Time and Translation

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I n her collection of essays, Anecdotal Theory, Jane Gallop proposes an alternative to a formal academic rhetoric by using an initiating personal anecdote as a theoretical basis for a thesis presentation. In order to "produce a more literary theory," Gallop writes, she "experimented [in the 1990s] with writing in which [she] would recount an anecdote and then attempt to 'read' that account for the theoretical insights it afforded" (2002: 2, emphasis added). "Anecdotal theory would cut through" the "oppositions" of "anecdote" and "theory," she adds, "in order to produce theory with a better sense of humour, "anecdote" and "theory," she adds, "in order to afford" (2002: 2, emphasis added). "Anecdotal to 'read' that account for the theoretical insights it [she] would recount an anecdote and then attempt to experimented [in the 1990s] with writing in which a theoretical basis for a thesis presentation. In order arguing about the book pages. he understood the phenomenon and we went back to a pencil in the middle between my thumb and index and performed the "rubber­pencil" with it (i.e., holding and arguably smart, a world traveler, produces at least that John was about 55­60 at the time, is well read and perceived as off­centred was just an optical illusion. But, as numerous examples can show, it appears that nothing of any certainty or finally can ultimately be "gained" from decoding texts without accepting that these results are manufactured (or to use Nietzsche’s term, “invented”) by the apparatus employed. Ultimately, then, any decoding would simply be a new encoding even further "away" from the truth of a signifying origin. And the process of semiosis carries on, endlessly. Humans, Nietzsche maintains, have arranged an epistemological “peace treaty” which “brings in its wake something which appears to be the first step toward acquiring that puzzling truth drive; to wit, that which shall count as ‘truth’ from now on is established. That is to say, a uniformly valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth” (1873: 889). This is how we “invented knowing” – “Truth and being are illusions” (891). Decoding, accordingly, could be viewed as a “residue of a metaphor” (892) or a “conceptual crap game.” “Only by forgetting the primitive world of metaphor,” Nietzsche concludes, “can one live with any repose, security, and consistency” (893). Given the unarguably human, impositional, even fabricational component of what we call decoding, Nietzsche’s perspective actually holds positive consequences for semiotics. It acknowledges that decoders don’t just passively decode sign vehicles: they make them anew. Otherwise, if semiotics continue to pretend that decoding is a disinterested process with a “stance” (as it is similar to some components of the scientific method), they are not being honest or even accurate about what happens in the course of decoding. This is understandable, after all, for as Stanley Fish notes, the illusion of materiality, or consensus, or reproducibility of results, is undesirably seductive. Fish emphasizes the immense seduction of the materiality of the page in this regard. While he avers that “the objectivity of the text is an illusion,” he nevertheless is “a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The objectivity is the sufficiency and completeness. A line of print or a page or a book is so obviously there – it can be handled, photographed, or put away – that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it” (1970: 82). The text, along these lines, then, is

The End of Decoding PART 1

By Scott Simpkins

in decoding is the same as John Deeply believing that he saw me flexing a rubber pencil.

And, to some extent, he did. It always looks like rubber when you do that.

The same value for decoding. If a semiotic connotations the illusory for a reality, then decoding is, indeed, possible.

Still, “decoding” is, in fact, nothing but an illusion.

Decoding is not really possible, and its "end," in the sense of a goal of some kind, is seldom considered in semiotics since it necessarily serves as a strategic myth. (In Roland Barthes’s sense) for the existence of semiotics as a discipline (or whatever it is). There is undeniably an agenda, a purpose, a remainder behind the concept of “decoding,” as it enables a belief in the “success” of semiotic analysis – the ability, in other words, to “crack” the code of a given signifying entity.

But, nevertheless, decoding is surely nothing more than what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call a “literalization which fixes the differences of a relational system” (1985: 114). Or, perhaps one could modify this to read: to which would be doomed to fix.

An apt illustration of this is found in the common belief (Priest, Eco, et al.) that “infinite semiosis” is not truly infinite. If a transcendentally signified of some kind will be reached, even if, as Peirce has it, as soon as the end is found, semiotics immediately kicks into action again. Laclau and Mouffe observe that the signifier that a signifier ultimately refers to a transcendentally signified, caries with it “the possibility of fixing a meaning which underlies the flow of differences” (1985: 112). Signs, in effect, do not refer only to other signs, this argument maintains; some sort of end –understanding or knowledge or even truth – will be the eventual, progressive outcome. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that a signifier ultimately refers to a transcendentally signified, despite infinite semiosis. “The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a process of what that word means to someone, in effect, through a process of what Gil Ryle (1968) and Clifford Geertz (1973) discuss as “thick description.”

For semiotics, acceptance of the viability of “decoding” arguably serves as a rationale to justify itself. If semiotics can provide an outcome for decoding a sign vehicle, leading to the equivalent of a sum or remainder, then something it has an end purpose. But, as numerous examples can show, it appears that nothing of any certainty or finally can ultimately be “gained” from decoding texts without accepting that these results are manufactured (or to use Nietzsche’s term, “invented”) by the apparatus employed. Ultimately, then, any decoding would simply be a new encoding even further “away” from the truth of a signifying origin. And the process of semiosis carries on, endlessly. Humans, Nietzsche maintains, have arranged an epistemological “peace treaty” which “brings in its wake something which appears to be the first step toward acquiring that puzzling truth drive; to wit, that which shall count as ‘truth’ from now on is established. That is to say, a uniformly valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth” (1873: 889). This is how we “invented knowing” – “Truth and being are illusions” (891). Decoding, accordingly, could be viewed as a “residue of a metaphor” (892) or a “conceptual crap game.” “Only by forgetting the primitive world of metaphor,” Nietzsche concludes, “can one live with any repose, security, and consistency” (893). Given the unarguably human, impositional, even fabricational component of what we call decoding, Nietzsche’s perspective actually holds positive consequences for semiotics. It acknowledges that decoders don’t just passively decode sign vehicles: they make them anew. Otherwise, if semiotics continue to pretend that decoding is a disinterested process with a “stance” (as it is similar to some components of the scientific method), they are not being honest or even accurate about what happens in the course of decoding. This is understandable, after all, for as Stanley Fish notes, the illusion of materiality, or consensus, or reproducibility of results, is undesirably seductive. Fish emphasizes the immense seduction of the materiality of the page in this regard. While he avers that “the objectivity of the text is an illusion,” he nevertheless is “a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The objectivity is the sufficiency and completeness. A line of print or a page or a book is so obviously there – it can be handled, photographed, or put away – that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it” (1970: 82). The text, along these lines, then, is
Peanuts

An article in The New York Times (January 14, 2009) titled "Listening to Schroeder: Peanuts' Scholar Find Memes in Cartoon's Humor," offers a more detailed discussion of the strategies through which Charles M. Schulz manipulated his characters' speech to create a kind of comedic "language" [A3]. In one of the strips, the reader is informed that "Peanuts" is essentially equivalent to the convincing sight of the "Anyone". She does this with four sets of "characters" overlay for the poem which posits, for instance, that "Anyone" can actually serve to open an increasingly larger array of signifying possibilities of the minister's appearance, a decoding framework which, while on the surface (as it is for semiotics as a whole), seems to beg for the discovery of an interpretative tool, a substantiatable diagnosis. ("Everybody lies," is Dr. House's motto, and this is a truly for medical semiotics as it is for semiotics as fundamentally the study of lying [1976]).

