

Editorial

Allagmatic

By Jakub Zdebik

1. Gilbert Simondon, Gilles Deleuze and Sobriety

“Sobriety, sobriety,” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari announce in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “that is the common prerequisite for the deterritorialization of matters, the molecularization of material, and the cosmicization of forces” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 344). It is a rallying call without exclamation. In its quiet way, sobriety links the flower to the cosmos. And the philosopher Gilbert Simondon shows how the individual plant is opened on either end to that which is geological, as it pumps nourishment out of the soil, and to the cosmos, as it imbibes the sun’s rays through photosynthesis (Combes 1999: 12-13). If, according to Alain Badiou (2000: 16-17), Deleuze is the monotonous philosopher of the One, then Simondon is parsimonious with his concepts. With Guattari, Deleuze has constructed a system populated by deterritorializations, molecularizations and cosmicizations, a kaleidoscopic multiplicity of concepts. While constructing the Body without Organs, the rhizome and the diagram, Deleuze and Guattari have given a number of philosophers a new life. Simondon is not just another figure holding up the Deleuzoguattarian assemblage. He is at once subterranean and ubiquitous in their corpus, but most importantly, he is sober.

Simondon’s system is an “entire philosophy,” as Deleuze (2002:120-24) calls it, and links the formation of crystals to the splitting of cells, the formation of coral reefs and termites’ nests to the psychic make up of individuals and their composition of a society with very few key concepts: transduction,

metastability, hylemorphism, structure and operation, crystallization and modulation are all woven together through the notion of analogy. Transduction is a biological term from which Simondon isolated a theory of systematic information sharing. A transduction is “the transfer of genetic determinants from one microorganism to another or from one strain of microorganism to another by a viral agent” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary).

It is hard to sketch a whole system and its articulation in one trait. Yet, at the end of the massive *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information*, relegated to the last appendix is a section titled “allagmatic,” from the very end of the philosophical system Simondon offers a key through which to read the notion of analogy visually while giving an ontological depth to this logical operation.

Allagmatic is an ontological study of the crux of the relation between structure and operation. Allagmatic theorizes a schism, a blind spot that is productive in its articulation of thought. The theory of the allagmatic provides the opportunity to visualize an unrepresentable process that is no less actual because it is virtual, reversing a cleft into a depth. This theory proposes a visual semiotic tool of interpretation of aesthetic objects.

2. Hylemorphic basis for a rift

Let’s start with the very sober brick. And the very sober mould and earth needed to form the brick. The “entire philosophy” begins with an evocative example involving all the possible facets of brickmaking from

the earth (the matter) out of a mould (the form). The dyad of matter and form presupposes the concept of individuation that renders it static, with no possibility of a dynamic becoming. Simondon proposes in its place to look at the concept *in medias res*, throwing out equilibrium and stability as the foundation for the individual and instead looking at individuation from a metastable perspective. Slowly, Simondon reveals the dynamism involved in the brick taking shape, the underlying event being the individual brick emerging from a metastable system. The mould does not perform the role of a stable limit on the earth, the substance of the brick. It is constantly at play: the boundary delimited by the mould is fluctuating with the force of the earth settling, pushing on its structure. The matter and the form are in a state of fluctuation, of metastability. Simondon goes as far as to expose this process from a wider angle: the brick is never the same for the worker who makes it, even though the industrialist who employs the worker sees only one brick. This is related to the effort the brick-maker puts into every single brick, thereby further shaping their individuality. It is a preliminary illustration of the concept of *operation* which envelops the structure. The brick/mould structure is enveloped in the operation of brickmaking. The operation is endowed with an ontological force that makes the structure, mediated by the conscious individual, a system.

