiteness. Altogether the tinge is that the focal point of the self-awareness of a subject. This flavour then occurs also in other existentialists. As Charles Taylor states of Hegel as the turning point of the European philosophy: earlier, people believed that the cosmos – which was transcendence – determined the fate of humans. The modern emerges from the fact that one thinks of humans as

a self-determining entity. Altogether what is involved is the turning point of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* transcendence.

Furthermore, Jean-Paul Sartre continues from the notion of the transcendental ego, for which he is nevertheless indebted, except to the proper existentialists, also to Edmund Husserl. Husserl in his tract *Cartesianische Meditationen. Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie* (1995) scrutinized the difference between the psychological ego (the zemic 'I'), and transcendental one (supra-zemic). His work appeared first in Paris in French in 1931 translated by Emmanuel Levinas and G. Pfeiffer. He starts from the great turn caused by Descartes in the philosophy or definition of *ego cogito* as a transcendental subjectivity. He first articulates what we call the zemic world, to which belongs the existence of selves, men and animals, as bodies (M1), as well as regarding their social nature and culture (S2). Yet, to this corporeal world belong also non-sensual cognitions like evaluations, judgements (S1) but even they are 'only' phenomena of being. However, Husserl is interested in the so-called pure ego, pure experience, pure life, and by these he means *epokee* or phenomena put in brackets as pure experiences. The world is for me nothing but this valid cogito. The foundation of being in nature is secondary or Husserl denies the value of the zemic as such.

To this meditative ego the psychological ego neither signified anything (p. 27). In the phenomenological reduction or *epokee*, I reduce my natural ego into a transcendental phenomenological ego. The science studying this therefore is not psychology, whose object is the objective animal ego, but absolute subjective science. The aforementioned psychological ego is only the store of habits (*Habitualitäten*) and my characteristics or M2; but now it is observed from the point of view of the transcendental ego. The ego is the universe of possible living forms or accordingly virtual elements (in the vertical sense); yet it is also the concomitance of experiences and their succession horizontally (p. 75). The universal *a priori* which as such belongs to transcendental ego, is the form of essence (*Wesensform*), which contains endless forms, *a priori* types for possible actualizations in the life (zemic). However, not all types find their place inside the unified ego (p. 76). Accordingly the ego chooses the most suitable forms and essences from the supra-zemic and actualizes those and what happens then is the coming to the world of the ego. Husserl speaks about the genesis of the ego as a temporal process, a little like Hegel. Time then provides the ego with a universal genetic form or, in our zemic mode, the movement from M1 to M2 to S2 and S1 as a kind of subjective growth, *Bildung*.

Yet, does the universal genesis also contain the vertical movement among different levels of transcendence? The acts of the ego, however, depend on their sociality. Husserl speaks about active and passive becoming. He deals with the problem of transcendence likewise from an idealist point of view, but yet reduces

all into intentionality. “All that which exists for myself, exists thanks to my awareness which makes me conscious, thanks my experience, thought, theorizing“ (p. 84). Even the distinction between being and appearance, *Sein and Schein*, is the creation of my consciousness. “Transcendence in all its forms is the sense of the being taking shape inside the mind of an ego” (p. 86). Husserl’s theory is therefore purely *a posteriori* in our context of existential semiotics. Yet, a few philosophers have portrayed as eloquently the shift of the subject from mere being into the level of the transcendental ego i.e. from zemic to supra-zemic. Let it be that there the ‘genesis’ of the Husserlian ego ends.

11 The transcendental argument: the pragmatists

Sami Pihlström’s work *Naturalizing the Transcendental* (2003) brings the whole field of transcendence to Anglo-analytic philosophy and argumentation. In the chapter ‘What are transcendental arguments?’ Pihlström goes to the core of the issue (Pihlström 2003: 144–165). The reflections take place essentially in the context of Peircean pragmatism.

In general, the transcendental argument is an argument which proceeds from the actuality of some problematic phenomenon (e.g. knowledge, experience, language, or thought) to its conditions of possibility. That is to say, a transcendental argument seeks to show that a given phenomenon is possible only if some necessary conditions obtain. This kind of argument is usually of the following form: There could be no A unless its necessary condition, B, obtained; but A is actual, hence possible, consequently (necessarily) B. Kant’s transcendental deduction of the categories, the ‘pure concepts of understanding’ is the best example here. Together with the forms of intuition (space and time) the categories constitute the ‘epistemic conditions’ for our experiencing of the world. We might apply this to a dialogue. If Mr A is talking there must be a Mr B as receiver of the message which is similar to A. Applied to signification: if A is a sign as signifier, then B is a sign as signified. Or if there is A as actual or as act-sign, then there is B as signified or pre-sign or post-sign.

Then this can be formalized:

1. If A then B (i.e. B is a necessary condition for the possibility of A)
2. A (i.e. A is actual)
3. Therefore, B

In semiotics thus: 1. if we have a signifier A, then there must be somewhere its content, signified B; 2. A or sign is actual; 3. Therefore, B

Such an argument is, of course, rather close to Peirce's abduction. So first we have the transcendental argument 1. if p (is possible) then c; 2. p (is actual); 3. then C

Yet abductive reasoning would be:

1. if c then p (or typically in science c is the cause of p)
2. p is actual
3. then it is reasonable to suppose that c

The abductive argument is also known as the inference of the best explanation. The difference between TA (transcendental argument) and AA (abductive argument) is: TA is logically valid whereas AA is invalid (but can be regarded as a sound of non-deductive inference typically employed in science) (Pihlström 2003: 164)

In other words, we may presume that in our *zemic* world or *Dasein*, occurs some A, which we cannot explain in another way than that it is an experience of transcendence i.e. transcendence is its cause; if A occurs then it is reasonable to presume that there is a transcendence which causes it. Or verb 'cause' can be of course replaced by some term borrowed from the afore-mentioned theories, 'radiates', *Bildung*, refutation, follows from action etc.

Yet, the question remains. Why should transcendence be naturalized? Almost all previous theories have tried to show it is impossible, since what is involved is something *ungegenständlich*, non-objectal. John Deely's whole semiotic philosophy seems to turn around one issue: the sign is not a thing but an object, and an object involves the human mind and its cognition. Thomas Aquinas distinguished between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*. Now also Pihlström joins this quire. He says:

A successful naturalisation of transcendental arguments requires... a full-blown pragmatist view of human world-structuring, thereby presupposing that there is no 'ready-made world' with a built-in structure of mind and discourse-independent 'real kinds'. The ways the world (for us) is, are not independent of our human practices and the values and purposes inherent in those practices ... Insofar as the pre-Kantian and pre-pragmatic assumption of a ready-made world is among implications of Peircean extreme scholastic realism, this realism must be rejected (Pihlström 2003: 165).

So Pihlström here seems to join the standpoint of nominalism, *pas de salut hors du discours*. Our categories are our *a posteriori* activities. He criticizes the idea of a ready-made world existing 'out there' without our structuring mind; yet, speaking about transcendence, why should one not think, that – albeit transcendence might 'exist' and there is a virtuality of our values and ideas – we are totally responsible for our choices among them i.e. which we accept or deny, affirm or negate and then actualize and realize in our pragmatic world of actions?

Now I again return to my ‘metaphysical diary’ to which I wrote the following in February 2015:

Transcendence can manifest in many ways in the zemic world. For the first its impact is unnoticed i.e. as it is said in Kant’s theory it filters through time, place and subject every moment into our perceptual world, as *das Ding an sich* which we can never reach. Second, it can radiate its influence to the fates of subjects in zemic, as theologically conceived ‘grace’, without which the whole zemic world would collapse. Third, it can appear as a benevolent rain like the motif of Angels in Wagner’s *Parsifal*. However, it can also penetrate violently and unexpectedly into zemic world like the burning bush to Moses, or heavenly herd of warrior to the pastors, archangel Gabriel to the Moses without waiting anything. Altogether it occurs also from below to up as the longing of subjects towards transcendence – Amfortas’ music or *Abendmahl* motif, the musical gesture as a prayer in *Parsifal* or in an adagio of Bruckner symphony. It represents then the zemic, which is preparing for transcendence which reaches towards it, aspires for it with a passionate longing.

What is interesting in the transcendental argument is that in the reasoning “If A then B”, in which from the occurrence of A in the zemic one reasons the existence of transcendence or B, then in the place of A one can situate very diverse ‘facts’ as premises and the end result is always yet the same: transcendence. There is the Cartesian I doubt = I think, therefore I am or I am a transcendental ego; Avicenna’s man without M1 and zemic in general and still he is! However, which kind of reasoning represents that ‘therefore’? Which kind of transcendence is the one by Emerson.

On March 26, I wrote to Markku Sormunen:

You asked what is supra-zemic? It is the same as the sphere or domain of existentiality I need it for my three-phased theory of transcendence i.e. for transcendence does not emerge from that Pihlströmian pragmatist reasoning If A then B...or If A or certain event in *Dasein*, it can be explained only so that it refers to transcendence or to B (even if the reasoning is a little awkward if I say that B causes A). To my mind in *Dasein* there is already transcendence which I call empirical i.e. the idea by Schutz and others that all absent is already transcendence, therefore in semiotics the act of communication or sign (signifier refers to the absent signified). But when *Dasein* stops in its movement in its moments of existential experience of meaning, then one is shifted to the supra-zemic world, which then already is detached from *Dasein* ... partly. However, behind it looms the third level, radical transcendence which is *ineffable* in principle, except by metaphors. Contrarily, radical transcendence radiates its impact to the world of *Dasein*, not directly but via the level of suprazemic or existentiality. The existentiality is therefore the inevitable mediate phase in the journey towards the (radical) transcendence and actualisation of transcendence, on the other hand.

Accordingly, the essential is that for me, obviously, the transcendental argument does not contain two terms If A then B, but three: If A and if B then C (or vice versa). Yet, one has to ask of course what the “if...then” reasoning means. I think that the *direction* of the reasoning is crucial. In theology, the direction goes from C

to B and A, and it means the announcement, theophany, but otherwise the direction is from A to C, and we can call it as we like as transfiguration, sublimation or whatever.

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Section 8:

Masters on past masters

Dinda L. Gorrée

From Peirce's pragmatic maxim to Wittgenstein's language-games

Abstract: Pragmatism is the early 20th century movement in American philosophy serving as a socially engaged theory of meaning leading to the distinctive, reasonable, and assertible theory of truth. Pragmatism was introduced as a theory by Peirce in the pragmatic maxim of 1878. Further, pragmatism was made concrete by different American thinkers of science, art, law, and religion: Holmes, James, Dewey, and others. The general version of pragmatism (as distinct from pragmatism) was grounded in the interactive meanings of Peirce's three categories, while Wittgenstein's pragmatism broadened the American outlook into the wider use of language in the European tradition. Peirce and Wittgenstein shared the ethics of terminology, the fragmentariness of writing paragraphs, and the sign-action of semiosis. Peirce's principle started by logical definition, Wittgenstein merely gave practical stories (parables) introducing language-games. Peirce and Wittgenstein struggled with the "use" of language. Peirce concentrated on words to build meaningful sentences asserting the truth of meaning in the doctrine of fallibility (and infallibility). Wittgenstein focused on the good and bad "uses" of words and sentences in the language-games. The "bricks" of language-games demonstrate the "building blocks" of Peirce's three interpretants, making guesses at the riddles of cognitive and creative games. Peirce and Wittgenstein disparaged all forms of dogmatism to champion self-criticism at the practical standards of making good "use" of language, constructing sign theory and coordinating human communication.

Keywords: translation, semiotics, pragmatics, language games, truth

1 Peirce's pragmatism

The semiotic relation between Peirce and Wittgenstein was concerned with the pragmatic combination of the identity, ambiguities, and contradictions of the human tool, language. Pragmatism is the American method of philosophy serving as a socially engaged theory of meaning to lead to the distinctive, reason-

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able, and assertible theory of truth. The history of pragmatism was initiated and first formulated as Peirce's pragmatic criteria of the analysis of linguistic signs, signalled before the entrée of modern linguistics (Goriée 1993). Peirce wrote in the first pragmatic maxim of 1878, "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (CP: 5.402).

Peirce, as a logician and exact scientist, initiated the movement of pragmatism marginally, even naively, to engage in the human activity of thinking about language. The first pragmatic maxim offered a formal definition to establish the problem of ascertaining facts to give the idea of meaning. The pragmatic goal is achieving the logical "effects" of language in Peirce's three interpretants. The interpretive "effects" of immediate and dynamical interpretants lead in time to the final stage of clearness of thought. Peirce had twice used the term "object" in the non-technical sense of the "subject studied".

Note that Peirce constantly used in the first pragmatic maxim the expression "conception" (and other derivatives of Latin *concipere* in "conceivable", "conceive", "conception") to reinforce the definition of the pragmatic argument (CP: 5.402 fn. 3). By a "conception", Peirce fully explained in a footnote he meant to be "speaking of meaning in no other sense than that of *intellectual purport*" (CP: 5.402 fn. 3). Also note the conditional use of the imperative mode in Peirce's "consider", now used in the first personal plural by analogy with the "conceivably practical" habit (CP: 5.400) of future experiments, which it is meant to replace. The imperative reference to the future is meant here in a "soft" way, as a neutral invitation or advice rather than as a command or obligation.

Peirce being the originator as well as the inheritor of the pragmatic movement, pragmatism becomes at the turn of the century a habit of relative freedom. After Peirce's abstract definitions of pragmatism, the movement of pragmatism was revived and reformulated by different American thinkers of science, art, law, and religion. Jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, psychologist William James, and educationalist and political theorist John Dewey shared with Peirce and other young intellectuals the membership of the *Metaphysical Club* in the 1870s (Menand 2001), contributing to the pragmatic movement.