People Watching

Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Man of the Crowd" (which appeared in the journal Atlantic's Gaski [1840]), portrays a related detection scenario through a narrator who, while reposing in leisurely convalescence following an illness, prides himself on his ability to perform a typological decoding of the passer-by in the crowds of mid-nineteenth century London. Most individuals have repeatedly used this skill successfully over and over again on those who past him walk. At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passerby in a certain aggregate relation, he notes. "Soon, however, I descended to, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable various dress, gun, vest, gir, visage, and expression of countenance" (527).

The initial reference to the narrator's health ("For some months I had been ill in health, but was now convalescent" [1840: 507]) merits commentary at this juncture. Perhaps significantly, Poe's epigraph ("'Are you sure it is our parson?'"), one of the many "non-English quotes in the space of the first textual issue, see Foucault, "What is an Author?" [1970]). Poe qua author is well known for having his narrator incorporate languages other than his "base" language of English (the uses Ancient Greek in this story as well, for instance).

A parallel scenario, then, is portrayed in the declaration of the narrator's conclusion of what his man of crow nets signifies: that which "does not permit itself to be read" (i.e., the second quote, translated [506]). The subject who resists signification, who inhabits an extraneous, non-English realm, is, indeed, given the quote in German, in other words as well, leaves the text of the story in the upper hand of the narrator, who then resists the last one of them out of the stranger's unnameability: "This old man," I said at length [and to whom he is speaking], is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the proverbial man of the world and a man to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is the grosser book than the "Horrors!" and in it a further sign of the great mercy of God that 'a laiss sic nich lass' (506). This closing line hooks back to the opening reflection that certain men "will not suffer themselves to be revealed" (507) and that the "converse" nevertheless manages to override by virtue of naming a name to that which resists naming.

Veiled Meaning

A useful illustration of this resistance to decodability also appears in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil" ([1836]), a short story which begins when the parsonesses of the Reverend Mister Hooper "beheld the semblance of" him "pacing slowly his meditative way towards the meetinghouse" (17: 31). Hawthorne's descriptive lexicon, in other words, in that "semblance" suggests both resemblance as well as an entity as that is lesser of an original. The only entity with which it could possibly enter the world, than the wonder that if some strange minister were coming to dust the cushions of Mr. Hooper's pulpit (38), the reader is not given sufficient information to account for this. Consequently, this makes it only truly possible to place this "sign" in the category of what Barthes identifies as an "enigma" (5/2), a sign-vehicle rendered all the more problematic as it is encoded as something unusual, something escaping or even perhaps precluding intelligibility. Are you sure it is our parson?" one of the crowd asks the sexton, who functions apparently as the subject who is supposed to know (1836: 38). Again, Hawthorne draws attention to the process of decoding by virtue of this display of inter-observer agreement. When the sexton asserts that "Oh a certainty it is good Mr. Hooper", on the other hand, the sexton has to wonder how the sexton knows this or anything in the semi-uniiverse, for that matter, with "certainty." To return to the narrator's identification of Hooper's "semblance," the decoder cannot assert definitively that this figure is Hooper himself. This is an issue that Hawthorne further troubles by having the minister black facial signification by way of wearing a black veil.

While finally offering an explanation for the crowd's consternation, the narrator begins to provide a decoding framework which, while on the surface (as was the case with Poe's story) seemingly reduces the significant possibility of the text, which actually serves to open an increasingly larger array of decodings. The narrator remarks that "the cause of so much amazement appear sufficiently slight," but in the course of elaborating on the veiling phenomenon, provides a semiotic bombshell of sorts by relating, seemingly offhandedly, that this is indeed "Mr."

Jonathan Culler argues that accepting certain strategic compromises (decoding, for example, or in his case, a modernized literary idiom and effort necessary in order to establish a profession or discipline.
The claims of schools and universities to offer literary training untarnished by a slighted curriculum, for instance, that "anyone" (given a capital "A" now) is a character named "Anyone." She does this with four sets of "characters" (Anyone, Someone, Noone, Everyone) and furthermore creates character-typos corollaries (protagonists and antagonists), specified "team" units (Goffman), and a story plot. But, as she says, she has to chose these characters through the one typographical feature in particular that cummings usually avoids (in fact, he went so far as to say that he despised the spelling of his name to -lower case letters, although Reinhart also changes his name to "Cummings"). The point here is that whatever gains Reinhart makes, comes with an at least equal if not greater cost. However, after all, she is altering data to fit her hypothesis. The same situation can be found right now on the American television show "House, M.D.," in which a gifted medical student jóvenes wins young doctors through group "differential diagnosis" to crack the code of each week's new puzzling malady. During the differential, he and his team throw out diagnosis hypotheses based on the case's existing symptom with the way that such medical problems present themselves. Often, though, one member will propose explaining one or more symptoms in order to consider a potentially "valid" theory. (If we leave out the hypothesis...) This usually leads to a sarcastic denigration of that hypothesis proposal since it doesn't include all the data. The point, however, is the narrowing down of at least two potentially fruitful results based on what has happened on the episode up to this point. Either this will lead the group to dismiss the proposed dishonest hypothesis, but in the case of cummings we will see the situation differently and come up with something (and this happens almost every week) that does include all of the symptom's information. The point is that the patient is suffering from two different maladies at the same time, and thus the second set of otherwise excluded symptoms actually matches up with those characteristic of the second malady. "You're out, House," it turns out that the patient withheld some key information that House or his team can literally uncover to produce a substantiable diagnosis. ("Everybody lies," is Dr. House's motto, and this is a true for medical semiotics as it is for semiotics as fundamentally the study of lying [1976]).
Hooper" (1836: 38). The "one thing remarkable in his appearance," the narrator adds, is "Swaithed about his forehead and hair, and does not ever seem to be shaken by his breath, Mr. Hooper had on a black veil."

As is found in film, the narrator appears capable of zooming in on the minister for "closer" inspection, thus allowing the standpoint of decoding possibility, all this does is increase the semiotic distortion of the sign vehicle, rather than clarifying it. Without detailing how this perspectival shift is accomplished, the narrator states that "on a closer view, the veil "seemed to consist of two folds of crepe, which entirely concealed his features, except the mouth and chin, but, to no one except the interlocutor had its further than to give a darkened aspect to all living and inanimate things." The emphasis on conjecture is clear here, as the narrator refers to these decodings as actions of "semiotic infrastructure that argues that..."

The narrator continues to freight his description of Mr. Hooper with connotative accretions, noting that he is walking "with this gloomy shade before him...at a slow and quiet pace, stooping somewhat on his walking on the ground, as is customary with abstracted men" (1836: 38). Now, so the register here is one of gloom and abstraction, the latter of which appears to refer rather to disjunction. Either the narrator is engaging in the common technique of reflecting the consciousness of the onlookers instead of providing the reader with straightforward, omniscient perspective. Yet, the narrator is merely perceiving Mr. Hooper negatively.