Anne Sauvagnargues, in her essay “Gilles Deleuze. De l’animal à l’art,” offers an insightful summary of the thesis guiding Simondon’s system: Simondon asks when we can speak of ‘one’, whether it is one individual, one animal, one crystal (Sauvagnargues 2004: 133). The question is answered by being transposed onto the plane of the form and matter problematic, or hylemorphism, from *hylé* (matter) and *morphé* (form). Can the principle of individuation explain the genesis of the individual, the process of becoming one individual and then, can the individuation, that is, ‘becoming individual’ and ‘individual that has become’ taken together, be considered one? In other words, when the process of individuation, through which the individual is formed, is superimposed onto the individual that has become, do they match up? The answer is obviously no. From the very first principle in Simondon’s system we are introduced to the productive incongruence that will be described as the disparation. Based on the hylemorphic schema, the problematic of matter and form, the question of individuation, cannot be answered. A rift opens up. The incongruence between the individual and

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the process of individuation is key in Sauvagnargues's interpretation of Simondon: not only does it inaugurate the distinction between operation and structure; it also provides a material opening of difference. Deleuze writes about the disparities present within oppositions and the intensive depth arising from them: "These are the source of the illusion of the negative, but also the principle of the denunciation of this illusion. Only depth resolves, because only difference gives rise to problems" (Deleuze 1994: 235). The reconciliation of the difference will not bridge the gap. The differentiation of the difference between the oppositions will emboss this gap as intensity. "Oppositions are always planar; they express on a given plane only the distorted effect of an original depth. This has often been commented upon for stereoscopic images" (Deleuze 1994: 236). The solution can be found in visual terms, as if the negative of the dark gulf brought it back to light.

Simondon teaches us how a philosophy can move dynamically and juggle the one and the many in a reciprocal dynamism. Therefore, this crucial link between material, physical individuation and psychic-social individuation slides seamlessly and systematically between materiality and thought. As an operation that opens the possibility of a systematic continuation of the material in thought through analogy, the system is seen as fluid and virtual rather than rigid and repetitive.

3. An Image of Analogy

It would be unfair to try to capture Simondon's system without mentioning the underlying *idée fixe* that guides his philosophy: the process of crystallization from which he analogizes the operation of thought on the principle of crystalline growth. He raises the possibility of actual, physical analogies in the midst of his philosophy when he asks whether it would be productive to develop an entire system of analogy based on the individuation of crystals: "a similar rule could be found in the growth of flowerage, in the development of a tree, in the formation of a colony, in the genesis of mental images, as if the dynamic dominance gave a structure to ensembles from a singularity" (Simondon 1995: 196. My translation). If this image is striking, it is also promising. For the purpose of figuring out Simondon's concepts as a visual theory of comparison, we can move into the visual field and give a spatial image to the notion of analogy.

In her book *Visual Analogy*, Barbara Maria Stafford (1999) shows how analogy is seen as an engine of thought that travels the wide gap between the immanent and the transcendental in order to provide an intelligible image of that which is intangible. Stafford's book deals with the mechanism of analogy within works of visual art that brings us on par with the visualization of a system. She herself visualizes the analogical process: it moves upwards.

Her argument starts with the pre-Socratics, who developed the concept of analogy as a way of mediating between the divine and the worldly to give an intellectual image to the senses of that which was not immediately manifest. Later turning away

from "simple, vertical anthropomorphism," analogy was refined into a "methodological tool of science" (Stafford 1999: 105). Plato adds a third element to analogy's binary mechanism: the mediator that makes "appear at the core of experience what does not appear" (Stafford 1999: 105). *Logoi*, Stafford states, "embody the analogical notion that conceptual representations, or images, enable us to make the transition from sensible things to otherwise unseizable intelligible Forms" (Stafford 1999: 106). Analogy gave a sense of the intangible by giving it flesh in an image, a tangible shape in the form of an image seized by the mind.