Judge Holmes accepted Peirce's pragmatic maxim in his fundamental work of American legal science, *The Common Law*, written in 1881 (Holmes 1963); Schefler 1986 [1974]: 5). Holmes' legal work acknowledged the shifting senses of intellectual and biological terms in the American society of his time, which he used to change the moral elements of experience into new legal acts (Goriée 2005, rev. ed. 2014). Holmes' legal rules are grounded in the subject's private behavior, which he considered as including emotional attitudes. The anti-social behavior of legal

acts is treated by Holmes as public property with duty and obligation to the entire "community" (Peirce's term indicating the critique of public opinion to reach the social consensus of law). The legal community makes intimate contact with social reality, but can also distort reality by morally coherent or attractive (good or evil) circumstances of the legal action. Agreeing with the process of pragmatism, Holmes' evolutionary modification of law remains the touchstone of later jurisprudence in American common law.

Among his friends and colleagues, William James' cosmology applied the individual guide of life to the religious experience of man or woman. James' practical definition of pragmatic religion (White 1983 [1955]: 154–173) gives pragmatic truth to human prayers. Prayers can start from personal claims for comfort or support, but can become full sentences used in collective worship, Peirce's "community" of believers. The prayer can serve as personal plea for the act of healing the body and spirit, but, according to Peirce's evolutionary communication theory, can also announce the collective experience of "seeing" the idea of God's mercy in the divine answers to the prayers (Scheffler 1986 [1974]: 95–146). Pragmatism was further developed, expanded, and disseminated in the later work of John Dewey, one of Peirce's students (White 1983 [1955]: 173–189). In Dewey's ethical experience, he changed the moral values of experience and nature. Dewey points in his critical work of social and educational theory further to the cosmopolitan entry of American intellectuals toward the progressive background of worldwide pragmatism in the comprehensive thought of urgent general interest in political action (Scheffler 1986 [1974]: 187–255).

In 1902, Peirce's rewrote the 1878 pragmatic maxim to revisit the rhetoric contributing to the impressions of the inquirer's weak belief and indecisive knowledge:

In order to ascertain the meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception. (CP: 5.9, Peirce's italics)

To express the idea of conditional futurity of inferential reasoning, the original imperative has been changed into a persuasive construction: "In order to ... one should consider". Note especially the modal auxiliary verb "should". The previous "effects" having "practical bearings" are rephrased as "practical consequences". Yet Peirce added here one important element of thinking: the "truth" or "entire meaning of the conception". The mention of the "truth" indicates that Peirce's pragmatic meaning has definitively reached beyond the practical matters and has become identical with rational purpose. The "scientific procedure" of

Peirce's inquiry is no longer guided by personal, practical beliefs as in Peirce's early thought, but by theoretical, scientific beliefs, and experimentally verifiable judgments. This change is further elaborated in Peirce's 1905 version of the pragmatic maxim.

From April to October of the year 1905, Peirce published three essays in *The Monist*, in which he attempted to wed, so to speak, the categorial scheme of the three categories – firstness, secondness, thirdness – into the evolutionary cosmology of “pragmatism”. In the new formulation, pragmatism was to play a central role in Peirce's semiotics. Beginning with a very “soft” universe consisting of pure irregularity and chance, the pragmatist embarks upon a process of making an ever “harder” process of meaning. For Peirce, the evolutionary process of investigative inquiry is nothing but experimental science itself. In two of the *The Monist* essays, Peirce proposed in 1905 two successive restatements of his pragmatic maxim. Chronologically, the following came first:

... the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life; so that, since obviously nothing that might not result from experiment can have any direct bearing upon conduct, if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, and *there is absolutely nothing more in it*. For this doctrine he invented the name *pragmatism*. (CP: 5.412)

Here we have an emphatic verbal construct consisting of no less than two logically and grammatically consecutive sentences connected by a semicolon. The first is only conditional in an implicit way, because it is advanced as an indicative statement, in a non-subjective, rather peremptory form; while the second is phrased as conditional, but with a double main clause, which underscores certainty in the future at the expense of conditionality. Truth as the final result of pragmatic inquiry is graphically represented in the emphasized finale.

The triple negation of “nothing”, “not”, and the negative noun “denial” (in contrast with positive “agreement”) will serve to enhance the validity of the practical experiment as the scientific method to maximize the knowledge of what is called first a “word or other expression”, twice a “concept”, and subsequently the third, using the key-term in Peirce's passage: the “experiment” of pragmatism (repeated in the form of “experimental phenomena”), instead of the more neutral “test” or “trial” of experiments. Pragmatism clearly indicates that here speaks the exact scientist of Peirce as “laboratory-man”, stressed by the terms “accurately” and “conduct of life”.

Later, in this year 1905, Peirce rewrote the pragmatic maxim once again in semiotic terms. He wrote that: “The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally

upon all the possible different circumstances and desires, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol" (CP: 5.438). What Peirce had originally referred to as the "object of our conception" (1878), the "intellectual conception" (1902), and the "word or other conception" and "concept" (CP: 5.412), he now called, in unreservedly semiotic terminology, the "symbol". The symbol stands in an arbitrary relation to the absent reference (Peirce's object) which it nevertheless signifies. In order to function as the genuine sign with triadic predicates with an intellectual basis, the symbol needs "acceptance" by Peirce's "community" to become the final interpretant.

With "conditionally" and "would ensue" taking central stage in Peirce's upgraded 1905 version of the pragmatic maxim, conditional futurity has definitively found a semiotic foundation as well as a semiotic or even semio-logical space. In contrast to the semiotically still "underdeveloped" versions of the previous pragmatic maxims, the future dimension of infinite semiosis is now fully exploited by Peirce's semio-logical formulation.

In the last pragmatic maxim of 1907, Peirce described mainstream pragmatism as a "method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts", whose experimental character follows the "older logical rule" (CP: 5.465) ending with: "The *total* meaning of the predication of an intellectual concept is contained in an affirmation that, under all conceivable circumstances of a given kind ... the subject of the predication would behave in a certain general way – that is, it would be true under given experimental circumstances" (CP: 5.467). One implication of Peirce's latest pragmatic maxim (1907) would be that logical meaning is, like his infinite concept of semiosis, by definition an infinite and open-ended form of human pseudo-semiosis. Meaning is an infinite would-be or practical would-do for the agent or speaker, but real meaning will stay an incomplete work, which can only make itself increasingly known by actual experience and experiment to the "community" of inquirers. Yet truth and untruth remain forever a puzzle of practical degree.

In this final version of the pragmatic maxim, the meaning of symbols is rearranged in semio-linguistic terms. Thus, the meaning of a linguistic utterance (in Peirce's text called the "subject") is determined by the different "circumstances" of contextual objects or *Umwelts*, successfully used in communication. These circumstances of life are mentioned twice, first as "all conceivable circumstances of a given kind" and second as "given experimental circumstances". In modern parlance, one would conclude that the meaning of Peirce's evolutionary communication theory (or speech-act theory) is both performance-bound and co-text- and context-functional expressions of language.

Let me wrap up the argument of the fivefold pragmatic maxims. In the 1878 maxim, Peirce initiated pragmatism theoretically in formal logic. Soon,

the definition of pragmatism took an overly “practical” turn in the hands of his peers (Scheffler 1986 [1974]), whereupon Peirce, the logician and exact scientist, reformed pragmatism as “pragmaticism” (CP: 5.414–5.416). He developed the pragmatic movement into a doctrine showing how logical concepts can be worked out for the “virtual, not actual” meaning of an intellectual predicate in what called the “thought experiments” (Brent 1993: 12), to affect one’s brain and ways of thinking. Perhaps the same as the correlated meaning of language in Wittgenstein’s *Denkbewegungen* (Gorrée 2012: 70–71, 299)? The 1902 version of the original pragmatic maxim stressed that truth is the highest goal of inquiry. Under the label of “semeiotic”, Peirce combined pragmaticism with his categories and the pioneering work of the evolutionary speech-act theory. In 1905 he rewrote the pragmatic maxim twice to demonstrate its basis in the semiotic doctrine of signs. Finally, in 1907, Peirce couched the fifth version of the pragmatic maxim in what seems like the contemporary semio-linguistic terminology.

2 Theoretical meaning and practical use of language

To stress the pragmatic-linguistic association between Peirce and Wittgenstein, let us consider the traditional meaning of sharing semiotic elements in six points regarding the clarity and unclarity of language.

First, while Peirce was mainly a theoretical thinker about the intricacies of logical language according to the theory of categories, Wittgenstein’s work must be regarded as analyzing the practical science, which played right into the relativity of belief and knowledge about using the human tool, language into the language-games. Wittgenstein’s unbelief turned into a crisis of skepticism, facing with a psychological, anthropological, and quasi-religious tone to the cultural logic of language. Peirce and Wittgenstein studied the symbolic development of logical elements (thirdness), but added non-logical elements to language. After Peirce’s feeling of firstness into secondness, emotion and pain were included in Wittgenstein’s comfort and discomfort including the variety of logical and non-linguistic analyses. Yet their motivation could be radically different in their approach. Peirce’s and Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language may overlap, but considering the time and space between them, they associate in various ways the differences and ambiguities of language.

Second, Peirce and Wittgenstein removed themselves from the paradoxical claim of the yes/no certainty of sign-and-object to find the labyrinth of the global dialogue of thought in Peirce’s interaction of sign-object-interpretant. The train

of thought moved to the efforts of Wittgenstein's *Denkbewegungen*. Peirce's interpretant is the practical sign of the possibilities of the interpretation of the previous sign (Gorlée 1994: 56–61). The interpretant is itself a sign (interpretant-sign) to be interpreted again and again, and give new interpretations in Peirce's semiotics. The perspective of the interpretant changes radically into right, wrong, and all kinds of in-between functions of certainty and uncertainty.

The series of Peirce's three interpretants, which follow and interact with each other are the immediate, dynamical, and final interpretants, also called the emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants. The interpretants give three kinds of reasoning, moving from illogical to logical. The first trio (immediate, dynamical, and final interpretants) can be limited to the successive stages in the interpretative process of semiosis. The second one (emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants) indicates the pseudo-semiosis from the perspective of the agent, receiver, and interpreter of the sign. Peirce's semiosis "turns over [to] the interpreter the right to complete the determination as he please" (CP: 5.393). In the half-improvized pseudo-semiosis, the role of the interpreter "seems a strange thing, when one comes to ponder over it, that a sign should leave its interpreter to supply a part of its meaning" (CP: 5.448 fn.). The pragmatic interpreter (sign-receiver), not the author (sign-maker), takes on the duty to interact the motifs of belief and inspiration in the practical workings of Wittgenstein's language-game.

Third, the distinctive character of semiotics displays the "semiotic bridge" (Gorlée 2012: 17–58) between Peirce and Wittgenstein. Peirce and Wittgenstein had in common many words of the logic of semiotics, such as "sign", "proposition", "object", "pictures", "images", "index", "symbol", and others (Gorlée 2012: 171–187). But the pragmatic background of semiotics and the practice of logic and the applications of insight are not identical. As discussed (Gorlée 1993), Peirce's first pragmatic maxims had the theoretical background of the early speculations on logic and the emerging linguistics. The young Wittgenstein discussed the logical and semantical considerations of linguistics with Karl Bühler (Gorlée 2012: 23–27). Bühler's *Sprachtheorie* (1934) referred to the "indexes" of the clear *Gegenstände* and *Sachverhalte*; these notions may exemplify Wittgenstein's "ostensive teaching" in his middle period (PI: 7). When "showing" the "thing", the object "can be said to establish an associative connection between word and thing" (PI: 7) to understand the linguistic mechanism of the world (Hintikka and Hintikka 1986: 154–156; Glock 1996: 274–278).

Fourth, Peirce's approach built up the theoretical maxim in semio-linguistic terms, while Wittgenstein took a practical turn, initiating the language-games. Although the similarities through time would suggest Wittgenstein's reading Peirce's works, the inescapable truth is that Wittgenstein did not read Peirce. The pragmatic elements in the thought of later Wittgenstein and its overlaps with

Peirce institute a semiotic connection of pragmatism that became the political *Zeitgeist* between them. Born in different parts of the world, Peirce lived in the United States, but had worldwide connections with colleagues. Wittgenstein lived first in Austria but, hunted by fascism – the *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany – he had to live and work in England, also travelling to Norway, Ireland, and even Russia. While Peirce’s philosophical world-view opens to the present-day American method of mind, Wittgenstein’s *Weltanschauung* broadened the American outlook into the wider use of language in the European philosophy and cultural humanities.

Fifth, Wittgenstein’s friend in Cambridge, the mathematician Frank Ramsey, translated Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* into English (1922) (TLP). Ramsey introduced Wittgenstein to semiotics, essentially Peirce’s work (Gorrée 2012). The possible relations of Peirce and Wittgenstein played an active role evidenced in the pioneering book, *The Meaning of Meaning*, edited by Ogden and Richards (1923). Peirce remained, after his death in 1914, an unknown philosopher until the appearance of the *Collected Papers* (CP) (1931–1966), edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. To explore Peirce’s unpublished work on the logical symbols of language, *The Meaning of Meaning* published an Appendix D about the exposition of Peirce’s three-way elements of semiotics (1969 [1923]: 279–290). This made Peirce known. Meanwhile, Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* had become popular and was in *The Meaning of Meaning* (1969 [1923]: 89, 253, 255) mentioned as the mathematical meaning of sign and object.

Sixth, Peirce’s thinking was originally directed to logical certainty, signifying a turning from rectangular or formal linguistics into the informal directions of fallibility and infallibility. Peirce’s logical turning of deduction foreshadowed Wittgenstein’s certainty in the earlier *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s certainty confronted a number of informal uncertainties in the inductive inferences of distorted speech and language. In the *Blue and Brown Book* (BBB), *Philosophical Investigations* (PI), and later works and writings (all of them published posthumously), the speech conversation includes warped or distorted forms of “noise” in language-games, where the words can hardly be recognized in Peirce’s abductive reasoning.