In either case, though, the impression signified by Mr. Hooper is increasingly steered away from a positive, or even neutral, perspective. Although Mr. Hooper "nodding kindly to those of his parishioners who still waited on the meeting-house steps," "so wonderstruck were they that his greeting hardly met with a return," we are told (1836: 38). Here, of course, the interpretive operation vacillates in the other direction, since "wonderstruck" is clearly at least in the neutral decoding zone, and even could be termed a positive term. Mr. Hooper, the narrator intuits, appears throughout the story, however. After the non-requiring greetings, the word on the street is not favorable. "I can't really feel as if good Mr. Hooper's non­requited greetings, the word on the street is not...nearly met with a return," we are told (1836: 38).

Mr. Hooper is "nodding kindly to those of his oldest parishioner," the narrator explores still another instance of new-reframing of his significance. "It was strange to observe, how slowly this venerable man became conscious of something singular in the appearance of his pastor," the narrator notes. "He seemed not fully to partake of the prevailing wonder, "The veil becomes in this instance a "mysterious emblem": "It shook with his measured breath, as he gave the benediction to some "one thing remarkable in his face.""

The primary consideration remains on the impact on the decoders who find Mr. Hooper's transmission of meaning to be veiled by the veil. Even though he is delivering his usual, "mild" sermon, there was something, either in the sentiment of the discourse itself, or in the imagination of the auditors, which made this message a more powerful effort that they had ever heard from their pastor's lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of his "veiled face," with this synecdoche apparently being such by labeling it that which cannot be decoded. This is a curious urateness, considering that gender has not entered into this discussion so far (The exception to this is the remark about the garment resembling a woman's veil, which probably establishes an economy of gender differentiation when Mr. Hooper "cross dresses" in this manner. Or, rather, it could be said that he reassigns the gendered orientation of the veil by virtue of wearing it). This, of course, further reflect an anxiety about the horror of confronting the transcendental signified in all its semiotic finitude. Would this be akin, then, to the dividing bar between the signifier and signified; the final elision of significative differential in which a sign ends its oscilating!

In Notes from Underground, Fyodor Dostoevsky's narrator reports that women were given an opportunity to live unfettered by impediments, they would immediately want them restored (or new ones created) in order to have something to cause a friction they need in order to have something to complain about. The same would be true if we could somehow achieve "final" semiosis - we would immediately want semiosis to begin oscillating again.

While Mr. Hooper's performance at a funeral service later that afternoon provides further opportunities for supernatural decodings of the veil (Does the corpse's face change? Do the curtains move over the body in the casket? Did the body shudder at the sight?), it also provides the audience with a type of theatrical-internet which the narrator mentions in his benediction: "The people trembled, though they but darkly understood him when he prayed that they, and himself, and all of mortal race, might be ready, as he trusted this young maiden had been, for the dreadful hour that should snatch the veil from their faces" (1836: 42). Of course, although he could be referring to the more common practice of face veiling, the crowd assumes that he is turning his literal veil into a metaphorical reference, one with semiotic implications insofar as it asserts that everyone is "palatable" by face, whereas a literal face veil is a signvehicle instead of a transparent (or even just translucent) signifier.

The subsequent supernatural associations of some citizens imagining that they see the minister "walking hand in hand with a young woman," following this scene (something corroborated by inter­observer agreement), along with a similar development pertaining to a young couple he marries, suggest that, indeed, the veil is imbuing Mr. Hooper with extraordinary signifying capabilities (1836: 43).

After performing the ceremony, Mr. Hooper raised a glass of wine to his lips, wishing happiness to his young bride. The wine, he explained, was a strain of mild pleasantness that ought to have brightened the features of the guests, like a cheerful gleam from the hearth. At that instant, the bride looked like a cheering gleam from the looking­glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His face shone, and the bride then untasted wine upon the carpet, and rushed forth into the darkness. For the Earth, too, had on her Black Veil. (44)

In order for the townsfolk to satisfactorily decode this resistant signifier, a group was changed with the task to "put an understanding mind on the matter," and "he did this thing." This would imply a belief in the ability of the encoder to identify a privileged signified that this primary of signification is the original. In turn, ironically, the impetus behind this mission was located in "a feeling of dread, neither plainly confessed nor carefully concealed," elicited by the veil. In other words, the veil appeared to reveal itself from a position almost cleverly concealed and/or significantly concealed. It neither shows nor hides.

This extra-signifying capacity is arguably what impels the community members to bring it into the realm of signified, signification, one way or another. "There was the black veil swathed round Mr. Hooper's forehead, and concealing every feature above his placid forehead, and concealing every feature above his placid, like a cheerful gleam from the hearth. At that instant, the bride looked like a cheering gleam from the looking-glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His face shone, and the bride then untasted wine upon the carpet, and rushed forth into the darkness."
In effect, the smile serves as only another impediment to signification, further imbuing that dignity which the veil is meant to bestow. The smile is a signifier without a signified, that is, it is a sign that stands for nothing. By standing for nothing, the smile ceases to be a signifier, and thus the smile becomes the sole indication of the veil's signified. In other words, the smile is a paradigmatic signifier, a signifier without any correlate in the world. This is the essence of the signifying process as outlined by Saussure, and it is this process that Mr. Hooper's use of the word "veil" (as well as the literal use of the word "veil") is based on. He uses the word "veil" as a signifier without a signified, and thus he is able to signify on a level that is beyond the reach of the ordinary observer. This is the power of the signifying process, and it is this power that Mr. Hooper is able to harness in his use of the word "veil."

By Anna Cabak Rédei

The selection of writings illustrates Lady Welby's contribution to the Signific Movement in the 1890s, which eventually flourished in the Netherlands within the Dutch Significs Group.

Petrilli's ambition with this book is to communicate the theoretical bedrocks of significs and its evolution with a special focus on issues connected to the problem of "signs, meaning and understanding," i.e., with "language and communication" (iv).

The organization of the volume is chronological. The reader is carefully led through Victoria Welby's own writings as they develop, and their linkage to contemporary intellectual and scientific streams of thought, by Petrilli's sensitive "ear." There is also a rich selection from the archives of Victoria Welby's correspondence and papers, as well as reviews of those, in the closing chapters of the book, which ends with appendices and bibliographies of great value for anyone interested in further studies of Lady Welby and the Signific Movement. The integrated archival material, such as letters, unpublished letters and/or illustrations contained within the book, illustrate the scientific and intellectual development of Welby.

Who was Lady Welby? In her lifetime, Lady Victoria Alexandrina Maria Louisa Stuart-Wortley was one of the highest circles of the English nobility. She was named
after Queen Alexandra Victoria, who was her godmother. In 1863 she married Sir William, the Earls Welby. Lady Welby lacked formal education. She studied on her own through, among other things, travelling, reading and experiencing life with her mother as a child and later on through her extensive correspondence, Lady Welby communicated with 450 interlocutors, who were to make up the ‘Welby Circle’. Lady Welby’s intellectual work was very much developed in dialogue with others.