Analogy reaches vertically into the unknown, as the etymology of the term demonstrates a directional arrow: "Where *ana* means 'up', 'upwards', and gives the idea of a passage or a surpassing, a transcendence when it is a question of passing into a superior order. From the animal to the human, for example, from the human to the divine" (Stafford 1999: 106). The concept of analogy serves to bring together the world of the unknown and the familiar world by translating one in terms of the other. This is what Simondon explains of the analogy using Plato's *Sophist* (Simondon 2005: 562). And just like the construction that appears out of the crystallization process, where each crystal spawns another identical to itself, as if it was a self-generating architectural edifice, the analogy is also compared to a "bridge that crosses over a border. But this border is not abolished by the bridge: rational proportion does not destroy real differences" (Stafford 1999: 106). The bridge constructed over the gulf underlines the fact of the gulf.

Simondon's own use of analogy is ingenious because he establishes an order to his philosophy that equalizes the real differences between a human and a crystal, through an analogical short-circuit (see Toscano 2005). Simondon achieves this productive devaluation through the overarching process of individuation. As such, to be human or crystal, that is, a being, is a process which is delicately organized into a system. If the individual is never finite, and the being of this individual is in process, it is the same process, the very real process of crystallization. Simondon explains the physical aspect of this process through the notion of depth in binocular vision, where the form taking operation is based on incompatibility and sursaturation as in crystal formation (Simondon 2005: 547-48).

Muriel Combes cites the process of crystallization as a material manifestation of an operation which coincides ontologically with the generation of thought (see Atlan 1986). It must be understood that this operation does not function metaphorically. Rather, the mechanism of crystallization is repeated in the operation of analogy. And so, because crystal formations expand only with the basis of the model that offers itself as a platform for the expansion of other subsequent crystals, the method of thinking becomes as 'real' as the crystal through the operation present in the analogical process. Combes explains how the power of analogy for discovery, for bridging 'upwards', is based on the model of "crystallization in the domain of physical individuation" (Combes 1999: 23. My translation). The operation of

analogy is analogous to crystallization. But the operation must be independent from the terms of the analogy. What makes Simondon's particular use of analogy a potent method for thought is precisely the fact that it is explained in terms of an analogy with a physical process.¹

The analogy generates its own analogy in thought. The terms may not be fully superimposed, entirely compatible, but the difference is productive. The crown is to the king what the sword is to the warrior. But the crown is not a sword and the king is not always a warrior. The gulf is bridged but the gulf remains. What Simondon proposes by his theory of allagmatic is to study that gulf, the operation.

4. Allagmatic and the Geometers

Allagmatic exists as a word, albeit with a prefix, in the language of law where it means to bring two parties together under a contract: synallagmatic. In effect, it means to form a couple, to bring two perspectives together. It comes from the Greek *Sunallagmatikos* that in turn comes from *sumallattein* which means to bring together, to unify. Compare to the etymology of symbol: from Late Latin *symbolum* baptismal creed, from Late Greek *symbolon*, literally, token, sign, from Greek; in other senses, from Latin *symbolus*, *symbolum* token, sign, from Greek *symbolon* token of identity (verified by comparing its other half), sign, symbol, from *symbollein* to throw together, compare, contribute, from syn- + *ballein* to throw.

Allagmatic could be defined, based on the Greek *allagma*, by the word 'change', transformation; Valérie Carayol (2004) defines it as 'changement'.

Following Simondon, Jacques Roux sees it as "the operative passage from one structure to the next" (Roux 2005). If Simondon is able to create a system spanning from the mechanism of crystal formation to the functioning of human society while passing incrementally through unicellular differentiation, the organization of animal societies and human psychology, it is because he strings these elements together by the device of analogy. Allagmatic, at once removed from the objects contained in the terms of the analogy, gives these objects an ontological depth by stretching the frame so as to encompass what surrounds the terms of the analogy – its operation.

Simondon introduces the figure of the geometer in order to illustrate the operative aspect of the device. What is most striking about this example is its graphic dimension. The tracing of the shape by the geometer illuminates right away the visual aspect of the allagmatic process. Thus, the way the example is laid out in its intricacies must be visualized in order to be grasped.