One may stress that pragmatic philosophy has clarified and extended the interpretation of linguistic science in the prospects of determinacy, including indeterminacy. The meaning of relating sign and object argues further the truth and untruth (right or wrong) of language, but in the semiotic interaction of sign-object-interpretant, Peirce’s practical interpretant is upshifted to the triadic perspective of fallibility and infallibility. The perspective of the interpretant changes radically into right, wrong, and all kinds of in-between functions of noise and uncertainty (Peirce’s infallibility).

3 New approaches to Peirce and Wittgenstein

Guided by the correctness of the sources, the unorthodox forms of argumentation by Peirce and Wittgenstein raise the puzzling problem of how to closely connect or disconnect their work on pragmatism. Let me focus my attention on four points, in which I hope to blend the pragmatic duality of Peirce and Wittgenstein's works about language together.

The **first** reference is the ethics of **terminology**. Peirce followed the semiotic arguments of the 17th century semiotician, John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understandings* (first published in 1690). The mind is a *tabula rasa* written upon by sensory experience alone, but human activities produce Locke's "ideas" of sensation, reflection, and knowledge. The concept of word is the idea to give the meaning of language, but in Locke's time the concept of idea was merely the hypothesis to knowledge and had no truth. Locke insisted that the general and vague ideas of words had "mixed Modes and Substances", but unfortunately had "no Standards" (1974: 301). Locke's new ideas to structure language came back in Peirce's continuity of terminology and the building-blocks of Wittgenstein's language-games.

However, Locke went no further than guessing words. He focused on the imperfection of "old" terms, considering the "great many of the controversies that make a noise of the world" (1974: 306). The concept of "noise" should be clarified to gain the absolute precision when using the terms of philosophy. In Locke's chapter "Of the abuse of words" (1974: 306–311), he remedied the unhappy situation of old words by considering new terminology of an artificial nature. His idea of introducing words from scientific jargon bears many similarities to Peirce's article "The ethics of terminology" (CP: 2.219–2.226; see 2.427–2.430; Ketner 1981: 330–331).

Like Locke, Peirce disliked old terminology, considering it the "noise" which disturbed language from proceeding accurately in human communication for future science. Instead, Peirce liked the ethics of terminology of his own as showing a technically standard form in "language distinct and detached from common speech" offering the "good economy for philosophy to provide itself with a vocabulary so outlandish" and "barbarous" (CP: 2.223). New terminology with a single exact meaning is for Peirce defensible only insofar as it precised the philosophical and pragmatic ideas ensuring a progress toward realism of ideas and thoughts.

Peirce gave himself shock treatment by moving away from the literary style of the "dictionary" towards the entrée of the "immense technical vocabulary" of his own (CP: 8.169). Peirce formulated the plan of operation for new terminology as follows:

... each of the terms should be confined to a single meaning which, however broad, must be free from all vagueness. This will involve a revolution in terminology; for in its present condition a philosophical thought of any precision can seldom be expressed without lengthy explanations. Already, when philosophy is only just beginning to resemble science, the influx of new terms is getting to be considerable ... We must expect arduous labours yet to be performed before philosophy can work its way out of the jungle and emerge upon the high road of science ... (CP: 8.169–8.170)

Peirce also advocated in “Philosophical Nomenclature” (CP: 5.413) the specialized “virtue of scientific nomenclature” against the vagueness and ambiguities of the “laboratory” of sciences (CP: 1.126–1.129).

Peirce was a champion of the novelty and originality of his new terminology. The new notations were, for example, the semiotic version of “sign”, “interpretant”, “representamen”, “qualisign”, “sinsign”, “legisign”, “rheme”, “seme”, “dicent”, “abduction”, “delome”, and other words. He also gave new meaning to existing numerical terms, such as “firstness”, “secondness”, and “thirdness”. Peirce gave special meaning to a great number of technical words, such as “icon”, “index”, “symbol”, “tone”, “token”, “type”, “term”, “haecceity”, “inquiry”, “instinct”, “degeneracy”, “community”, “habit”, “breath”, “depth”, and others (Gorrée 2012: 146–147). The basic groundwork of Peirce’s scientific jargon consisted of the learning of the vague terms and arbitrary notations, intended to standardize that which is unfamiliar to readers into common scientific symbols. After study the meaning of the words is not to be applied as technical metaphors, but will become Peirce’s clear and individual terms of the vocabulary used by the scientists, following in unison Peirce’s experimentalist methods of invariable thinking in all sciences.

Wittgenstein agreed with the “old” ethics in his philosophical works and writings, but he proceeded by his own rule. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein took an academic turn with the articulate and arithmetic structure of his mentor Gottlob Frege. Frege imprinted on young Wittgenstein the belief or certitude of arithmetic functionalism in language. However, in later works, *Philosophical Grammar* to lectures of *The Blue and Brown Books*, and the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein’s style of writing was formulated differently in “ordinary” language; his writings were to “speak for themselves”. Wittgenstein’s discourse formulated in natural language (Locke’s words) used for intellectual philosophy must be read not directly but indirectly. This paradox has created the puzzle of reading Wittgenstein’s work and writings.

Wittgenstein practiced in common speech the terminological abstinence from special terminology, but he also created special terms, such as “fact” (*Tatsache*), “atomic facts” (*Sachverhalt*), “name” (*Name*), “calculus” (*Kalkül*), “family resemblance” (*Familienähnlichkeit*), “form of life” (*Lebensform*), “grammar”

(*Grammatik*) (Glock 1996: 67–72, 120–124, 124–129, 150–155, 193–198) as elements of the “language-game” (*Sprachspiel*) (Glock 1996: 193–198). These technical terms of the “game” of language stand out as the symbols to “play-act” the drama of Wittgenstein's game-theory.

The passion for terminology differs from Peirce's uniformity and regularity. Wittgenstein's used some new terminology but preferred not to do so. Peirce's moral action in the “ethics of terminology” initiated the habit of the artificial symbols in modern standard words (Oehler 1981: 351–357). Peirce's theoretical program of the communicative and technical modes of reasoning and Wittgenstein's personal and social language-games with cultural or environmental forms of life, encouraged and competed the codified symbols for the communication revolution. The information of certainty in natural language will establish the uncertainties of scientific investigation as the real of that the two-way information can flow in unison.

The **second** reference is that the **fragmentariness** of the style of the writing of philosophical texts intimately connects Peirce with Wittgenstein. The numbered paragraphs of Peirce's *Collected Papers* (CP) express the formal scheme of fragmentariness and whole (Gorlée 2007, 2012: 91–98). The fragments equally cause some problems in understanding the meaning of Wittgenstein's paragraphs (*Ansätze*). The paragraph or aphorism stands for the brief article expressing a note or item in a number of sentences, dealing with a particular idea or thought. The division into paragraphs is usual in newspapers and journalism, but somewhat unusual in philosophical arguments, furnished by Peirce and Wittgenstein. Peirce's pre-signs of “icons” cause the vagueness of individual pieces as weak “indices”, questioning the fragmentariness of the strictly logical matters of philosophical symbols. The fragmentary collection of paragraphs work as the whole collection of “arguments” (Gorlée 2007).

Peirce's paragraphs with numbers and subnumbers were not his own work; this structure was applied by the editors of the *Collected Papers* (CP), Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, to make Peirce's earlier drafts accessible and comprehensible texts (CP: 1.iv-vi). In the *Introduction* to the first volume, the editors remark that Peirce's typographical signs are applied by themselves to make his fragmentariness publishable and understandable: “Paragraphs are numbered consecutively throughout each volume. At the top of each page the numbers signify the volume and the first paragraph of that page” (CP: 1.vi). However, Peirce's thinking in itself in paragraphs expressed the verbal mode of interaction with the readers. As Peirce wrote:

All thinking is dialogic in form. Your self on one instant appeals to your deeper self for its assent. Consequently, all thinking is conducted in signs that are mainly of the same general

structure as words; those which are not so, being of the nature of those signs of which we have need now and then in our converse with one another to eke out the defects of words, or *symbols* (CP: 6.338).

Peirce's short paragraphs are something like the dialogue actively involved in maintaining the conversation of the monologic philosophy to communicate, not vaguely but generally, with others, bringing different "habits of conduct ... of any conceivable subject, and under any conceivable circumstances" (CP: 6.481). Peirce's pragmatic thought takes the form of a meditative dialogue, in which the "person divides himself into two parties which endeavour to persuade each other" (MS 498: 25). The goal of the dialogue expresses the pragmatic meaning of the "discourse of the self that has been to the critical self that is coming" (MS 1334: 45; see CP: 4:6, 5.506, 6.481).

Wittgenstein's drafts were his own statements as the short columnist in paragraphs and brief statements. His persuasive system of questions and replies were meant as didactic dialogue to communicate with his students or other readers. In the *Tractatus*, the numbers are a medium of steps from one level to the next. In the later work, we find a weak version of this strategy of giving lessons. The collection of paragraphs played "games" in language, announcing the usual writing style used today. Wittgenstein's short games were derived from the Cubist or Surrealist montage texts combining polemic aphorisms, satirical letters, creative journalism, political slogans, and anecdotal episodes of magazines. Wittgenstein's mode of art began to flourish with the young and revolutionary personalities in, for example, the journalist, poet, and critic Karl Kraus, novelist Franz Kafka, literary critic Walter Benjamin, and playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht (Janik and Toulmin 1973). Benjamin figured the modernist difference in the criterion of authenticity versus fake in arts, when he wrote in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* in 1936 that:

... for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence upon ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics. (Benjamin 1968: 224)

Wittgenstein's passion for music must have expressed his feelings in the "vocal" nature of paragraphs; he got his messages across in the fragmentary form of "vague" shocks (Sebeok 1985: 304–310) of musical semiosis. Wittgenstein's somewhat bizarre hobby was whistling melodies from operatic arias (Gorrée 2008). His

philosophical language could have turned into the travesty of the art of whistling, or vice versa. The questions about the confusions of language involves self-questions about the arbitrariness of all meaning in language, but when he resounded the wordless game of non-linguistic signs, Wittgenstein set an intersemiotic limit to the linguistic argument.

One can conclude that the essential fragmentariness was the “advertising” trademark of Wittgenstein’s “philosophizing” interart from lengthy texts of philosophy into short fragments. He suggested the fragmentary description of correlative examples to imply in questions and answers the active communication with the listeners-readers. Wittgenstein’s dialogue contained an infinite collection of paragraphs in common words. The separate meaning of the paragraphs did not describe or suggest the main object of Wittgenstein’s entire work, which remained as unpublished heritage the hidden mode of speech. Yet as communicator, Wittgenstein used the imagination of the readers or students to draw their own conclusion about the nature of his work.

The **third** argument is Peirce’s **definition** against Wittgenstein’s **description**. Another difference between Peirce and Wittgenstein was the total presentation of the “architectonic construction” (CP: 5.5) of the fragments in the attempt to write a “real” book. Peirce was an orthodox thinker: his principle started by logical definition, followed by reasoning, and ending with the conclusion (CP: 1.99). The definition is the abstract explanation giving the formal hypothesis of the subject, the reasoning further arranges the details of the investigation, and the conclusion leads to the truth. The logical definition works accurately in exact logic (CP: 3) and the logic of mathematics (CP: 4), but for Peirce the transition from hard science to the soft sciences of liberal arts was uneasy. For example, the detailed definitions of the categories (CP: 2.300–353) gave problems of explaining formally the “rough idea” (CP: 2.780) of the ideas of feeling, struggle, and other terms (CP: 1.322). Peirce explained that:

If you look into a textbook of chemistry for a definition of lithium, you may be told that it is that element whose atomic weight is 7 very nearly. But if the author has a more logical mind he will tell you that if you search among minerals that are vitreous, translucent, grey or white, very hard, brittle, and insoluble, for one which imparts a crimson tinge to an unluminescent flame, this mineral being triturated with lime or witherite rats-bane, and then fused, can be partly dissolved in muriatic acid; and if this solution be evaporated, and the residue be extracted with sulphuric acid, and duly purified, it can be converted by ordinary methods into a chloride, which being obtained in the solid state, fused, and electrolyzed with half a dozen powerful cells, will yield a globule of a pinkish silvery metal that will float on gasoline; and the material of that is a specimen of lithium. The peculiarity of this definition – or rather this precept that is more serviceable than a definition – is that it tells you what the word lithium denotes by prescribing what you are to do in order to gain a perceptual acquaintance with the object of the word. (CP: 2.300; cf. Gorrée 2007: 249–252)

A definition is to be understood as introducing the definitum. Peirce realized that the speculative fragment-to-fragment identifies the chemical element of lithium in Peirce's "depth", but it does not identify the strength of lithium in Peirce's concept of "breath". The practical nature of reality in actual events involves a speaker and a hearer, and becomes both a personal monologue and dialogue for active learning. Lithium, originally a "single tone, has now turned into a "thread of melody running through the succession of our sensations" (CP: 5.396; Gorrée 2007: 251) to become a puzzle of Wittgenstein's *Denkbewegungen*.

Wittgenstein taught not by Peirce's abstract definition, but by the practical example of stories introducing his language-games. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein wrote that:

It was correct that our considerations must not be scientific ones. The feeling 'that it is possible, contrary to our preconceived ideas, to think this or that' – whatever that may mean – could be of no interest to us. (The pneumatic conception of thinking.) And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place (PI: 109).