During 1870–80 Lady Welby expanded her correspondence significantly and it came to include a wide range of interests, and many important names within contemporary philosophy such as Charles Sanders Peirce, Henri L. Bergson, Michel Bréal, Rudolph Carnap, Thomas A. Hanley, Henry and William James, Charles K. Ogden, Bertrand Russell, Ferdinand C. S. S. Schiller, George Bernard Shaw and Ferdinand Tönnies. Last but not least, Lady Welby’s correspondence with women such as Lucy L. Clifford and Mary Everest Boole was important for her intellectual work. With the former, to give an example, Welby discussed the issue of identity, and in a polemic with positivism advocated a relational and semiotic perspective (1861). Welby’s understanding of subjectivity involves the idea that it is dialogical in nature and as such a result of the interaction between “a plurality of selves” (1849). Peirce expressed much the same view in his conception of ‘tuism’ (1892). Peirce expressed much the same view in his conception of ‘tuism’. However, as “a plurality of selves” (149). Peirce expressed much the same view in his conception of ‘tuism’. However, as “a plurality of selves” (149). Peirce expressed much the same view in his conception of ‘tuism’. However, as “a plurality of selves” (149). Peirce expressed much the same view in his conception of ‘tuism’. However, as “a plurality of selves” (149). Peirce expressed much the same view in his conception of ‘tuism’. However, as “a plurality of selves” (149). Peirce expressed much the same view in his conception of ‘tuism’. However, as “a plurality of selves” (149). Peirce expressed much the same view in his conception of ‘tuism’. However, as “a plurality of selves” (149).

In the definition of the triad, one might see a debt to Peirce’s triadist, secondness and thirdness, already present in Welby’s earlier work. What is meaning? However, at some places, a slightly different terminology is evident:

For we begin with a vague sense which is a response to a stimulus. This becomes gradually more concrete, coming to that level which we call “feeling,” and involving more and more definitely that which we call “mind,” a word which in its turn suggestively connotes in popular usage, will, desire, intention, memory [i.e. some sort of General in Presentation terms; my note] (in Petrelli, 23, n.1)

Welby’s triad indicates three levels of meaning:

These levels indicate a progressive increase, quantitative and qualitative, in the articulation of ‘sense’, interpretation, signification, and expression, therefore in practical import, capacity for incisiveness and relevance in the ever more complex dimensions of life, whether in the intellectual spheres or in everyday life. The term “sense” has different meanings: it is a reference term to the world of the senses understood in biological terms, the world of sensual perception, perceptual experience, to the properly biological or perceptual dimension and in connection with values, ideology, and social programs; “meaning” is the general term for signifying processes, as well as the second term in Welby’s triad indicating meaning intention; while “significance” indicates the overall effect, import and value of signifying processes. (in Petrelli, 264)

Petrey himself reviewed What is meaning? paying special attention to the term “sense” (Welby, 1891). He was very much the reductive side of the term ‘common sense’ (Petrilli, 141) writes: “meaning is meaning, linguistic and valuative; semantic valency of the concept of ‘signify’ which evidences the dual relationship of what is signified to a sign and to a sign system to another” (20–21).

In the early essays “Meaning and Metaphor” (1893) and “Interpretation” (1896) that preceded What is meaning? Welby was specifically occupied with the problem of language, meaning and interpretation.

In any case, meaning – in the widest sense, and not just ‘sense’ which is the only value of whatever “fact” presents itself to us. Without this, to observe and record appearances or occurrences would become a purely formal and unfruitful task. Significance is the one value of all that consciousness brings, or that intelligence deals with, the one value of life itself (in Petrelli, 429)

As can be seen, the problem of the context’s (which Welby defined in comprehensive term) significance for conveying meaning to any word (or in broader sense, any sign), is at stake throughout these writings. As Petrelli (2011) writes:

Significs breaks the verb “to signify’ which evidences the dual semantic valency of the concept of meaning, linguistic and valuative; and different in semantics and ‘semiotics’, it was completely free from technical associations.

In connection with Welby’s semiotic approach she wanted, on the one hand, to criticize what she thought was the reductive side of the term ‘common sense’ (‘simple’ meaning), and on the other, as something a priori to language. Welby theorized the latter (already present in Louis and Claus from 1881) Welby within the frames of her conception “mother-sense,” or “primal sense” (142).

Another substantial contribution to the field was the ‘Welby Prize’ his invention of the term of significs, Mind, which Welby announced in 1896. The German sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) was granted the prize for his essay ‘Philosophical Terminology’ (1881). Other Dimensions (1931) where Welby’s daughter Nina Cust included an exchange of letters between the author herself. Indeed, practising the philosophy of language, meaning and interpretation, signification, and expression, therefore in practical import, capacity for incisiveness and relevance in the ever more complex dimensions of life, whether in the intellectual spheres or in everyday life. The term “sense” has different meanings: it is a reference term to the world of the senses understood in biological terms, the world of sensual perception, perceptual experience, to the properly biological or perceptual dimension and in connection with values, ideology, and social programs; “meaning” is the general term for signifying processes, as well as the second term in Welby’s triad indicating meaning intention; while “significance” indicates the overall effect, import and value of signifying processes. (in Petrelli, 264)

Another genre important for Welby’s mode of expression is the so-called thirdness, already present in Welby’s earlier work. What is meaning? However, at some places, a slightly different terminology is evident:

For we begin with a vague sense which is a response to a stimulus. This becomes gradually more concrete, coming to that level which we call “feeling,” and involving more and more definitely that which we call “mind,” a word which in its turn suggestively connotes in popular usage, will, desire, intention, memory [i.e. some sort of General in Presentation terms; my note] (in Petrelli, 23, n.1)

Welby’s triad indicates three levels of meaning:

These levels indicate a progressive increase, quantitative and qualitative, in the articulation of ‘sense’, interpretation, signification, and expression, therefore in practical import, capacity for incisiveness and relevance in the ever more complex dimensions of life, whether in the intellectual spheres or in everyday life. The term “sense” has different meanings: it is a reference term to the world of the senses understood in biological terms, the world of sensual perception, perceptual experience, to the properly biological or perceptual dimension and in connection with values, ideology, and social programs; “meaning” is the general term for signifying processes, as well as the second term in Welby’s triad indicating meaning intention; while “significance” indicates the overall effect, import and value of signifying processes. (in Petrelli, 264)

Another genre important for Welby’s mode of expression is the so-called thirdness, already present in Welby’s earlier work. What is meaning? However, at some places, a slightly different terminology is evident:

For we begin with a vague sense which is a response to a stimulus. This becomes gradually more concrete, coming to that level which we call “feeling,” and involving more and more definitely that which we call “mind,” a word which in its turn suggestively connotes in popular usage, will, desire, intention, memory [i.e. some sort of General in Presentation terms; my note] (in Petrelli, 23, n.1)