The inextricable ontological relation between operation and structure is shown by the geometer in the midst of performing the action of tracing "a line parallel to the straight line through a point taken outside of this straight line" (Simondon 2005: 559 My translation). The line being traced according to the straight line and the point on the paper is the structural aspect of the action. The second part of the action is the

operation which involves not what is being traced on the paper, but the general aspect of tracing. Simondon writes that: “This gesture of tracing possesses its own schema” (Simondon 2005: 559. My translation). The operating system consists of that which brings about the structure: “it supposes the availability of certain energy that finds itself released and ordered by the mental gesture through the interlinking of complex conditional causalities” (Simondon 2005: 559-60. My translation). Both operation and structure are the parts necessary for the resulting action; both are complementary. It is the brick-maker seeing his brick taking shape.

Whereas analogy bridges terms in thought, the allagmatic process bridges terms on the principle of sight (they exist, then, because they can be perceived through the material organism of the eyes). Furthermore, the terms in an allagmatic process depend on the presence of an ontic being to carry out the operation. It therefore constitutes a material manipulation of the process.

The figure of the geometer is not wholly original when philosophers consider philosophy, especially when they ponder the problem of abstraction and concreteness, or the passage between theory and reality. The figure of the geometer appears also in Young Ahn Kang’s excellent text *Schema and Symbol: A Study in Kant’s Doctrine of Schematism* (1985). Kant summons the geometer to illustrate the operation of analogy.

Kant first chooses to determine the ground of possibility of the thing that is real when he is confronted with two different possibilities. He thus raises the *a priori* possibility of synthetic judgments in mathematics before considering whether the science of metaphysics is possible. Since mathematics exists and is real, but metaphysics as science – since we are talking about their possibility – is not, Kang explains that a question on the former will determine the ground of the possibility of the latter. Whether or not metaphysics as science is possible is not a question based on the modeling of metaphysics on mathematics, “but rather... [on] ‘disclosing’ the source and ground of *a priori* cognition” (Kang 1985: 48-49). The analogy is not made between the terms of metaphysics and mathematics. In the matter of metaphysics as science, the *operation* present in the structure of one question must be transposed onto the structure another. In the second preface of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, right before the Copernican revolution in metaphysics is introduced, Kant explains that the ‘true method of mathematics’ is “not to inspect what he [the geometer] discerned either in the figure, or in the bare concept of it, and from this, as it were, to read off its properties” (Kang 1985: 48-49). It is rather “to bring out what was necessarily implied in the concepts that *he* had himself formed *a priori*, and had put into the figure in the construction... (B xii)” (Kang 1985: 48-49). Kang defines ‘construction’ as the “act of determining the concept in mathematical cognition” (Kang 1985: 49). Kang proposes, in effect, an alternative way of thinking about construction not framed in terms of material objects. But similarly, as the

allagmatic device is based on visual perspectives and therefore needs the vision and the materiality of the eye to function, Kant’s construction is made material by one very important element. The method is not derived from experience or from the boundaries of the figure traced by the geometer: what is material here is the fact that this transcendental act is performed by the subject, the geometer, the italicized *he*. The subject is part of the act of construction: “This constructive act is not to ‘read off’ the property of the concept from experience and figure, but rather to ‘read’ (and a step further, to ‘interpret’) it in accordance with the transcendental act of the subject” (Kang 1985: 49). The place of the subject within this operation draws attention to an ontological dimension in the space of materiality. Therefore, in the allagmatic method, the ontic subject is a necessary element in the passage from one structure to the next.

Both geometer-figures as parallel threads between Simondon and Kant cursorily show how the focus is not solely geared towards the geometric structure traced on the paper. A whole system surrounding the paper, the tracing and the one who perpetrates the action is involved. The illustration of the geometer can be rendered more life-like in the context of aesthetics.

5. The Aesthetics of the Allagmatic: Disparation

Contrary to Kant, an analogy can be placed on a single univocal and material ‘plane’ rather than an equivocal and metaphysical ‘dualism’ repeating the split of the empirical and transcendental. Alberto Gualandi (2004: 24) explains that Deleuze believes it necessary to replace Kant’s onto-theology, which he deems to be “analogical and equivocal” through a philosophy of immanence and univocity of being.