The inventive manner of teaching the language-games was presented by suggestive, allusive, and imaginative storylines. In Wittgenstein's "parables", as Christ in the series of parables (*Gleichnisse*), he pointed to or showed the actual objects and events of the narrative, rather than by stating them as ostensive definitions. Wittgenstein's stories are not traditional parables; he invented new plots drawn from daily life to reveal educational material in order to teach wisdom and knowledge. In the spirit of Wittgenstein's "essentialism" (Abelson 1972 [1967]: 314–317), he gave in practical lines the instructions, suggestions, or even dreams, to think about the uses if the content and make conclusions. As a teacher, Wittgenstein avoided giving clear definitions of the logical analysis of ideas and concepts; instead, he pursued the meaning in literary models, paradigms, and metaphors, which he used as analytical tools. The vague "essences" without definitions moved him to describe merely the "experiences" of life, based on "forms of life" (*Lebensformen*) (Glock 1996: 124–129). In the parables, Wittgenstein does nothing more or less than define the pattern of our lives. In the language-game itself, Wittgenstein opened to the allegorical exemplification of alternative explanations. When the language-game misleads us again and again (uncertainty), we can adjust to radical alterations of the meaning, activities, or behaviors – or modify the principles of the language-games to another rule (certainty).

By living in the principles and techniques of the parables (Jeremias 1963: 11–22), Wittgenstein exemplified in practical allegory from the archaic tradition to the contemporary narratives to build the linguistic and cultural language-games. He pointed pictorially to the story of childhood adventures, the work of shop-

keepers and construction workers, and other stories to tell of his views at the grievances and injustices, fears and pain. Characteristic of the game of language, Wittgenstein radically challenged the logical definitions of traditional philosophy to emphasize the new direction of the pragmatic philosophy of future generations, carrying human (non-logical) components into his (logical) philosophy.

In fact, the resistance to dogmatism challenged Wittgenstein's unorthodox position on weighty grounds. Distancing himself from Peirce's theoretical abstractions, he left a deeper impression on the mind with the concrete instance of the pictorial narratives he speculated with. Wittgenstein's speculative system proposed the metaphorical "grammar" of simple words combined into the story of (linguistically) full and (culturally) meaningful sentences (Glock 1996: 150–155). The words play-acted together as complex language-games in which the pictorial thought creates and recreates the constructive rule of logical propositions to work for the whole community of culture (Peirce's sense of critical "community").

Finally, the **fourth** point, as argued before, implies that Peirce's **semiosis** from the pragmatic maxim becomes Wittgenstein's **pseudo-semiosis**. Peirce's three-way method of rules, actions, and feelings (thirdness, secondness, and firstness) are formulated in the parts (paragraphs, sentences, and words) to form the total meaning of language. For Peirce and Wittgenstein, the words are considered as primitive units, only observed "in itself" as separate words. Yet the sentences are the contextual relations of words to generate meaning through local interactions with words. The paragraph or aphorism has become, for Peirce and Wittgenstein, the total fragment and amalgamate the unity of meaning. The continuity of language lies in the final or definitive semiosis, in Peirce's interactive sense of analytical logic. In Peirce's semiosis, "we have in thought three elements: first, the representative function which makes it a *representation*; second, the pure denotative application, or real connection, which brings one thought into *relation* with another; and third, the material quality, or how it feels, which gives thought its *quality*" (CP: 5.290). Peirce constructed the purely formal continuity of the categories in the interaction of sign-object-interpretant, creating the general or universal semiosis (CP: 5.484, 5.489).

In Peirce's pragmatic period, he was aware that speaking and writing linguistic "signs" is a complex of signs and non-signs. How different is exclaiming a simple interjection from pronouncing an intellectual lecture; how different is speaking English to speaking Spanish, Chinese, or any other language; how different is speaking to adults from addressing an audience of children. Peirce transformed the simple "sign" into the semiotic sign, calling the three-way term "representamen". The activities of human thought makes possible not one single interpretant, but the opportunity of all interpreters (sign-makers and sign-receivers) to produce logical and non-logical interpretants bringing them together in

the representamen. In 1909, Peirce presented to Lady Victoria Welby the more informal definition of the sign embodying the representamen. Peirce wrote that:

A Sign is a Cognizable, that, on the one hand, is so determined (i.e., specialized, *bestimmt*,) by something *other than itself*, called its Object, while, on the other hand, it so determines some actual or potential Mind, the determination whereof I term the Interpretant created by the Sign, that that Interpreting Mind is therein determined mediately by the Object. (CP: 8.177).

The activities of the human mind make possible not one single interpretant, but the opportunity of all interpreters (sign-makers and sign-receivers) to produce all kinds of logical and non-logical interpretants. The continuity of the emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants are integrated into semiosis. This means that the immediate and dynamical interpretants are bound together by the final interpretants. The pragmatic effect is not a single interpretation, but can become truth or untruth.

Instead of obeying the semiosis of real things in realism, human individuals tend to escape beyond to the world of reality to build their version of “reality”. The “pseudo-reality” is cut off from logical symbols to become connected to the earth under human feet filling by the tool-analogy both the “reality” and “irreality”. The term pseudo-semiosis is the free habit of freedom, clearing the ground a little from logic, removing some of the intellectual rubbish to create the way to practical knowledge. For Peirce, pseudo-semiosis can be a cultural (personal, group, or collective) habit of the agent, embodying the views of the sign-maker and sign-receiver. The common life of Wittgenstein’s language-game and the underlying cultural forms of life come into existence in linguistic-and-cultural forms of pseudo-semiosis, creating a room of one’s own out of the separate lives which we live as human individuals.

Wittgenstein defended and attacked, in a negative sense, the informal pseudo-problems of meaningless pseudo-propositions (*Scheinsätze*) (TLP: 4.1272, 5.535–5.5351, 6.2, PI: 60, 65), regarded as “nonsense” of language use (Glock 1996: 258–264). Beyond Peirce’s psychological belief (first), the “nonsense” is not connected to the logical forms of will (second) or thought (third) (also volition and cognition) (CP: 1.302, 1.332, see CP: 1.304–1.323, 1.332–1.334). The “nonsense” corresponds to first-person expressions of language as in “I think that”, “I only see this”, the negation “Nothing can be red and green all over”, or even the mathematical formulas “ $a = a$ ”, “ $x = a$ ” (TLP: 5.534–5.535, 6.2, BBB: 71; Glock 1996: 65). Those pseudo-statements are pure beliefs (firstness) without depicting the general or logical opinion. The pseudo-proposition is the reverse of the propositional sign (*Satzzeichen*), expressed by “logical symbolism by variables, not by functions or classes” (TLP: 4.1272), but has a formal identity as well as a logical

sense (secondness-thirdness). Wittgenstein affirmed that a “nonsensical” pseudo-proposition are expressed in examples as “So one cannot , e.g. say ‘There are objects’ as one says ‘There are books’” (TLP: 4.1272). The contrast between propositions and pseudo-propositions leads to all kinds of misbeliefs and misunderstandings.

Wittgenstein weakens the true (clear) notation of Peirce's semiosis into the broader reasoning of pseudo-semiosis with true and trivial elements of uncertainty. Wittgenstein did not aspire to Peirce's precision of definitions, but enables the reader to build the self-assembly of complex organisms into the engineering of the language-games. Peirce concentrated on dividing and subdividing words within meaningful propositions. These propositions in universal languages assert Peirce's truth of meaning in fallibility and infallibility. Wittgenstein focused on the good or bad “uses” of words within propositions in language-games. Peirce and Wittgenstein disparaged all forms of dogmatism to champion self-criticism to the standards of usefulness of language.

4 Wittgenstein's language-games

The working-descriptions of the language-games explain the lexical and technical meaning of the language-games. Wittgenstein's activity of “operating with signs” means “operating with words” (BBB: 16). In *The Blue Book*, based on short dictations to the class at the University of Cambridge (1933), he featured the cross-cultural *Gestalt* of the operation by way of linguistic research across cultures preparing the first language-game. In order to understand the system of signs (*Zeichensprache*) of human communication, Wittgenstein first applied static (coded) tools of simple language, giving certainty; then, he applied dynamic (uncoded) tools of language to present the surprise of uncertainty.

The Blue Book was the first part of the *The Blue and the Brown Books* with the editorial title *Preliminary Studies for the Philosophical Investigations*. From 1936, the English dictations were paraphrased in *Philosophical Investigations* (PI, written in German). In *The Blue Book*, Wittgenstein presented in simple language-game this proposition:

I will give someone the order: “fetch me six apples from the grocer”, and I will describe a way of making use of such an order: The words “six apples” are written on a piece of paper, the paper is handed to the grocer, the grocer compares the word “apple” with labels on different shelves. He finds it to agree with one of the tables, counts from 1 to the number written on the slip of paper, and for every number counted takes a fruit off the shelf and puts

it in a bag. – And here you have a case of the use of words. I shall in the future again and again draw your attention to what I shall call language games. (BBB: 16–17)

Wittgenstein added that the language-game is the “study of primitive forms of language or primitive languages. If we want to study the problems of truth and falsehood, of the agreement and disagreement of propositions with reality, of the nature of assertion, assumption, and question, we shall with great advantage look at primitive forms of language in which the forms of thinking appear without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought” (BBB: 17).

The language-game of shopping had been reduced to a child’s task of learning simple “activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent” in the forms of life of the child’s social (cultural) environment, but with the general aim of “building up the complicated forms from the primitive ones by gradually adding new forms” (BBB: 17). Wittgenstein’s problem is to make the groundless language-games extend, beyond the fairy tale of a child’s learning objects and numbers, to playing specific “games” in the saga of man’s enterprise of using language. A saga, with its essential craftsman’s tools as a series of episodes narrated by all kinds of interpreters and receivers in various circumstances – Wittgenstein’s forms of cultural life.

Beyond the linguistic cliché of Wittgenstein’s apples, the language-game turned further into the logical interpreters of the technical crowd of social workers and cultural craftsmen. This mechanized Wittgenstein’s toolbox to achieve technical results with artistic effects. The language-games could be maddeningly argumentative in open-ended processes of certainty and uncertainty for the surrounding society. The concept of language-games changed from the human game into work and play of tool and joy.

Wittgenstein enjoyed do-it-yourself language-games, illustrating the pragmatic use with the use of technical instruments. His first “engineering” example was: “Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws. – The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects” (PI: 11). Wittgenstein stood out as somebody who knew the Shakespearian difference between a hawk and a handsaw (*Hamlet*, II, ii). However, Wittgenstein gave the names of the tools of individual or single words and their objects. He indicated the carpenter’s practical use to justify the standard use, but without distinguishing between different activities of word-tools. Wittgenstein emphasized in his language-game the ostensive (demonstrative) words (BBB 1958: 1) taken from the toolbox to perform their standard functions. He stressed the possibility of changing and modifying the use of tools to create differences within the games as mapped in the semiotic changes of the language-games.

The account of the different experiences with the fixed sign-action of sign and object has now generalized into the dynamic game with different speech-acts. The semiotic forces of the language-game are formulated in Wittgenstein's argument (Peirce's term), meaning the complex sign with the possible object, mediating an interpretant of problematic nature. Wittgenstein changed the primacy of language to focus on the secondary background, receiving elements, instances, and collections from the cultural background inside the linguistic language-game. He reacted against the certainty of an unchanging language-game to appeal to the dynamic performance of the cultural circumstances with wit, prophecy, and meditation – sending a challenge to uncertainty.

Wittgenstein also listed in the beginning of his *Philosophical Investigations* (written from 1936) a cumulative number of what he really meant with language-games:

- Giving orders, and acting on them –
- Describing an object by its appearances, or by its measurements –
- Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) –
- Reporting an event –
- Speculating about the event –
- Forming and testing a hypothesis –
- Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams –
- Making up a story; and reading one –
- Acting in a play –
- Singing rounds –
- Guessing riddles –
- Cracking a joke; telling one –
- Solving a problem in applied arithmetic –
- Translating from one language into another –
- Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. (PI: 23)

Wittgenstein's new facts and fantasies refreshed the practical language-games with asking a question, testing a speculation, apologizing, lying, playing a card game, inventing a secret language, or, for that matter, writing this essay. The gesture here is one of linguistic (speech) and non-linguistic ways of dealing semiotically with the game of language and "reality". On the level of passing from spoken to written language, language-games transpire in words and sentences, but also in gesture, emotion through accent, intonation, facial expression, the mental image of reading the signs, and other cultural accessories of language. Language-games are baptized as dramatic *Gestalt*-forms of cultural "play-acts" (thirdness with secondness-firstness).

The theatrical interplay between language and "reality" enacted by different personal or professional interpreters does not always reflect the truth, but often

sports with language-games as the fictional experiment, forms of “pseudo-reality” used as the tool for teaching. The organization of the two elements in games play with social forms of collective and personal languages, veering between the philosophical, the educational, and the emotional. Although a language-game “stands for” rule-governed and free alternatives of the source text, we now face exploratory problem-solving techniques that utilize learning, discovery, or some experimental and trial-and-error methods to find a target solution of the game (Gorlée 1994: 70–81). In the language-game, first comes the purely cognitive game, such as playing chess, provided with (self-)educating rules and techniques as the evaluation of feedback. Then comes the creative game one can freely play with language, transposing words into significant activities of all kinds of “play-acting”, using the interactive tools of words and sentences.

The language-game has become a bold and creative experiment to work through the difficulties of the linguistic appliances. The dynamic nature of the first language-game of shopping does not function in a social vacuum, being more than looking at the shopping list, counting the apples, or in the second example the inspection of the tools of carpentry. The elements of language and game semiotically (culturally) reflect the interaction of the linear narrative structure, mediating the speech-patterns as cotext. They also handle (or manipulate) the non-linguistic and non-logical impressions and thoughts – such as looks, half-words, gestures, objects, and other “poorer” substitutes of speech – by copying both non-linear and non-verbal contextual information into language. Thus the whole language-game implies the possible meaning of a gesture, providing no certainty but only the degree of uncertainty of such material.