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... of ‘significance’ (the third level of her meaning), was to be regarded as a ‘practical extension’ of the second (Thirdness). What Pettilli highlights in his philological commentary is the structural and constitutive interconnection between the pragmatic-operative and evaluative/valuative dimension of sign activity in human signifying processes (272). Pettilli also notes that in a letter to Peirce dated 19 Jan. 1909, she set side by side the terms ‘significa’ and ‘senscopic’ (as used by Peirce) in order to underline her own focus on the ‘ethical, aesthetic and what today is identified as the ideational dimension of human sign activity’ in contrast to what she thought to be ‘a purely descriptive approach to studies on language, knowledge and expression’ in the way that those terms were used in her monograph Significs and Language (1913), where the connection of signs to values is stressed as the ‘ultimate aim of signification’ (283). An important topic for Pettilli would be the way in which Peirce used the term ‘time’ in his letters (notably between 1904 and 1905), instigated by the latter’s review of What Meaning? was the issue of time – although their stances on time were different. Pettilli in an essay on the topic with the title “Time as Derivative” published in Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy. Peirce thought that time was an inferior concept to space, being derivative of it, something that he expressed already in a letter to him dated 20 Nov. 1904. She found a proof of this in a language, a concept that later on would be used as ‘time’ by Peirce in his letter in their exchange of letters (notably between 1904 and 1905), according to him, language did not manifest the dependent nature of time on space “except in the matter of expression in speech” (i.e., in a conventional way, language being such an intervening term). About a month later Peirce wrote to Welby:

> It appears to me that the method of designating temporal relations by their analogies with spatial relations must date from the very beginnings of speech. [...] I therefore imagine the method took rise between two persons who met and endeavoured to communicate partly by words and partly by signs. These persons would be together with a common spatial environment, which was visible, and in which the signs would be partly made by one person and partly by the other. [...] the time concept is expressed in language in terms of space, and the principle of reversibility formulated by HJWM [i.e., Peirce] is not reducible to Secondness (1.420). Pettini, (397)

Welby included the idea of “mother-senscopic” in her conception of time, expressed as follows in a letter to Peirce (20 Nov. 1904):

> “To the race-readiness there is and can be no difference in existential reality between the past and the future any more than between a mile just left behind and a mile just entered upon” (in Pettini, 399). These lines suffice to illustrate the divergent views on time of Welby and Peirce. However, Welby was not alone in viewing time as being dependent on space. The French contemporary philosopher Henri Bergson, for instance, held a similar view, and in a letter to G. F. Stout (1903–1905), now the issue of time was dealt with before her essay of 1907 in which she mentioned the idea that space is ‘general in referring to all possible experience? May not the spatial mother-senscopic is living, plastic, and determinable, in space, and the principle of reversibility formulated by HJWM [i.e., Peirce] in a continuous, never ending chain of events. The notion of time would be “paradoxical in growth in significance,” and involves the accumulation of knowledge not only in quantitative terms but also in qualitative and ethical terms. The qualitative aspects in Welby seem to match Peirce’s conception of the final interpretant (something to strive for). Translation is a topic central to other philosophers of language such as Bakhtin and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) and Pettilli shows how Welby’s thoughts may be linked to ideas present in these scholars’ work. When it comes to Wittgenstein it is the issue of translation in the work of reference the relation between Wittgenstein’s notion of “proposition” and Welby’s “pictorial symbol” and “representative action,” all being “signifying units” (541). Pettilli reads Welby’s theory of translation in the light also of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi’s (1921–1985) works. Notably, the distinction between Welby’s concept of “common language” (from What Meaning?), also expressed in terms of “common sense” or “common meaning” and Rossi-Landi’s concept “common speech” later developed in the term “social reproducibility” (542–5). Pettilli relates “common sense” to the notion of “significs” to underwrite the idea that different languages are part of a “single” language or that “language is an a priori community generating differences and variations through expression. It seems to me that the ‘common meaning’ used by Welby might be connected to another fundamental term in her work, namely, “mother-senscopic” (or “primarscopic,” as her publishers preferred). And it is via Peirce that we may not only explain Welby’s term mother-senscopic, as noted above, but also translate it to Peirce’s notion of “primitivum” (572), but also the connection of the former to “common meaning.” Pettilli produces arguments that Welby’s ideas might be further explored in the light of Peirce’s three categories (discussed above), and thereby in connection with his notions qualisigns, sinsigns and legisign or the triad of significs. Welby writes in a paper entitled “Primal Sense and Significs,” dated 15 April 1907:

**The discussion on time, which is here accounted for, to some extent at least, illustrates Petzil’s polyphonic to...**
The connection between Mother-sense and Significs may be put like this: Primordial Sense is what takes up and supplies to us the material of that inexpressible awareness, conscious and interpretative. It is thus at once primordial and universal, at all stages of human development [...]. (in Petrilli, 574)

However, as Welby stresses in the same paper, "the greatest of all special gifts, the rationalising Intellect: which has not only to criticise, but also to reason out its swift reading of worth, its penetrative reality" (in Petrilli, 574). If we look at Peirce's discussion in an undated manuscript published in Collecta Ripes with the title "Forms of Consciousness," we may establish some possible links to Lady Welby.

Feeling is the momentarily present contents of consciousness taken in its pristine simplicity, and might be called primisense. Altisense is the consciousness of a directly present other second, withstanding us. Madisense is the consciousness of a thirdness, or medium between primisense and altisense, leading from the former to the latter. It is the consciousness of a process of bringing to mind: [...] Altisense has two modes, Sensation and Will. Madisense has three modes, Abstraction, Suggestion, Association. (CP 3.55 in Petrilli, 577)

One is tempted to connect Welby's notions of mother-sense and common meaning through Peirce's definition of altisense, and in doing so, establish a link (at least in some respects) between the former term, in its turn, to this triad of Peirce (as mother-sense gives rise to the "rationalizing Intellect," also called "father reason," with which it is in a dialectical relation). Petrilli, on the basis of the correspondence between Welby and Peirce, extends these connections, when writing: "Opening the ethical sphere before and beyond the strictly cognitive, with Peirce scientific rigour in reasoning is connected to 'motherwit' and to agapastic logical procedure, with which it is in a dialectical relation). Petrilli, on the basis of her selected writings. At the same time, Signifying and Understanding will greatly assist and inspire those who would like to extend this line of inquiry. Petrilli's work in the archives is priceless for the research field, not only concerning Significs, but also of semiotics and semantics. However, Petrilli's outlining of Welby's "thought system" might have gained from a more rigorous editing, as the reader is from time to time interrupted by the many appended texts within Petrilli's compelling discussions. These appendices might have been assembled at the end of the chapters, or preferably perhaps at the end of the book.

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References


2010 McLAREN-LAMBART AWARD


The journal is delighted to be acknowledged as the publisher of this prize-winning essay. It may be found online in the SRB Archives at http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/semiotics/.