Deleuze’s desire to eradicate the classical model of the double-bind analogical representation must be negotiated through the visual aspect of an *allagmatic materialism*. Analogy, as a representational device operating through metaphors and symbols (where everything means everything else, as Deleuze and Guattari note in “On Several Regimes of Signs” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 112: “There is a simple general formula for the signifying regime of the sign [the signifying sign]: every sign refers to another sign, and only to another sign, ad infinitum”). Out of this notion of exchange that leads to infinity, the road to transcendence, Deleuze and Guattari draw the following formula: “It doesn’t matter what it means, it’s still signifying”) must be replaced by the spatial, orientative *operation* of the allagmatic. Spread on a spatial surface, we do not perceive something *as if* it was another, but instead, something *and* another at the same time. The function of the allagmatic collapses two things, makes them one, and also, through the stereoscopic process of the material function of vision, provides depth, giving an ontological dimension to the objects that retains the difference in the repetition.

The Russian Constructivist El Lissitzky is the allegorical image of the two geometer-

figures invoked by Kant and Simondon. Lissitzky is the geometer as constructor (see Figure 1a. *The Constructor Self-Portrait*, 1924, gelatin silver print, 19 x 21.2 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute). “The collocation of the pair of compasses, graph paper, and cranium; the insertion of the Latin letters XYZ with their simultaneous evocation of universality and anonymity . . . the cool black, white, and gray palette of the photographic medium – each of these components emphasizes the apparent rationality and sobriety of Lissitzky as constructor” (Bowl 2005: 136). As opposed to the collage technique in which images are juxtaposed, Lissitzky superimposes two different photographs, creating a photogram. In this “photogram,” Lissitzky is surrounded by geometric objects – compass, lines and graph paper patterns. His eye, peering through a superimposed palm of a hand, captures the notion of the geometer’s agency constituting a frame of the process of tracing a line, in this case, an unfinished circle springing from his head. The constructor is thinking what the eye is seeing what the hand is doing. (Cf. Figure 1b from 1914)

A duality can be read into the picture: “Although using the compass to indicate his trust in science and technology, by positioning an eye in the center of the palm of his hand Lissitzky also reminds the viewer that the artist’s visual acuity was central to his new constructivist identity” (Tupitsyn 2003: 179). But rather than the duality of art and science brought together through vision, it is the idea of the allagmatic that is illustrated: “The sobriety of the assemblage is what makes for the richness of the Machine’s effect” (Deleuze and Guattari