The inner and outer forms of life (*Lebensformen*) are interwoven in the primary nonverbal sign, with secondary meanings alongside verbal language. The speech-patterns are no longer personal remarks, but have a social and communal nature, obeying the cultural rules of society; at the same time, they must be experienced by a so-called “naïve” interpreter to learn and visualize them in the “serious” complexities of one’s public behavior. The adult speech-patterns or interpretants (thirdness) of the language-game are not merely cognitive behavior, but are rooted in our physical reactions (secondness) and emotional activities (firstness). In terms of philosophy, these interpretants nourish the three different ways of cultural life, including in the meaning (significance) not only of using the words and sentences, but also the expressiveness of the miscellaneous thoughts, drawings, gestures, and even sounds of Wittgenstein’s musical vocabulary – and generally embodying his artistic insights (Gorlée 2008).

In Wittgenstein’s view, the language-and-culture mode of language-game closely connects “language” and “culture” together in the new compound noun, called “linguiculture” (Anderson and Gorlée 2011). This marriage of linear and

rational language together with the irrational, nonlinear data of culture is an essential ingredient to achieve the enduring and satisfying understanding of Wittgenstein's language-games thought framed inside Peirce's triadic semiosis. The double paradigm of linguiculture suggests the direct connective of language-and-culture at the cognitive-intentional-intuitive levels, beyond that of the relative openness of language itself, making us captives of the deeper penetration of the cultural background information. The relation is not to the sociological world (*Welt*), but instead to the semiotical (cultural) *Umwelt* of the observer (interpreter).

The next example of Wittgenstein's language-game is the more complex activity of, once again, a fictional game. The strategy of this "complex primitive language" (PI: 2009: 2) is the building a brick wall. In this language-game, the building materializes in reality by placing a number of bricks according to the keywords (or word-tools). Puzzling the game with some confusing word-tools, Wittgenstein creates a varying response into questions, commands, and answers, accepting to an almost uncanny degree the structure of an infinite number of groundless games of language-and-culture. Is this language-game reality or pseudo-reality?

As a technical (that is, learnt) activity embedded in a cultural model, the language-game of the builders moves linguistically away from common (Wittgenstein's "primitive") words as "table", "chair", "loaf" (PI: 1, 2) of the simple language-game of shopping. The language-game emerges now with the technical language-game, performed by a team of builders acting together (BBB: 77–89, PI: 6–21). The strategy of the "primitive" and "complete" commands (PI: 2) comes from the main builders, whereas the assistant-builders place the actual bricks. Building a wall is, for Wittgenstein, more than the manual manipulation of assembling some bricks. The labour of building a brick wall, obeying the commands, and using the material tools is no atomical action of collecting some "bricks and mortar" (CP: 1.1; see 6.238), but represents the building of a new structural activity – a linguistic-and-cultural life-form underlying the "linguicultural" language-game.

Wittgenstein's rule of "such-and-such a call" (PI: 2) must be obeyed by the action of the building to play this professional game. The semiotic adequacy of the builders' commands – such as "Bring me a brick" (BBB: 78) – are the "direct" quotes as codes named during the "indirect" building of the wall. In other words, the quotes are the catchwords of the language-game of the builders. The actions and reactions of the technical language-game include the traditional nouns and verbs of the action utterances used in performing the totality of this play-act. The whole game moves from separate words and pseudo-sentences to a whole utterance and a fragment, and back again. The fragments can be reduced to a shorter

form, with abstraction of the words, rephrased from the long list to a shorter, and ultra-short, list. This game seems to function, if the builders keep in mind the unity of linguicultural impression and being of the whole speech-act (interpretant).

Instead of the plural forms of “cubes, bricks, slabs, beams, columns”, the single form, “‘cube,’ ‘brick,’ ‘slab,’ ‘column’” (BBB: 77, PI: 8) is used by the builders to point to individual tools to construct the wall. Wittgenstein also used “One slab” (BBB: 83) to direct the opposition between the economical or, better, linguicultural terminology. The elliptical sentences in one or two words – “This slab” for instance – function as “cultural shorthand” for the complete command ‘Bring me a brick?’” (BBB: 78). The builders (and also the readers or receivers) must reconstitute the missing words (imperative in this verbal action of first person personal pronoun and indefinite article) in order to make a full sentence, moving from the actual to the virtual message (CP: 3.458–482). There is no symmetry providing the identical meaning. If we focus on a single language-game, the elliptical words are not understood by the players of the language-game, but remain irrational habits; yet a daily language-game immerses the players in a codification of language and paralinguage, creating an intimacy with language in new habits – Peirce’s “habituality” (CP: 5.476–5.487, 5.491–5.493). Eventually, the descriptive phrases can develop further and form a new model for everyday discourse, giving a sense for all uses of words and sentences.

“This” exists here to build “that” – reflecting Peirce’s linguicultural clue-words “thisness” building “thatness” (CP: 1.341). The “random selections” (CP: 1.341) of the words “‘cube,’ ‘brick,’ ‘slab,’ ‘column’” do not work in isolation, but must be contextualized in the cultural “reality” of building the brick wall to give to the commands the “rudimentary assertions ... in form with no substance” (CP: 2.342) with logical accuracy or exactness. Wittgenstein commented in technical metaphors about the “cabin of a locomotive [with] handles there, all looking more or less alike” (PI: 12). One handle of a moving “crank” or a “switch” has “two operative positions”, namely the “brakelever” as in stopping the vehicle, or the “pump” moving “to and fro” (PI: 12). Wittgenstein stressed that tools “serve to modify something” (PI: 14) moving into different functions (or perhaps disfunctions and refuctions).

The linguistic categories of the “universal semantic primitives” (Wierzbicka 1997: 26–27) of pragmatolinguistics are applied to the parts of speech of Wittgenstein’s language-games of the builders, fabricating a logical type from the secrecy of the pseudo-logical tokens and tones. The secondary tones and tokens (CP: 4.158) mark the listener-reader with knowledge of semiotic signals to pursue the meaning of the clues. A gesture, sketch, or drawing open the varieties of language-games to all kinds of tokens and tones (BBB: 78–84). For example,

the quote “Five slabs!” (BBB: 79) emphasizes an extra-number as a cultural token, while the exclamation point marks the interpreter's meaning with a tone of surprise. Wittgenstein's “This slab!” and “Slab there!” (BBB: 80) are impersonal tokens forming shortened sentences or pseudo-sentences in questions and answers. “How many slabs?” (BBB: 81) has a question mark with a numeral as a reply. Another example of “saying something” and thereby “meaning something” would be the addition of a proper (personal) name (tone-token) to the commands, such as “John's slab”, to make the vocative clues a personal message directed at a single builder.

Beyond language, there are the cultural remarks. Wittgenstein's philosophical writings argue with the contradictory and ambiguous linguistic forms and cultural shapes of the linguicultural language-games. These are employed in an examination to allow not only the production of various conjectures of a semiotic definition, but to actually apply them for solving the specific practical problems in understanding the “building” message of the particular meaning of general language-games. The meaning of words consists in the verbose thought-experiment in a treasure of all kinds of daily-and-technical words that come up in the pragmatic use (and disuse) of language by all kinds of language-users. The concept of meaning had, for the later Wittgenstein, lost its straightforward referentiality of the “calculus” (*Kalkül*) model of the earlier *Tractatus* (Glock 1996: 67–72). Moving away from the clear isomorphism of the picture idea, meaning had turned from the concrete dictionary to “signify” (PI: 15) in *Philosophical Investigations* the abstract tool taken from the tool-box. In his later work, Wittgenstein mentioned that the pragmatic meaning of the language-game is described as a complex, elusive, semiotic entity to be vaguely understood by the interpreters and the receivers.

Wittgenstein only acknowledged the vagueness of the meaning of language-games in his final writings. *On Certainty* (OC) is particularly loaded with Peircean themes about belief and doubt. Wittgenstein seemed to accept the fuzziness of the combination of certainty-and-uncertainty as the vagueness inherent in the language-games. The signification of the hypothetical and logical arguments – Wittgenstein's true and false claims of the subjective and logical arguments of language-and-culture – are engaged to study the false belief, the error, the falsification, the doubt, the rule, the sureness, and the truth of the language-game, working *in action*.

In my book *Wittgenstein in Translation: Exploring Semiotic Signatures* (Gorlée 2012), I have argued that Wittgenstein's ideas agreed with the practical belief and pseudo-final judgment (CP: 5.538–5.548) of the methodology of Peirce's doctrine of signs. The mutual cooperation of truth and falsehood – derived from the traditional science of right and wrong, true and false, yes and no – was always con-

nected with Peirce's theory of fallibilism and error-bound infallibilism (Gorrée 2004: 149–233), as both of them operate in the linguistic-cultural representation of semiotic signs. The pragmatic association of Peirce with Wittgenstein has demonstrated that the limits of human knowledge can bring some truth (certainty), but also untruth (uncertainty) to the dramatic performance of the language-games.

5 Conclusion

It is by no means an easy task to draw a balanced conclusion from the above observations about the pragmatolinguistic connection between Peirce and Wittgenstein. Peirce associated in the different versions of the theoretical maxim (and other fragments) a variety of themes to approximate the final meaning. Wittgenstein suggested in his analytical presentation the stories of language-games expressing the fragmentary approach of linguistic expressions. Beyond the traditional questions of semiotics to know Peirce's and Wittgenstein's pragmatic background, my perspective focused on Peirce's ethics of terminology, the fragmentariness of the aphoristic paragraphs of Peirce and Wittgenstein. Peirce's accurate definition was rearranged and reformed into Wittgenstein's linguistic-cultural description of the language-games.

Regarding the movement from Peirce's theoretical semiosis to Wittgenstein's practical pseudo-semiosis, Peirce and Wittgenstein do not branch the same tree of pragmatics. Peirce's pragmatic maxims prepared the ideal "recipe for sign-interpretation" (Fisch 1986: 189), but Wittgenstein's pragmatic outlook broadened into the "play-acting" of language-games, which show again the practical and dramatic continuity of Peirce's three interpretants in semiotic signs. The series of the interpretants follow and interact with each other; the immediate (emotional) and dynamical (energetic) interpretants bring together the final (logical) interpretant. Peirce's interpretants give three kinds of triadic reasoning in Wittgenstein's language-games, moving from illogical meaning to logical use, revealing the ultimate truth (or misrepresentations) of the pragmatolinguistic doctrine.

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Isabella Pezzini

Semiotics as a critical discourse: Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*

Abstract: This paper intends to explore the early development of European semiotics, by bringing into relief the critical aims from which it originated and examining the work of some of its protagonists. In particular, it will examine *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes, whose centenary was celebrated in 2015 and who found in Saussure and Hjelmslev's linguistics a theoretical framework which could serve the purpose of exposing precisely the ideological mechanisms at work in a burgeoning consumer society. Now that half a century has gone by since those founding works, it is time to ask if and whether the discipline of semiotics has kept such a fundamental critical preoccupation alive.

Keywords: Barthes, Saussure, Hjelmslev, myth, ideology, semiology, narrative

There is at present an ever increasing number of occasions for reflection on the beginnings of contemporary semiotics. For example the anniversaries of works and their authors: I am thinking of the 50th anniversary of a book like *Éléments de sémiologie*, by Roland Barthes (*Communication 4*, 1964), the centenary of whose birth was celebrated in 2015. But also of the 50th anniversary of a “pre-semiotic” book by Umberto Eco – *Apocalittici e integrati* – on which a fine collective discussion promoted by Gianfranco Marrone for the online magazine *Doppiozero* (<http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/apocalittici-e-integrati>) has been developed. It is precisely this coincidence of dates which suggested to me the theme of the paper that I am delivering here, dedicated to the critical stance that marks the early development of our discipline, and which offers both a source and a perspective – not only theoretical-methodological – for what Paolo Fabbri has more than once defined the *semiotic gaze*. The theoretical need for a general discipline of modes of signification and communication, distinct from the other social sciences, found a fundamental impulse in the early and fertile explorations of the new variety of signs, texts and media in the consumer society that was developing around the founders of semiotics – great theoreticians as well as accurate interpreters of contemporary society and its cultural output. It seems to me of crucial importance for our discipline to continue to keep in mind today – a

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time of radical changes in the scenarios of communication and its means – this vital circuit of internal coherence, descriptive efficacy and hold on the world.

In particular, I want to focus here on Roland Barthes' discovery of semiology as a way of making his critical discourse scientifically rigorous. Directing his attention at first above all to literature and the theatre, Barthes subsequently began to open up more and more to the analysis of the most varied manifestations of the rising mass consumer society, in the series of brief essays which were to make up one of his more successful books, *Mythologies* (1957), together with its final essay "Le mythe, aujourd'hui". The essays were written under the stimulus and, at times, a fascination for current events, but also in the spirit of a French writer and historian whom Barthes had long studied and above all reevaluated with respect to then current critical discourse – that is, Michelet, whose original approach "between history and novel" Barthes considered to be completely in tune with the emergence of the new social sciences in which he actively participated. He in fact attributed to Michelet

the foundation of an ethnology of France, the desire and the skill of questioning historically – i.e., *relatively* – those objects supposedly the most natural: face, food, clothes, complexion. (...) In his *Mythologies*, it is France itself, which is ethnographed. (...) the ethnological book has all the powers of the beloved book: it is an encyclopaedia, noting and classifying all of reality, even the most trivial, the most sensual aspects ..." (Barthes 1972: 84).

Mythologies unites subtlety of interpretation with engaging writing, while outlining the entire field of pertinence of a new and innovative disciplinary approach. The essays analyze a vast array of manifestations of French daily life and collective consciousness in the 1950s, according to a unified plan set out in the first lines of the book: to unmask what was then defined as bourgeois ideology in its most subtle and pervasive form, the ideology that creeps into the appearances of daily banalities and tends to define as 'natural' what is not natural at all, being instead artifice and intentional construct.