This article reopens the idea of animation as a precursor to the cinematic form, drawing on research into the works of one of its historical progenitors, Emile Reynaud. This is a deconstructionist text that references related arguments from the author, providing a deeper excavation of the contention that ‘cinema is animation’ while offering a detailed account of Reynaud’s pre-film work. The selection committee was comprised of Tom Klein (Chair), Richard Sneyd, Chris Carter, Adam de Beer, and Romana Turina. Dr. Cholodenko is former Head of Department in Film and Animation Studies at the University of Sydney, where he now holds the title of Honorary Associate.

The McLaren-Lambart Award is an annual honour bestowed by the Society for Animation Studies (S.A.S.) to one of its members, recognizing an outstanding contribution made to animation studies in the previous 2 years. Tracing the origins of this prize to a collaborative award with Canada’s National Film Board, it is named for NFB animators Norman McLaren and Evelyn Lambart.
Information Enough
By Inna Semetsky

This review essay is a series of musings inspired by L.A. Scott Kelso and David A. Engstrom's book Information Enough: Cybersemiotics: Why information is not enough (2008). It is almost trite how instrumental rationality in the modern world has led science and mysticism into a pair of binary opposites. While acknowledging what the pure reason of modernity considered to be a supernatural act, any attempt to exploit it was made in the name of science from the perspective of the logic of explanation and causality. “Naturally enough” the term natural has been habitually taken in its reductive sense of a linear direct cause-effect connection pertaining to the modern epoch has separated science and mysticism forever separated from the world of materialism; organism; environment; immuno­transcendence; body; mind; nature; nurture; in­vivo being; being­constancy; certainty; material; spiritual; and so on ad infinitum.

Different disciplines have their own complementary pairs that, rather than being alien to each other in the manner of Cartesian dualism, are connected via what Kelso and Engstrom specify and present as coordination dynamics. Among complementary pairs in which the terms are related, or coordinated in a bipolar interdependent manner are the following: cause–effect; so­called­so­called, rational­empi­rism, humanistic­science; humanities; organism­environment; immuno­transcendence: body; mind; nature; nurture; in­vivo being: being­constancy; certainty; material; spiritual; and so on ad infinitum.

Among Brier’s extensive endnotes I would like to single out one time­contingent one. I mean Roman Hesse’s masterpeice Magister Ludi also known as the Glass Bead Game and which is a mode of playing with the total contents and values of the whole world as one is unlike the organist playing pipes on the organ. However the range of this magisterial ‘organ’ is the entire intellectual cosmos and, hence, is capable of reproducing, at least in theory, the full intellectual content of the universe.

The game is played with “ideas” like with musical notes in a fugue and partakes of the new symbolic language that can simultaneously represent the structure immanent to the ideas it expresses; as well as having its own means of symbolic, albeit hierarchically, expression. Brier concludes that “Magister Ludi” is a manifesto for the reintegration of intellectual life with the ‘real world’, of intellectual and mystic enlightenment with practice… "We are in serious need of a broader global view of knowledge and enlightenment to individuals as well as in society" (443).

The word ‘enlightenment’ in this context seems, however, to be slightly problematic. Rather than using such a specific word that traditionally highlights reason as the over­rational paradigm of modern thought, I think that creative instruments illumination will have captured Brier’s idea better. Indeed, Peirce (as Brier’s major intellectual inspiration) appears to be the first post­modem (post­positivist) philosopher (Dewey 2001; Griffin 1993) and his semiotics as the science of signs partakes of post­modern critique of the Cartesian subject who stays forever separated from the world of objects that he can observe with the cool gaze of an independent spectator, a scientist, informed by the positivist paradigm stemming from modernity’s culture of Enlightenment.

The triadic nature of a Peircean sign, however, makes a “scientist ­observer” the very participant in the process of semiosis. A genuine sign such as encompasses a triad comprising, as John Dewey said, “the observer, the observing, and the observed.” (Dewey 1991: 97).

Brier’s act of observing plays the role of a Peircean interpretant: knowledge is embodied in action making a transaction defined as an "un orthodox observation” (Bld.3) the minimal unit of analysis. Such participation in the reality of what is produced was indeed a distinguished feature of mystical, post­modern thought. In this regard, Brier’s book is a form of Peircean mysticism and transcendentalism (383) is very appropriate even if Peirce himself emphasized intelligence as specifically scientific yet inaccessible from experience. Peirce asked “what must be the characters of all signs used by a ‘scientific’ intelligence, that is to say, an intelligence capable of learning by experience” (CP 2.227, Peirce’s italics).

Herman Hesse’s conceptualizations are Peircean to the core. The boundary between science and mysticism is blurred when both conflate to form unitary "evolutionary cosmology, in which all regularities of nature and mind are regarded as products of growth” (Peirce quoted in Brier, 382). As Niels Bohr who coined the term “complementarity” pointed out, the extremes of materialism and mysticism alike must be avoided by means of balancing analysis and synthesis. Whether information, then! Not enough or just the right amount!

Brier concludes his book by telling his readers that he “developed an informational theory that accepts several ‘levels of existence’” (457). In this respect he has cyber­semiotics. Hesse’s seminal work Cybersemiotics and the nature of complexity theory as a broad contemporary paradigm applicable to natural and social­cultural systems alike (cf. Cilliers 1998; Byrne 1998). What is the governing dynamic of multi­levelled systems? It is coordination dynamics. Therefore, the founder of general systems theory, who was first to address the insufficiency of analytical procedures of classical science based on linear causality, emphasizes two basic variables as attracting our attention to “new categories of interaction, transaction, teleology” (1972: xii) as problematizing the old mechanistic paradigm.

The interactions between more than the two objects create, sure enough, an unsolvable problem – but only within the equations of classical mechanics, at the level of Peirce’s particular interactions pertain to Peircean Thirdness, to the evolutionary process of semiosis and signs­becoming­otherwise in the terms of the new science of coordination dynamics.

Such transference is the defining feature of the new science of coordination dynamics as a paradigm for “The Complementary Nature” which is also the title of the book by L.A. Scott Kelso and David A. Engstrom (2008). While Peirce’s genuine sign represents a self­referential semiotic structure, it was “sentence and selfreference that [have] been making trouble for philosophers for centuries” (2006: 253). Italics mine. Kelso and Engstrom use a sqiggle, t”, “…” for pinpointing the relation, the symbolic punctuation for reconceiving the apparently dualistic opposites and assert that in “the case of human beings, complex nonlinear self­organizing systems of energy ‘matter have managed to evolve to the point of organizing a sense of self” (2006: 253). A self­referential relation is what establishes that all interpretant correlations between/across the different levels constituting a complex system.

Brier’s volume not only problematizes this logic by bringing biosemiotics into discourse in science, but also breathes life into science per se.

Importantly, as Brier notices at the outset, his book is an extended and updated synthesis of many previously published articles from as early as 1992 and supersedes all of them. He is motivated by the desire to create a knowledge paradigm independent from ideological concerns (I leave it to readers to decide whether it is ever possible or even desirable). Brier begins his “quest for cybersemiotics” (3) by revisiting cognitive revolution and the birth of research programs in information science against which he proposes to formulate a new transdisciplinary framework that combines “Peirce’s semiotics, second­order cybernetics, Luhmann’s systems theory, cognitive semantics, and language game theory” (4). This is an ambitious project, and understandably my brief essay won’t be able to offer a fair review of and/or critique of all the areas addressed in the book.