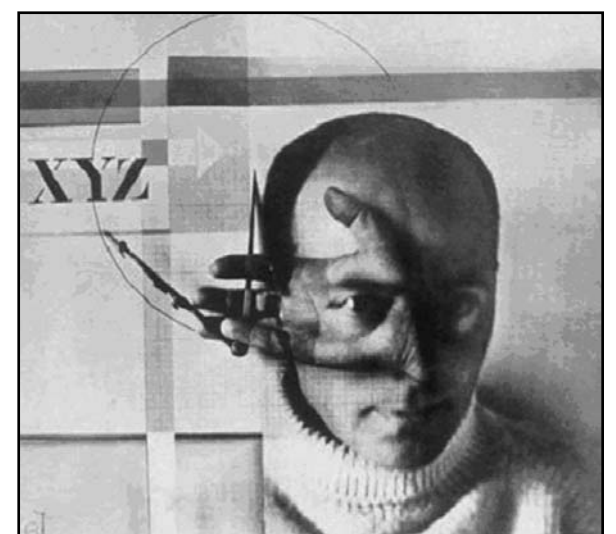


Figure 1a: El Lissitzky, The Constructor (self-portrait), 1924

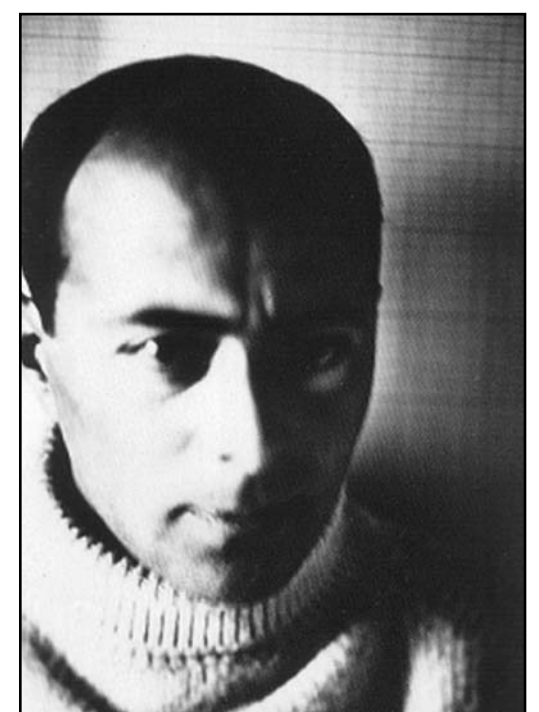


Figure 1b: El Lissitzky, Self-Portrait, 1914

2005: 344). Lissitzky illustrates the process needed to create the photogram within the very work through a sober superimposition of several disparate images, in effect taking the face of a clock to expose its gears.

Through the superimposition of images, Lissitzky exposes the articulation within the notion of the allagmatic: the concept of disparation. Deleuze writes about disparation as a way of capturing the ontological ground of assemblage: “Gilbert Simondon has shown recently that individuation presupposes a prior metastable state – in other words the existence of a ‘disparateness’ such as at least two orders of magnitude or two scales of heterogeneous reality between which potentials are distributed” (Deleuze 1994: 246). Disparation, disparateness. It is the schism, the incongruity necessary for vision. As Yves Citton (2005. My translation) writes in “*Sept résonances de Simondon*”: “It is the disparate nature of the image perceived by my left eye with that of my right eye that allows to accede to a perception of this third dimension which is depth; it is a tension belonging to these incompatibilities, to these *disparations*, that nourishes the emergences of new significations, and of the superior forms of individuation – and not their conversion to the flattening logic of homogeneity.”

Sobriety, sobriety. Paradoxically, it is through the eyes of the drunk that the concept can best be illustrated. Clément Rosset (1977:41. My trans.) shows the inverted view, and plays with the opposition between sobriety and drunkenness: “Drunks have the reputation of seeing double.” Rosset describes the doubled view of a drunk by referring to Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano*:

Man possesses two eyes and consequently two real images that normally are superimposed on each other; when he is drunk, this superimposition is not made well, from which comes the fact two bottles instead of one dance in front of the drunkard’s eyes. But this duplication of the real is a purely somatic phenomena, it does not affect the depth of the real in the perception of the drunk. On the contrary: the drunk perceives simply, it is rather the sober man who, habitually, sees double.

It is on this principle that the allagmatic assembles two orders of terms, as in an analogy, but whereas the bridge between terms in an analogy remains flat because the schism is never resolved – indeed is necessary for the analogy to function – the allagmatic gives the schism its three-dimensional reality. Rosset’s example shows how upholding an illusion is important for its subsequent denunciation (as in Deleuze’s illusion resolved by depth in *Difference and Repetition*, 1994: 235).

Allagmatic is the theory of exchanges that results in the transformations of a system (Simondon 2005: 559). It is a theory of operations. In the present case of turning the allagmatic into a visual theory, the core of the operation is the blind spot, the incongruence that puts system into motion: “An interval signifies in fact the possibility of

a relation and a relation consists of an operation” (Simondon 2005: 559. My trans.).