The extensive exhibition dedicated to Barthes by the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2002 paid significant homage to the essays, through the recovery and exposition of their inspirational icons, whose pictures had not been published in his book: from the celebrated Citroën car, known by its initials DS – la "Déesse", to the advertisements which circulated in those years; from wrestling matches to the *peplum* films; from the mythical black and white photographs of Hollywood stars to the covers of *Paris Match*; from the first generations of "soaps and detergents" to the spread of plastic (Alphant-Léger eds. 2002). The exhibition once again brought to the fore the mosaic of daily life that was, on the one hand, bound up with a tradition of national identity, a little dusty, closed and petit-bourgeois –

the very post-war-time France unloved by its intellectuals – while, on the other, it was already pervaded by the new transnational world of consumerism and mass communications. The effect of this grafting, already at the time completely intuited by Barthes, would over time be that of a progressive “aestheticization of the everyday” which we are still experiencing today – that is, the continual stimulation of common sensibilities by a world rich in appealing and clever ideas. The overall effect is that of a “domesticated sublime”, of a collective consciousness closed in upon itself, uninterested in History, ruled by consumption, without any apparent ideology (Guillaume 2002).

In Barthes's book, the traditional French dish of *steack frites*, the spiritual smoothness of Garbo's face, Abbé Pierre's deliberately casual hairstyle and the frothiness of the suds of a detergent all work together to create the mythology of contemporary man, a world with apparently naive and gratifying characteristics. Where, in actual fact, everything for Barthes hyper-signifies a single ideology, a value system passed on “under the table”, historically determined but tending to present itself as an immovable and eternal law of nature. Barthes' idea is that precisely the supposed innocence of all these signs chasing each other in a virtuous circle – the naturalness that brings about a desire of complicity – is in actual fact the *effect* constructed and achieved by the ideology of mass culture, which he perceives as a debased form of the traditional bourgeois one, and which he endeavours to energetically *demystify*. Bourgeois ideology had over time become *anonymous* and all the more influential, in the passage “to its derived, vulgarized and applied forms, to what one could call public philosophy, that which sustains everyday life, civil ceremonials, secular rites, in short the unwritten norms of interrelationships in a bourgeois society” (Barthes 1972: 139).

It is thus a bourgeois culture of pure consumption which is imbibed by the print media, cinema, theatre, popular literature, the figure of the writer, ceremonial events, Justice, diplomacy, conversations, the weather, the crime that is tried, the wedding which moves us, our dream kitchen, the clothes we wear. “Everything in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world” he writes, adding that it is through its ethic that the bourgeoisie pervades France: “practised on a national scale, bourgeois norms are experienced as the evident laws of a natural order – the further the bourgeois class propagates its representations, the more naturalized they become” (Barthes 1972: 139).

What Barthes offers in *Mythologies* is a structural analysis of mass communications which for the time being ‘skips’ – with foresight, one may say – the question of the autonomy of each particular semiological system – cinema, theatre, newspapers, advertising, photography, political language, as well as popular literature, the “system of objects”, architecture – in order to deal with

their manifestations effectively as though they were a matter of “great signifying units” capable of making it possible to find a common narrative model, along with the stereotypical applications made by the media. This is, perhaps, his most prescient intuition. Let us take for example his analysis of a vulgar “game” of the city outskirts – wrestling. A man lacking in semiological instinct would likely see in it nothing more than a game, a sequence of more or less entertaining physical events. When Barthes writes: “wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle” (Barthes 1972: 13), he says something more than the obvious: in fact, what he is seeking of this performance are the semiotic laws *proper* to it.

Wrestling is a complex artefact whose semiological nature is established first of all by the presence of two extreme poles of a communicative situation, whose participants share common *knowledge* about what is being performed. The audience, in effect, possesses a specific skill which allows it to decipher the performance it is watching according to the rules belonging to it: these are above all the rules of the game, a paradigm of possible moves aimed at the victory of one of the two fighters. The constitutive code of wrestling already presupposes a process of abstraction, placing a “real” fight into quotation marks: wrestlers do not hate each other because they have a mutual grievance, but because they have chosen a particular profession, and the crowd does not watch their wrestling match because they simply happen to pass by, but because they have bought a ticket to watch.

Thus, because of its fictional nature, this event renders the expression of the worst feelings acceptable and even necessary on the plane of communication:

The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees” (Barthes 1972: 13).

Every gesture made by the wrestlers appears to Barthes as if it were a sort of stutter in the system, associated – thanks to its being clearly emphasized – with a passional situation, such as Wrath, Sorrow or Defeat. Barthes thus perceives feelings and emotions expressed and produced within a semiological process as being external to psychologism, as if already organized into a combination – an idea which was to reappear subsequently, for example in the semiotics of gestures and the theatre, or the semiotics of the passions themselves. The confrontation between the two bodies in the ring is thus manifested as the encounter of two signs: “The physique of the wrestlers therefore constitutes a basic sign, which like a seed contains the whole fight” (Barthes 1972: 16). In effect, the combinational possibilities are – according to the way in which they are put into play by a kind

of set of “rules of the genre” – what constitutes the rituality of the performance, based thus on repetition and predictability as is the case in the most basic stories. Like the masks in the *commedia dell'arte*, on the “physionomic” level the wrestlers already bear the imprint, the marks which anticipate their role in the match: “As in the theatre, each physical type expresses to excess the part which has been assigned to the contestant” (Barthes 1972: 15). There is, in the recognition of this figurative endowment of the characters, an idea which was to become fundamental in semiotic analysis: the actualization of a “sign” contains within it a wealth of virtual meaning. Thus when a character qualified for the performance of certain actions intervenes within a story, he/she opens within the text a series of possible directions which make it possible to “foresee” the story’s development (Eco 1979). This is what Barthes observes in the wrestling “text” in which the figures and the possible dramatic situations are led back to a circular variation of stereotypes which does not reach the point of developing into a syntagm, but which acts precisely in response to the type of communicative contract stipulated between the actors of the game and their spectators: “Wrestling thus demands an immediate reading of the juxtaposed meanings, so that there is no need to connect them” (Barthes 1972: 14). It is only by starting from this analysis, which is already, as we have tried to show, a textual analysis in its proper sense, that the ideological level of wrestling – but also of other products of what can be called mass culture, like romance novels, for example – can be understood and unmasked. Beyond the first level of meaning, beyond the Exposition of Sorrow as a semiotic spectacle in which passion is simulated, this ideological level presents itself as an occasion to consume passions reduced to their minimum terms: something less heroic than the struggle between Good and Evil – which may concern tragedy; something like the affirmation of a paltry justice where the shrewder player wins.

Thus it is the notion of “myth” which at the time seemed to Barthes to be the most suitable to explain the phenomena singled out for consideration: those were the years which saw the rise of the work of Lévi-Strauss (1958) on myths as narratives, which for the participants within the culture in which they circulate are all the more effective the more their meaning and their functions remain unconscious. Barthes moreover had just read Saussure, and Hjelmslev translated into English: his “initiation” into structural linguistics goes back a few years earlier when, in Alexandria in Egypt, he started a fertile intellectual exchange with Greimas. Beyond Marx and Sartre, it is thus the linguistic model which was truly useful in suggesting the idea of myth as a language – “stolen and returned” to boot – and it is the idea of a general science of signs which was to present itself to him as a means of reflecting on the question of alienation, by articulating it beyond Marxist principles.

In its structural re-definition, the notion of myth in fact makes it possible to organize homogeneously materials which are not immediately comparable, such as newspaper articles and publicity scoops, sports matches and eating habits – to perceive similar modalities of construction and diffusion of meaning. All these phenomena have in common the fact that they circulate in society, which “pre-supposes a significant consciousness” which is commonly shared. On this foundation is based the possibility of dissolving the opposition between phenomena of *signification* (facts recognized as being endowed with significance, apart from an explicit or effective intention of communication, and not necessarily formulated from artificial codes) and conscious and intentional processes of *communication*, the question which so impassioned the semiological discussions of the 1960s. Within the scheme of his linguistic theory, for Saussure, the notion of *value*, defined dually, was fundamental: the linguistic sign, in fact, has a relational value compared to all the other elements in the system, like the different pieces in a game of chess, and in addition it expresses a value “of exchange” in some way, because it enables the transmission of content through linguistic expressions. But non-linguistic objects can also take on this type of value, observes Barthes: even “Myth can be defined neither by its object nor by its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning” (Barthes 1972: 108). One can decide for example that a black stone signifies the death penalty in a given ritual, while in another it can even mean the exact opposite – as happens with the colours black or white used to express mourning. Moreover, the same *use* of a certain object can be converted, within the society that defines it, into a “sign of that use”. And here we have the formation of an extended idea of signification which was to be fully accepted, along with other founders of a modern science of signs, by Umberto Eco, another theoretical correspondent bound to Barthes by a constant and faithful friendship.

In the final essay “Le mythe, aujourd’hui”, the semiologist is thus in search of himself: myth, which poses problems of “size”, since it can manifest itself or be perceived in unequal ways, is called from time to time a “word”, a “message”, a “language”, a “semiological system”; semiology, still in the bud, is defined as “a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their content” (Barthes 1972: 110).

The starting point is the Saussurean definition of *sign*, in which three different kinds of elements are to be taken into consideration: the signifier, the signified and, above all, the correlation which links them in a relationship of equivalency. If, for example, in order to signify my passion to someone I choose a bouquet of red roses, it is important to underline that *before* making my choice I had on the one hand the roses (the signifier) and on the other the passion (the signified). *After* the decision to signify my passion through the roses, that new

object – the sign – was created. We are, as we can see, in a situation different to the linguistic one, in which the correlations between signifiers and signifieds, for the most part, are not established by the speaking individuals but are rather the supra-individual heritage of the *langue*. For this reason as well, Barthes affirms that “the signifier is empty, the sign is full, it is a meaning” (Barthes 1972: 112). The three terms involved here are purely formal, and can be invested with very different content.

The case of the myth analyzed by Barthes is more specific still: not only can the tridimensional scheme of the signifier, signified and sign be perceived, but the myth system is built on the basis of a “semiological chain which existed before it: it is a *second-order semiological system*” (Barthes 1972: 113). But myth is also a meta-language, a second language in which the first is discussed, the object-language which the myth hitches on to in order to build its own system.

In furnishing a representation of the two aspects of myth, as second-order language and meta-language, Barthes refers to the two notions of *connotation* and *meta-language*, pressing them for the moment one upon the other.¹ He is concerned above all with highlighting the mechanism of stratification which makes it possible for myth to “pass on” its significations by installing itself parasitically on preceding significations – that is the mechanisms through which I can for example treat the Latin phrase “*quia ego nominor leo*” solely as an example of grammar – in which what counts is not the meaning of the phrase, but only a certain type of agreement of the predicate, or considering the cover photograph of a young black soldier saluting the French flag, as the clear example of the unquestionable imperial grandeur of France. The Latin phrase or the black soldier’s salute, says Barthes, would already have their own fullness of meaning which postulates knowledge, a memory, a history: the mythical signification proceeds first of all by *emptying* these signs, making them regress in some way to the state of empty forms, ready to receive the parasitical significations of myth:

The form has put all this richness at a distance: its newly acquired penury calls for a signification to fill it. The story of the lion must recede a great deal in order to make room for the

¹ For Hjelmslev, in fact, a connotative system is a semiotics (Expression and Content) whose scheme of expression is constituted in its turn on an entire semiotics (Expression and Content), and thus capable of contributing further meaning to the sign on which it has grafted itself: as in the banal example of the term ‘dog’ which denotes ‘dog’ and connotes ‘*faithfulness*’. Meta-language is instead defined as a language in which it is the plane of content which is constituted by this new system describing it, as in the example “the word ‘dog’ has three letters”: the entire English language, within which the term “dog” appears is the object of a language, the meta-language, in which the first is spoken of.

grammatical example, one must put the biography of the black man in parentheses if one wants to free the picture, and prepare it to receive its signified (Barthes 1972: 116).

The mythical concept – in the cases here presented, the grammatical example and French imperialism – “is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations” (Barthes 1972: 118), its instability and vagueness are in fact functional to the *appropriateness* of myth, the fact that they can be turned over and “aimed” at a certain type of audience. The myth can be expressed by many different signifiers, and this repetitiveness, among other things, makes it possible to recognize it. In addition, it maintains a relation with its previous meaning, which it does not cancel, but rather *deforms*. Barthes dwells at length upon the dynamics of the mythical word, which he defines again as “a word stolen and returned”, the result of a “quick theft”, of “a brief moment of falsification”, which apparently returns things to where they belong, but after having altered or in some way *corrupted* them. And this corruption results from having introduced into the sign, generally arbitrary (“...nothing ‘naturally’ forces the acoustic image *tree* to signify the concept *tree*: the sign here is without reason...”), a *motivation*, based on some kind of *analogy*, the agreement of the predicate in the Latin example, the identification of the black soldier’s salute with the white French soldier’s. The result is thus a form of *naturalization* of the signs, which leads the consumer of myths to perceive as “factual” what is simply semiological, to perceive a causal relationship between the signifier and the signified where instead there is a simple equivalency posited between the values of a system.

More than once, to explain in what way semiology ought to be a *semioclastie*, a *semioclasm* – that is, a critical analysis of manipulating signs produced by bourgeois ideology – Barthes refers to the arbitrary nature of the sign as the trait of a fundamental “healthiness” of language. The signs of ideology, on the other hand, are in his view excessively motivated, but at the same time they simulate innocence and thus manage to establish unquestioned standards.

Ascribed by their author to the period of his “political obsession”, in actual fact these brief essays are also the first fruits of his semiological apprenticeship. A few mythologies, in early 1953, are even blended in with or correspond to certain writings on the theatre of the same period, such as the one on the world of wrestling, or the piece on the power of ancient tragedy. In perspective, in the analysis of social significations as “material already processed in view of an appropriate communication”, as “mythical word” grafted onto a preceding semiotic chain, already implicit is the overturning of the Saussurean hypothesis of the relationship of inclusion of semiology within linguistics, which Barthes would make more explicit in *Elements de sémiologie*.