My argument is that, contra Brier, information is very much enough – but if and only if we will have reconceptualized it very much enough! In support of this I will invoke the cutting edge science of coordination dynamics (Kelso and Engstrom 2006) as well as the current program of transdisciplinary development and conducted by physician and philosopher Basarab Nicolescu. I think that both sources not only can but should inform contemporary research in semiotics. Brier freely fluctuates between different discourses (social science, natural science – especially biology, philosophy – especially phenomenology but with a twist of metaphysics – linguistics etc.) under the following motto: “I am presenting a new theory; clearly, then, I am not fully satisfied with the present ones. Yet each of these other theories provides useful concepts that have helped me in my search for a framework broad enough to encompass our present experience and knowledge” (5).

The blend of old and new theories is seen in the titles of the book’s twelve chapters, which occupy nearly 500 pages and include the following (slightly paraphrased for brevity). “The Problem of the Informations­Processing Paradigm as a Candidate for a Unified Science of Information”; “The Self­Organization of Knowledge”; “An Ethnological Approach to Cognition”; “Bateson’s Concept of Information in Light of the Theory of Auto­poiesis”; “von Foerster’s Cybernetic Viewpoints”; “Enalyzed Metaphors”; “Integration of Udwiddharma, Ethology, and Peircean Biome­semiotics”; “An Evolutionary View on the Threshold between Semiosis and Information­Extrusion”; “The Logic of Information, Signification, Cognition, and Communication”; “The Five­Level Cybersemiotics”. In addition, Brier offers a chapter on the practical problem of information and document management. Whether ideas, can be solved by means of cybersemiotics.

The overall paradigm that assists Brier in developing his new theory is Peirce’s triadic semiotics; but the sources are many. Here are the few: Bertalanffy, Bohm, Deely, Emmecher, Gadamer, Heidegger, Hoffmeier, Heise, Husserl, Jampach, Kauffman, Lorenzi, Morante­Ponty, Noth, Popper, Rusek, Seebach, Spencer­Brown, Suzuki, Varela, Wiener, Wittgenstein.
human experience per se, would be 'located' precisely at this included middle-in-between what appears to us as two disparate Cartesian substances of body and mind.

As Deely points out, "at the heart of semiotics is the realization that the whole of human experience is the result of an interaction of parts: structure mediated and sustained by signs" (Deely 1990: 5). The levels in the complex semiotic system are not immediately connected with each other but mediated by the intermediary of the third category: the generic 'interpretant', either human or non-human; and, it is the very mediation or interpretation that enables the emergence of meaning. Information is measured [and] unless it is interpreted; but so is the fundamental stuff in the informational universe (SRB 19.3 (2010) – 10, brackets mine) – digital (measured) – and analog again at the level of human actions (actual).

The reference to Leibniz brings to mind yet another of Brier's targets: algorithmic science as a project begun by Leibniz and today continued, without much success, by the Artificial Intelligence (AI). And here lies, I feel, the fundamental yet common misconception. Leibniz did not present his algorithmic science as a project of information for the interpretant in the form of meaning. As Peirce said, signs are in fact signs only when interpreted. Still, the information is always already here, embedded in semiotic systems in its implicit, potential, virtual form. Meaning is "altogether virtual … [it] is not contained not in what is actually thought, but in what this thought may become. It is the content of that "judgment" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 5, 289). Being virtual, it does not make its potential informational content less real (cf. Deleuze, 1994).

The transference of information between levels is what enables the evolution of signs, the very process of semiosis: a complex system grows, indeed, because it 'learns' by virtue of making the information meaningful. There is no activity in neutral network terminology, would be qualified as unsupervised learning (1998:100), which is contrasted with the exclusive computer function of "informationally based" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 9): informational universe is relation- or sign-based; and we can construct yet another complementary yes no field that is isomorphic with the concepts designated by them; [and] information is invisible" and it takes energy to process its own dynamical meaning (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 103), to self-organize. A sign is not a sign unless it is interpreted; but so is the fundamental stuff in the informational universe – as described in Deely (2001: 621, brackets mine): it is perfused with signs, both the sign of information from which all we can perceive at our signs, of the level of Peircean Secondness. It is a semiotic field. As Merrell points out, semiotics alters a traditional understanding of information from "about meaning engendered when signs are in their act of becoming signs, a becoming that includes sign interpreters as participating agents in the very semiotic process of becoming" (Merrell 1995: xii).

As Ludo comments, this invisible field named natural or ambient (Lavoie 2004) of virtual particles – a zero-field field also called the quantum vacuum – is everywhere while the observable visible world just floats on its surface. Vacuum or nothingness does not make this vacuum, but rather, according to Merrell (1995), the three Peircean onto/logical categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, require the existence of what we are holding them together, the as yet undifferentiated "field within which semiosis plays out its drama" (Merrell 1995: 217), acknowledged by Peirce as pre-existence or nothingness. Still, it is apparent not nothingness as a virtual potential informational field [that] produces effects, and these can be perceived (Lavoie, 2004/2007: 17); itstains micellar in a Peircean pragmatic sense as a kind of the observable, sensible, world in which we live.

Brier asserts that "Information… becomes the organisational aspect of nature" (154), but notices that with regard to information "a fullledged metaphysics...is underdeveloped" (Lavoie, 2004/2007: 13, brackets mine). This signifies "a subtle connection between just two different locations in space and events in different points in time. Such connections are… nonlocal in the natural science and 'transpersonal' in consciousness research" (ibid., 68).

Physicist David Bohm emphasized that in holonomenclature there is no direct causal connection except for the relations with a whole. It is being interwoven into a whole by means of the interconnecting network of quanta. Semiosis as such is this interconnection not between these different locations in space and events in different points in time. Segments are related, described as novelties confirming the reality, the structural coupling of ‘matter-energy describing the physical world is necessarily grounded in the logic of the included middle representation and in its corresponding informational level, which can be maintained with certainty that 'information is not enough'. Information is just right. It is on the basis of this information that the universe comprises its own dynamical evolution and in its correlation with the informational level, realizing potential reality as the computation proceeds.

In the universe perfused with signs information and computation are everywhere: it is all there. The information is potentially active everywhere, yet it is actually active, only where and when it can form to the "... energy" (Bolin and Hiley 1993: 10). The complex semiotic universe must express itself in a dual mode of matter and energy. Loyo points out that "most information is invisible yet it takes an energy to process information (to compactify it, in a way), that is, to make it relatively visible at the level of observablephysical world. The basic material elements such as Earth, air, fire, and water, interacting in these different forms they take are determined by information. To do anything requires energy. To specify what is done requires information. Energy and information are by nature inseparable. Information is first and foremost (keeping in mind that the flow of semiosis is unlimited) with the Peircean triadic sign. Noth (1995: 90/91) presents a synopsis of a triadic sign tracing its definitions and disparate terminology from Plato, to Stoics, to Fichte, to Peirce, to Ogden and Richards in notices that is in order to construct a semiotic triangle connecting, in the
generic terms, signvehicle, sense, and referent, the path of mediation, represented by a dotted line between a signvehicle and a referent, must be present.

The coordinating relation (akin to the dotted line) is ubiquitous. Kelso and Engstrom, however, point to the strategic importance of coordination, like physical laws in general, are matter-independent, they are function-dependent and context-dependent; they govern (hence make relatively predictable) the laws of functional information processing within inorganic entities. It is the coordination that produces meaning (or "sense" in North's triad). This means that, on the one hand, an entity becomes meaningfully integrated into its context, and on the other from the viewpoint of this paper from Nicolescu at the research program of this paper from Nicolescu's Center for Semiotics. The research program of Nicolescu's Center for Semiotics, see Index on page 476.

Transdisciplinary knowledge is based on the logic whose terms form a bipolar symmetry: unity versus being binary opposites. In vivo knowledge is not a static knowledge of the facts per se but a dynamic understanding of meanings that by necessity brings in the dimension of values. As it is the case for Brier, the research program of Nicolescu's Center for Semiotics, see Index on page 476.

This also means that our very sentience is an emergent property and not rule-based, that is, it is an emergent property and not rule-based (cf. spectator theory of knowledge).

The universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art; a great poem - for every fine argument is a poem and symphony - just as every true poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it rather with a painting - with an impressionistic seashore piece - then compare it with a piece of the elementary coloured particles of the Painting... The total effect is beyond our ken; but we can appreciate in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole (Peirce, CP 5. 119 quoted in Brier, 384).

I think that this ethical dimension should now become the core of semiotic research so as to establish what Brier has recently called "intercultural competence" (2010: 9) and which is an urgent matter in our present context that contains diverse "signs of the times" (Semetsky 2003/2009) amidst cultural conflicts and the clash of values at the global level. The language of signs that can 'speak' in characters denoting meanings and values - shared meanings and values - needs to be understood.

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References


"2010b) "Interpreting the signs of the times beyond Juing," Social Semiotics Vol. 20 issue 2, pp. 103-120.


Table 1. Disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge. Adapted and considerably developed in the context of this paper from Nicolescu at https://www.metanexus.net/conference2005/pdf/nicolescu.pdf (accessed on 15 November 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplinary knowledge</th>
<th>Transdisciplinary knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited to the objective knowledge of external world (cf. spectator theory of knowledge)</td>
<td>Correspondence, analogy, conversation, sympathy as a relation between the external world of objects and the internal world of subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static knowledge of facts</td>
<td>Dynamic understanding of meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogical conceptual thought – separation between mind and body; mind observing the world, disembodied cognition.</td>
<td>Synthetic holistic intelligence – harmony or correspondence between mind and body; mind participating in the world; embodied cognition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oriented towards power, possession and separation from, and control over the ‘other’</td>
<td>oriented towards sharing, cooperating with, and integrating the ‘other’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exclusion of values</td>
<td>logic of the included middle /non-dualist philosophy as SEMIOTICS</td>
</tr>
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</table>

KNOWLEDGE (Disciplinary) KNOWLEDGE (Transdisciplinary)
WikiLeaks provides a familiar glimpse into the future of networked knowledge. It is an effect of the slow erosion of the distinction between classified and declassified information. This erosion is the consequence of the manner in which documents are stored and accessed and the inability of their keepers to make guarantees about their security once digitally archived and networked. This is both familiar and startling at the same time.

Dutch digital culture expert Geert Lovink (2010) put it with last August. WikiLeaks is more of a quantitative leap than a qualitative game changer. It provides the leaked materials as content courtesy of the Taliban and al-Qaeda (as cybertheorist Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi (2010) has recently stated, there is a growing collective intelligence at work in support of Wikileaks.

The fact of Wikileaks is so readily reducible to the figure of non-editor-in-chief Julian Assange is one of the reasons why as an organization it is vulnerable. Certainly, Assange has made some deals with blue chip mainstream news corporations and has a group of hackers - Anonymous - to defend his interests and counteract (via what they call a LOIC - Low Orbit Ion Cannon - of Denial of Service attack under the rubric of ‘Operation Payback’) against the financial service sector players like MasterCard, Visa, and PayPal that have closed its accounts (and the blocking off of site for Library of Congress staff). Wikileaks’ counterassay that credit card companies like more stable revenue streams from porn and gambling is acute. So, this is richly understandable, and understandable in particular because use of the LOIC is traceable and, as has been recently shown, not ‘anonymous’ for hacktivists at all (Peat et al. 2010). Either this is a bad mistake and everybody downloading LOIC should have been warned or Wikileaks really believes in transparency at any cost.

Where Assange is personally threatened, his only recourse is to use the ante by more and more spectacular disclosures. His behaviour becomes less complex and more fragmented. He doesn’t deepen our understanding of data transfer, he is not a theorist, and, as a result, he plagues everyone into a politics in which he becomes a case, lepally, and psychopolitically, and this is what comes to dominate and drive the story, while the material awaits constructive narratives and actionability.

On the other side of the menu, there are the state agencies which lament their loss of control over secure information, and their right to privatize it, feeding the growing creature of the security industry. Then the security intellectuals enter the fray. Some, like University of Calgary’s Tom Flanagan (Wilton, Suzanne (2010) “Prof may face charge urging tsunami evacuation,” Calgary Herald (10.12). http://www.simpleshow.com/reports/loic-report.pdf (December 7).

The lesson of Wikileaks is not revealed in the content; we know that diplomats are paid to lie and that the military get paid for shooting civilians. But in the actuation of solidarity, complicity and collaboration between independent part-timers, between cognitive workers of various kinds: hardware technicians, programmers, journalists who work together and share the same goal of destabilizing totalitarian power. From this lesson, the rebels find their way to self-organization of the general intellect.

Recourse to a revised Marxist concept of “general intellect” underlines how general human semiosis is mobilized by a self-organizing cognotariat, otherwise exploited within the extensive electronic networks of post-Fordist production, in defence of Wikileaks. The traits of these semiotic modalities are heterogeneous and scattered across the cybersphere, yet seem to lack a corporeal body. The offline bodies of the hackers working to further the Wikileaks adventure have not yet appeared in this drama. For Bifo, diverse elements of the cognotariat are self-organizing and assembling a general intellect that doesn’t require, at least in its preliminary phases, an identifiable body, but rather coalesces semiotically around a common political project against state secrecy and for the catch and release of hitherto semored knowledge. Against secrecy is the timely call to the cognotariat to destabilize the master narrative of our time (Neoclesous 2008), the critique of which expurgators the kinds of subjectivities it produces and the violence it exercises.

The breakthrough into the world of classified information that Wikileaks has provided will need to be followed by more robust and sophisticated qualitative and, ultimately, actionable assessments of the datasets and the consequences of these interpretations will be the measure of this unfolding lesson for the sons and daughters of Wikileaks.

Gary Genosko is editor of The Semiotic Review of Books.

References


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