But what perhaps ought to be underlined even more is that (as already in *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*) ideology is not attributed to the diffusion of vague and ineffable beliefs, but takes on the concreteness of a material reality, even corporeal and organic: if in the literary field it becomes concrete, for example, in the different use of personal pronouns or verbs in writing, in the context of daily life eating a steak does not only mean consuming meat, but it signifies consuming “Frenchness” as well.

There is finally also a “positivity” to mythology, which defines Barthes' criticism as something very different to the genre of intellectual lamenting and conceit: “beyond the real that collapses due to the critical process of exposure, a new form of the real rises, poetically founded on the idea of unalienable meaning”, writes his pupil and editor Eric Marty (2006: 117), an idea that Barthes borrows from *Phenomenology of Perception* by Merleau-Ponty, with whose thought he maintains a close tie. As he does with Algirdas Julien Greimas, who upon Barthes' death wrote in the article “Roland Barthes: une biographie à construire” that “this vast undertaking of his to restore public health” offers “a definitive dignity” to semiology:

the procedures of rendering explicit, appropriate forms of scientific knowledge, are recognized, and valorized as well, because they are put at the service of a social ethics of liberating lucidity. The intellectual, reconciling ‘science’ and ‘ideology, know-how and making known, rediscovers, for a moment, his good conscience (Greimas 1980).

Barthes was to continue to recall his work of demolition and de-mystification as euphorical, promising himself now and again to take it up again, something which in effect he was to do only in part and with much less enthusiasm many years later in the *Croniques* written for the “Nouvel Observateur” between 1978 and 1979.

He had given birth to a new kind of social criticism, and was fortunate in its being received very favourably even at the time and for the many imitations that were to follow, right up to the present day. But above all, he had begun that *aventure sémiologique*, which we all still share, in a way that was truly enthusing.

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Ricoeur, a disciple of Greimas? A case of paradoxical maïeutic

Abstract: In January 1963, Paul Ricoeur praised structuralism in Rome (Ricoeur 1963). In June 1963, during a confrontation with Claude Lévi-Strauss that he had organised, on the premises of the journal *Esprit*, the same Paul Ricoeur entered into a violent rejection of that structural philosophy and then kept the same resentment seemingly forever.

At first, his anathema encompassed Greimassian semiotics until 1979 (see the famous Seminars of rue Parmentier on Narrativity and on History). Then, thanks to a period of private encounters and public debates with Greimas (1980–1989), Ricoeur radically changed his opinion about the achievements of Greimas to the point of not allowing him to step aside (outside?) of what would come to be known as standard semiotics in which he recognised an admirable device for explaining and, hence, understanding, more, the symbolic force of narratives.

Keywords: structuralism, semiotics, phronésis, narrative intelligence, logos

1 Introduction

A true friendship linked Greimas (1917–1992) and Ricoeur (1913–2005), to which bear witness innumerable references to “my friend Greimas” in Ricoeur’s texts from the late sixties to his *Intellectual Autobiography* in 1994. But a real dissymmetry is however to be noted in their intellectual exchanges:

- Ricoeur read, annotated and commented, very thoroughly in writing, some important texts by Greimas.
- Greimas, on the other hand, does not appear to have read Ricoeur; and apart from the very short article “herméneutique” in the *Dictionnaire I* (Greimas and Courtès 1979), it is well nigh impossible to find any conceptual interest for Ricoeur’s work in the writing of Greimas, not even a reference to his name.

Three major public debates (1980, 1983, 1989) bear evidence of this dissymmetry: Ricoeur read Greimas and submitted his critiques to him. Greimas limited

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himself to answering Ricoeur's philosophical objections, in Greimassian semiotic terms.

Ricoeur's constant wariness vis-à-vis the advances of semiotic narrative seems therefore to have made him an attentive disciple of Greimas and even an excellent student, increasingly aware of the scientific scope of the methods of modelling meaning that semiotics was bold enough to found, whilst, to the end, Greimas was in the posture of a Master. A pleasing paradox confirms the dissymmetry of these postures as well as the depth of the friendship that brought these great thinkers together: we shall see how, when, during their last great public debate in 1989, Greimas seemed close to giving up this masterly attitude, it was Ricoeur himself who demanded that Greimas pull himself together and keep intact the rigor, the clarity and the magisterial distinction of his abstract procedures.

Why revisit this past today? Even if the cognitive events that will be mentioned already belong to History, insofar as they took place in between 1963 and 1991, they are of a compelling relevancy, to assist in bringing to an end the misinterpretation of semiotics as a structuralism.

The narrative studies of Greimas gave rise in Ricoeur, first to a passionate reprobation (the rue Parmentier seminars, 1976–1979), then, on the contrary, to an increasingly enthusiastic appreciation (1985–1991) and finally a vibrant palinode, an auto-criticism (1991–1993), of the misunderstandings that were his, in the first period (1976–1979). The corpus of texts in which Ricoeur explicitly comments his reading of Greimas allows us to observe, step by step, how Ricoeur evolved, from his long proclaimed hostility (1967–1980) to a total approbation in 1991–1993.

Paul Ricoeur's evolution did not take the form of the constant progress of an erudite scholar, locked up in the silence of his ivory tower; rather the contrary, this "conversion" of the hermeneutist to semiotics unfolds like *a story full of surges and ups and downs, of sound and fury* of which I will just recall some episodes.

We shall see that there is no contradiction between the wrath Ricoeur reserves for structuralism and his slow conversion to the spirit of social sciences as embodied by A. J. Greimas. To do so, we will start by briefly recalling the chronology of the Greimas/Ricoeur relations, before dwelling on the precise critical point that led to some regrettable misunderstandings within the intellectual community.

2 Ricoeur/Greimas, chronology of an intellectual relationship

2.1 1963 Ricoeur's relationship to structuralism before meeting Greimas

Let us first recall the “primitive scene” at *Esprit*, which started Ricoeur's long war against structuralism (Ricoeur 1963).

In January 1963, during the international Congress on *Hermeneutics and tradition* in Rome, Ricoeur delivered and published his article “Structuralism and Hermeneutics” under the title “Symbolics and temporality”, proving then to be already well acquainted with the core of structuralist theses and not far removed from adhering to this new school of knowledge: the text, joyful with cognitive expectations, was republished, under its new title, in *Esprit*, November 1963, 596–627, after having been submitted to Lévi-Strauss for the debate of June 1963 for which Ricoeur and the members of the philosophical group of *Esprit* had invited Lévi-Strauss to a discussion on his most recent 1962 book, *La pensée sauvage*. The group had just spent a whole year of attentive readings, debates and critiques for the preparation of this summit meeting.

Let us dwell for an instant on the atmosphere of the June 1963 session, in the run-down premises of *Esprit*, rue Jacob in Paris. The transcription of the Lévi-Strauss/Ricoeur debate, published, apparently *verbatim*, in *Esprit* 322, November 1963, allows one to perceive how this session dedicated to *La pensée sauvage* (which, like all books by Lévi-Strauss, at the time, met with enormous success in the media) was not long in veering into a sort of slanging match between Claude Lévi-Strauss and Paul Ricoeur (backed up by 9 remarkable assessors fully armed, from head to toe, after the year of debate and reciprocal explanations they had devoted to *La pensée sauvage* in these same premises).

As he was constantly to do later on, in his encounters with other well-known scholars including Greimas, Ricoeur had strategically steered his written manifesto and his oral intervention towards the idea that a Yalta type division should be made between the field allotted to structuralism and the field of hermeneutical interpretations. Nonetheless the whole would finally be required to be included under the banner of the reflexive philosophy that Hermeneutics constituted for him.

Lévi-Strauss disdainfully thrust aside (p. 634) “this sort of deal that is offered to me of a field where structural analysis would reign alone, in exchange for another where its powers would be limited”. He exposed the subjectivism of Hermeneutics (p. 637), refused to “link the notion of discourse and the notion of

person”, and admitted to be seeking as an object of study “a discourse for which there is no personal issuer, a discourse that one gathers up like a little known tongue whose grammar one endeavours to establish” (p. 640).

In stark contrast to the joyful and inviting enunciation of his “*Structuralisme et Herméneutique*”, the last words uttered by Ricoeur resound like a kind of imprecation:

I rather thought that this Philosophy [a sort of materialism L-S has just admitted] would enter the field of your work, where I perceive an extreme form of modern agnosticism; for you, there is no “message”: not in the sense of cybernetics, but in the kerygmatic sense; you are in despair of meaning (...). You save the meaning, but it is the meaning of non-sense, the admirable syntactic accommodation of a discourse that does not say anything. I see you in this conjunction of agnosticism and of a hyper-intelligence of syntaxes. You are both fascinating and disquieting.

This violent disagreement about focalisation upon a grammar of meaning not immediately linked to personal subjects and attributed first to the social subject, added to Lévi-Strauss’s public refusal of any form of cooperation with Ricoeur, left a permanent and definitive resentment in Ricoeur’s future formulations regarding all that resembled research on immanent structures. This resentment appeared first as an open conflict all through the years 1966–1967, then, as distrust, coupled with permanent contempt for any assertions by Lévi-Strauss all through the three volumes *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur 1984, 1985, 1988), and right up to *La Mémoire, l’Histoire, l’oubli*, published in 2000 (Ricoeur 2000), where Michel de Certeau, another anthropologist with a structural background, is rehabilitated by Ricoeur but Lévi-Strauss certainly is not.

For their part, during the same period (the biographers of Ricoeur, Olivier Abel 2004 and François Dosse 1997, insist on this fact) the schools of Althusser and of Lacan, in the name of a scientificity that they purport to embody, passed off Ricoeur’s Hermeneutic as spiritualist ideas definitely out of date. The result was a temporary disrepute that, at the top of the structuralist wave, deeply touched Ricoeur.

2.2 1963–1980: Fulminations against structuralism

The intellectual climate (dominated by the series of “Maîtres à penser” such as Lacan, Foucault, Althusser, not forgetting Lévi-Strauss, or Barthes, Greimas and Dumézil, all very pugnacious, who were then reigning) had brought upon Paris this paradoxical “structuralist” fashion, totally unclear about what is to be understood by the term “structure”.

As a consequence of this climate, Paul Ricoeur withdrew from Paris and waged a bitter contest against what he has qualified himself as the dangerous philosophical and moral nature of structuralism, embodied in his eyes by Lévi-Strauss and his followers:

He teaches for three years at Louvain, in this temple of Phenomenology that houses Husserl's Archives. And especially in the United States where he seizes the opportunity to offer philosophical answers to the dead ends characteristic of the structuralist paradigm that still dominates France's intellectual landscape (Dosse 1997, Abel 2004).

The nascent semiotics of Greimas (1966, *Sémantique structurale*) was immediately caught up in Ricoeur's condemnations, but to a lesser degree: as soon as *Sémantique structurale* was published, Ricoeur criticised the structural aspects but took pleasure in dabbling with the concept of isotopy whose simplicity allows resolution of so many ambiguities. However, the positions he took up, afterwards at his seminars of rue Parmentier on narrativity and later on history (1976–1979), were a direct and ferocious invitation to rise up against Greimas and his Semiotics.

2.3 1980–1989: Direct public exchanges Ricoeur/ Greimas

But, in 1980, a direct public encounter was organized by some protestant intellectuals, amongst whom Marie-Louise Fabre and Françoise Bastide, Paul Ricoeur delved into a chapter of *Du sens* (1970) “Elements of a narrative grammar” (pp. 157–183) which he commented on in the document bearing the title *Herméneutique et sémiotique*, written to introduce this debate on “the abstraction of the text practiced by you, semioticians” (op.cit. p.VIII). This first public debate between Greimas and Ricoeur is a real confrontation. Each one claims to draw the other onto his own terrain and to ensnare him with his net of concepts: “I am engulfing you”, one often hears repeated on each side. Then, as a result, still in 1980, Ricoeur sends to the semioticians his famous “La grammaire narrative de Greimas” (Ricoeur 1980b), a heavy, detailed analytical and critical study of the elementary structures of meaning as elaborated in *Du sens*. Even though the hermeneutist shows himself to be quite taken up by the clarity and operativity of certain semiotic concepts, he remains cautious and does not then imagine introducing these concepts into his own intellectual apparatus and even less so in his hermeneutical practice.

The same text, greatly abridged and entirely recomposed reappears under the title “Greimas's narrative Semiotics” in *Time and Narrative II* (1985). This version is followed by an extremely laudatory reading of *Maupassant, La sémi-*

otique du texte (Greimas 1976). According to Ricoeur, from *Structural Semantics* to this *Maupassant*, Greimas's narrative venture is led by the ambition to build a strictly achronic model. *Du Sens* and *Maupassant* have strongly radicalised this logical "parti pris". "The stroke of genius, one may well say, is to have sought this already articulated character in a logical structure as simple as possible, that is to say "the elementary structure of meaning" (Ricoeur 1980b: 77). And Ricoeur comes to this conclusion: nowhere does Greimas come closer to turning linguistics into an algebra of language.

This theoretical radicality gives Paul Ricoeur a dazzling, true revelation and an intense intellectual pleasure, the more so that, according to him, Greimas has managed in the same movement to reintegrate into his modelisation some elements essential in the eyes of Ricoeur such as

- adjunction of temporalizing structures such as inchoativity/terminativity, durativity /punctuality, iterativity, and tensivity, in practice introduced at the discursive level.
- indexations of moral values invested in the narration thanks to the semiotic square, etc.

According to Ricoeur, all these adjuncts "loosen the logical model of semiotic narratology without bursting it apart."

This extremely synthetic and scrupulous presentation, worked out from a drastic recomposition/reconfiguration of the texts provided to the semioticians during 1980, tends to discover through this evolution of the theory many concessions to the fundamental preoccupations of Hermeneutics. This acknowledgement brings about a change of affective tonality just as categorical. The plodding dysphoria of *Grammaire* (1980) becomes the vibrant euphoria of *Time and Narrative II* (1985).

Finally, the period 1980–1989 sees Ricoeur increasingly taken over and convinced by the rationality of semiotic research. Some indisputable proofs of this fact are provided by his texts of 1989–1991.

2.4 23rd May 1989: The last public debate

On 23 May 1989, A. J. Greimas and Paul Ricoeur agreed to take part in a dialogue (in the programme I direct at the Collège International de Philosophie – cf. Hénauld 1994) on the manner in which semiotics of the passions could rationally connect up with the semiotics of action, elaborated so far. This debate attracted a very broad audience. Once again, Ricoeur placed his interlocution with semiotics under the banner of the hermeneutic category /explain/vs/understand. Having

recalled the various texts he had devoted to presenting semiotics, always in a critical though increasingly positively critical mode, Ricoeur concluded the first part of this debate (Ricoeur in Hénault, 1994: 201) with the words: “It is therefore this acknowledgement that I offer you”. This expression takes on an extremely strong meaning and can be made clear in the light of Ricoeur’s last writings, among which is *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, published in 2004.

As usual Greimas answers, exclusively on his own ground, mentioning “the interrelationship of the semiotic group, its convivial research and, lastly the “problem of meaning”; then, finally, a most modest evocation of his life that nonetheless provides a personal, private, intimate and very warm touch to this debate. Greimas had never given way to such outpourings in public encounters. That day, he abandoned his usual very specialised and abstract language, for an extremely simple and emotional language, which led him to give an image of proximity and effectiveness to his vision of passionate processes. What was experienced during this last encounter?

For Greimas, the bliss of making himself understood exactly on the level he wished, with neither haste nor pressure, in a friendly atmosphere, stripped of the common solemnity of ordinary scientific confrontations. Ricoeur (1990: 200) had first expressed an unreserved admiration:

I attach great importance to the Maupassant; for me, it is a major book; one can affirm that the text is respected to the degree that there is not a word, not a scansion that are not justified – and here I say that, thanks to the explanation, I discover something I would not have understood in a simple, ordinary, reading, especially the famous catch of fish offered by the dead, or rather that the non-dead offers to his enemy. Is that not a miraculous draught of fish? Thus there is a sort of mythisation that one can only bring out with the semiotic square of veridiction – it is as if we have a kind of productivity here of the explanation that makes me say that I understand better having explained more.

But, after the response of Greimas, Ricoeur plies Greimas with questions on the subject of *Sémiotique des passions*. Far from appearing reticent or still opposed to the achronic and logical epistemology of semiotics, as had been so often the case in the past, Ricoeur’s querying is in exact agreement with Greimassian epistemology under its most logical, articulate and distinctive aspect. Ricoeur calls on Greimas to tell him how he will maintain the dazzling simplicity, coherence and rationality of his theory while venturing on the unstable and labile territories of the sensitive. Then, displeased with the weak answers he gets from Greimas, not demonstrative or systematic enough to his taste, he does not hesitate to take him to task: Ricoeur thus orders Greimas to be more Greimassian.

2.5 1990–1991: The tribute to Jeanne Delhomme

That said, the comment that is most absolutely free from any restriction devoted by Ricoeur to Greimas, the real certificate of rationality awarded to semiotics by Ricoeur is to be found in a somewhat confidential document: “*Contingence et rationalité*”, an article in the volume of tributes to Jeanne Delhomme in which Paul Ricoeur affirms unreservedly the rationality reached by the semiotic work lead by Greimas:

Narratology is a relatively recent science (...) applied to the deep structures of narration, that is to say the codes that preside over the transformations from an initial state of things to a terminal state of things, which is finally the matter of all narrations. My thesis here is twofold: on the one hand I hold the narrative enterprise for perfectly legitimate, especially in the structural versions of Greimas and his school of thought today in France; on the other hand I hold that that enterprise (and those that are related) can ultimately only be justified as a simulation of a prior narrative intelligence. Thus narratological rationality is one of a second degree discourse, of a metalanguage grafted onto the understanding that, as children, we had of what stood as a story (Ricoeur 1991: 179).

This short auto-summary of the relationship of Ricoeur to narrative semiotics praises as the emergence of a new rationality, totally unknown till then, the semiotic meta-language; that day, Ricoeur was addressing the hyper-rational corporation of the most representative philosophers of the French school of philosophy and in memory of an admirable philosopher, who was also an actor of his own *bildungsroman*, Jeanne Delhomme, his contemporary, recently departed when he wrote this text in her honour, for the volume *d’Hommage élaboré par*, her disciples and by the Société de Philosophie de Paris. Delhomme was a friend from his youth; he met her at Gabriel Marcel’s Friday gatherings (les Vendredis) during the first years of his own academic training (1934–1935). This fact added to the solemnity of this publication; the depth and the value of a personal appraisal, at an age when one jests no more with one’s own truth and when one commits oneself before what may be already perceived as one’s own irreversible eternity.

2.6 1993–1995 : Ricoeur’s recantations and palinodes

On the one hand, one finds in these pages of *Réflexion faite* (1995), in extremely courteous terms, a meticulous distinction between structuralism as an ideology or philosophy and structural analysis as a well delimited technique “legitimate and fruitful adapted, each time, to a well bounded field of experience”; this distinction was becoming established and discussed during the 1963 happening and

Greimas himself had always been in full agreement with it. This distinction reappears in this self-portrait of 1995, to the benefit of Greimas.

One sees that the misinterpretation of Greimas vanished for Ricoeur as soon as he accepted that, even in the domain of significations, one had to distinguish work on general laws and structures (which is characteristic of/characterises any science) from structuralism which was a trendy word, forged essentially by the media, in order to designate a series of very important researchers, belonging to different domains of Human Sciences during the 1960s. In any case, most of these researchers did not accept for themselves this designation and they never constituted a group of thought recognisable as such. On the other hand, in “taking up” this self-portrait at the time for appraisals, Ricoeur re-qualified his 1967–1979 anti-structuralist anathemas and described as follows, his own evolution:

I strove to eliminate from my own conception of the thinking, acting and feeling subject, all that might make it impossible to incorporate into the reflexive operation a phase of structural analysis. There was nothing circumstantial in this auto-criticism: already, in my essays on Husserl following the translation of *Ideen I* –essays gathered together later on under the title “À l’école de la Phénoménologie” (1986), I distanced myself from an immediate consciousness of oneself, transparent to oneself, direct and argued in favour of a detour through signs and works deployed in the world of culture (Ricoeur 1994b: 19).

In his obituary for Greimas, he is even more explicit and less cautious:

The 1963–67 conflict revolved, then, around the question of the subject, ill treated, (or so one thought), by those named, in a global and encompassing sense, “structuralism”, under the banner of whom polemics placed confusedly Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault and finally Greimas. The subject supposedly saved by Phenomenology and Gadamerian hermeneutics to which I was perceived to be attached, every structuralist was, by definition, enemy of the subject. It is this conflict, in the end rather sterile, that I attempted, if not to arbitrate, at least to move, temporarily placing in brackets the question of the subject, the principle topic of the dispute. I then questioned, with the help of the Greimas of *Structural Semantics* (1966), the epistemological presupposition on which was generally fixed the advocacy in favour of the subject, i.e. the opposition going back to Dilthey between understand (*Verstehen*) and explain (*Erklären*). The opposition could only stand if to explain was considered a prerogative of the sciences of nature, and to understand, a prerogative of sciences of the mind. Linguistics, since Saussure, Hjelmslev, Jakobson, etc. had ruined Dilthey’s dichotomy by introducing explanation to the core of the sphere of language, however in a form no longer causal or genetic, but structural. It is at the very heart of the famous sciences of the mind that to explain and to understand should be innovatively brought together. That is how I found in Greimas less and less an adversary and more and more an ally (Ricoeur 1993: 48).

3 Misunderstandings in contemporary narrative studies

3.1 Phronésis vs théorétic

This is how Paul Ricoeur contrived little by little to escape from the intellectual dilemma into which, in his youth, the obliged opposition imposed by hermeneutics between the arid demand *to explain* of the sciences of nature and the generous encouragement *to understand* of the sciences of the mind had locked him. The 1991 text that we have mentioned regarding Jeanne Delhomme luminously demonstrates the manner in which Ricoeur came to consider the opposition ‘phronetic intelligence versus theoretical intelligence’ as a radical posing, hierarchically superior to explaining and understanding.

The art of storytelling has the virtue of teaching (...) the virtue of revealing one of the universal aspects of the human condition. It “*develops a kind of intelligence that may be called narrative intelligence and which is much closer to practical wisdom or moral judgement than science or more generally the theoretical use of reason*” (...) It is thanks to the familiarity that we have contracted with the modes of setting intrigue received from our culture that we learn to link these virtues or better still the excellences to good fortune or misfortune. *These “lessons” of poetry (understood as the art of story telling) constitute the universals mentioned by Aristoteles: but they are universals a degree below those of logic and theoretical thinking.* We must nonetheless speak of intelligence, but in the sense however that Aristoteles gave to Phronesis (translated by the Latins as prudentia). In this sense, I shall talk about phronetic intelligence, as opposed to theoretical intelligence” (Ricoeur 1991: 178, my italics).

We see how, in order to comment on the art of storytelling, Ricoeur renews with the aesthetic considerations, the *aesthesis*, a major pole of the philosophic research of his friend Mikel Dufrenne. For him, ethics uses this esthesia provided by the pleasures and seductions of storytelling in order to teach the indispensable art of *bien vivre*. However, if *Phronesis* is the domain he assigns to narrative poetics, Ricoeur does not for one instant lose sight of what he categorically opposes to this practical intelligence that is to say the *theoretical intelligence* that narrative semiotics had started to apply not only to storytelling but more widely to the entire field of living expression.

Linguistic semiotics (Hjelmslev, Greimas and so many other members of the European School of semiotics) had started responding to the scientific challenge of Saussure through a rationally structured method. By contrast, hermeneutic reason, embodied by Ricoeur until 1980, first set the task of reclaiming the “life experiencing” (“*le vécu*”) that it considered structuralism had fatally evacuated. But, at the same time, Ricoeur saw himself as increasingly dependent on the sci-

entific meta-language of semiotics to better "explain" in order to better "understand".

3.2 The last Master

The new *episteme* (Michel Foucault's vocabulary) alias *epistemia* (Jacques d'Hondt's vocabulary) that was appearing in the world during the second half of the XX century, through the scientific quality that human sciences were progressively acquiring, was received very differently by the two friends. In Volume III of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur proclaims that it is necessary to "Renounce Hegel" and welcomes the mutation of the world, the new spirit, the new rationality that was developing. He had sufficient knowledge of the history of the intellectual world to know that this would mean the rising up of totally new schools of thought. He also knew that the burning feeling, then the confused perception, *experienced* rather than felt, of the new horizons of thought, would probably be met by the answers of a Master who, as Hegel said, precisely should come neither too early nor too late.

In the manner of the rustic that he pretended to be, A. J. Greimas advanced alone, and founded in Paris a real School, subject to often violent sarcasms and attacks, like it was the case for Hegel storming Berlin's Humboldt University in 1818. As soon as he was able to return to Paris, *first in writing* in 1956, with his famous article "*Actualité du Saussurisme*" and *then, in person*, back from Turkey, with his seminar on *Structural Semantics* at Institut Henri Poincaré, in 1964 (after his appointment to Poitiers University), Greimas took on, immediately the intellectual stature of a Master. He adopted the appropriate firm tone and started coining and explaining the new concepts implied by Saussureanism, as well as moulding around him appropriate minds capable of prolonging the task upon which he was embarking. He was not the sort of professor who, one day, recited to his students Aristotle's doctrine and, the next day, that of Kant according to the appointed academic curricula. Past a certain age, Greimas only taught Greimas, i.e. very novel concepts as well as very honed, most elaborate, epistemologically: he purported to bestow on them scientific reliability, following a series of dazzling rational experiences that he owed particularly to Saussure, to Gestalt Theory and to the symbolic writings of Reichenbach. At least, those were the masters he wanted to acknowledge, adding, for good measure, Descartes, Nietzsche, R. Blanché, Bachelard and Raymond Ruyer (cf. Greimas 1966).

By contrast with his friend, Dumézil, who steadfastly refused to be bothered with disciples, A. J. Greimas was obliged, by the radical novelty and by the deep abstraction of the notions he had to develop, to found a school and to

really become its Master *infatigable*. It was in tune with the times; we will not mention Foucault, Althusser, Derrida, Deleuze, or Lévi-Strauss, whose brilliant schools have, now, more or less been dispersed. But we must mention Ricoeur, himself, who became step by step, an authentic Master too, whose numerous disciples deeply adhered to his feeling for *phronesis* without necessarily taking into account the prudence of this Master regarding the developments of truly rational knowledge, that he designates either as *science* or as theoretical intelligence.

If these followers, notably amongst the ranks of narrative studies, having superficially read *Time and Narrative*, felt they were authorised to ignore semiotic reason, Ricoeur himself provided them with a very different example. The Master of *Phronesis*, recognized in Greimas a Master of *Logos*, Master of pure reason and therefore Master to himself, Ricoeur. According to his own rating, both received from his professors and from his own rational experiencing, he publicly acknowledged that there is a semiotic reason exactly as there is a logical or a mathematical reason and that, on the one hand, this *theoretical intelligence* is more universal than *phronesis* and on the other hand, that it is capable of going further than hermeneutical reason, on the path of discovering, explaining and understanding significations.

His boundless respect for the progress of knowledge led Ricoeur to understand deeply A. J. Greimas's achievements. Before Greimas, his Master, younger than himself but deceased much before, Ricoeur consented to throw in the towel, i.e. to change his mind and learn a new way of thinking. Ricoeur's integrity, the way he conquered for himself this new rational domain, acquired, after more than thirty years of a resistance made of questions, doubts and criticisms, should be a lesson for many *neo-narratologists*, (or rather *narratologists* as they are so far from any *logos*) who confine themselves in *phronetic intelligence* and who disrepute drastically the *theoretic intelligence* of narrative semiotics.

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