The bridging of two terms has to be seen as more than metaphorical. Concepts, in Deleuze and Guattari’s rich corpus, such as the diagram that relies on tracing and mapping, assemblages of the wasp and the orchid or images such as the archipelago and the spine, uphold within their duality an ontological core that makes these groupings into viable concepts. These images, *qua idea*, should not be confused with mental representations, illustrations or metaphors. Instead, they must be read as a “virtual differentiated complex. This intensive and virtual difference actualizes itself by differentiating itself (with a c) when it individuates itself. Such an individuation comes to be a stabilizing liaison, which resolves the difference in the initial potentiality” (Sauvagnargues 2004: 138. My trans.). This is crucial to an understanding of what Deleuze means when he is talking about a non-representational image of thought. The stabilizing union modeled on Simondon’s ‘disparation’ thus solves the problem of two flat, two-dimensional images, each on the wall of each eye that then gives rise to a third dimension. The three-dimensional image is the idea which solves a problem as a process and comes to be. The incongruence is a negative space: productive in its negativity because part of the whole since it is necessary for the resulting figures in the positive space to exist. If the negative space is read in its positivity, it is read as a figure of the virtual which cannot be positively presented: the virtual exhausts itself in the actualization. The negative space is an abstract representation of something that is unrepresentable: the virtual. This is what is at stake when the operation is manipulated instead of the terms in an analogy, when the *blind spot* of the ‘disparation’ is not seen as a lack, but provides the three dimensional depth and, in doing so, provides an ontological fullness to analogy as allagmatic. This *blind spot* is a negative space until it is stared at enough so as to become positive and then provides an inkling of an unrepresentable dimension.

Brian Massumi, in his essay “The Diagram as Technique of Existence,” explains how the blind spot within the field of vision needs to be overcome for the eye to see: “How could we literally see a continuous surface-surround of space when our very own nose sunders our field of vision in two – not to mention the holes poked in both halves by the blind spot of each eye? Bridge it over.... We see unity of form in excess of our eyes” (Massumi 1998: 44). The eyes are in constant motion in order to compensate for the blind spot: “If the jerking stops, vision blanks out” (Massumi 1998: 44). Massumi’s description of the physical actions involved in the covering over of the incongruous schisms within vision mimics the image of the directionality involved in the analogical operation: “The continual variation draws the protofigural lines of the ambient array across the gaps between the rods and cones, across the nose hole, and across the blind spots. The discontinuities are giddily bridged by a continuity of movement” (Massumi 1998: 45). But Massumi is able to clearly

shed some light into the void in order to reveal the mechanism at work underneath the texture of reality: “The bridging yields a complex of moving lines of light *continuing across* invisible abysses of darkness. Protobridges of continuity, self-standing, over a void of vision” (Massumi 1998:45). Into the void, Massumi throws in the notion of the virtual.

The operation surrounding the structure of an analogy in the concept of the allagmatic has been extrapolated and its ontological depth extricated through disparation. The ontological depth that emerged from an analogy and augmented into the allagmatic takes on an independent existence as the methodological mechanism in the formation of a philosophical system based on visual image. One way to demonstrate the methodological validity of the function is to examine how it performs along aesthetic lines.

In 1957, Robert Rauschenberg painted his *Factum I* and *Factum II* (*Factum I* is at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and *Factum II*, is at the Moma in New York; see Figures 2 and 3). The titles infer, like synallagmatic, a legal term based on the notion of fact and act. They are parodying the notion of gesture and acting. They are works illustrating the process of stereoscopic vision by the ontological gap dividing them and providing them with an individual spatial positioning (as disperse as their locations, in New York and on the other side of the country, Los Angeles, allow). Didier Debaise, in his Simondon lexicon entitled “*Le langage de l’individuation*” isolates an explanation of disparation as the instance of two ensembles that do not fully resemble each other and so cannot be collapsed into each other, when “twin ensembles are not totally superimposable” (Debaise 1995. My trans.). *Factum I* and *Factum II* are split geographically but they are not fully superimposable. Rauschenberg’s works are meant to parody the Abstract Expressionist idea of original creation. Along these lines, the works consider the operative process of artistic production, not simply the transcendental notions of subject matter.

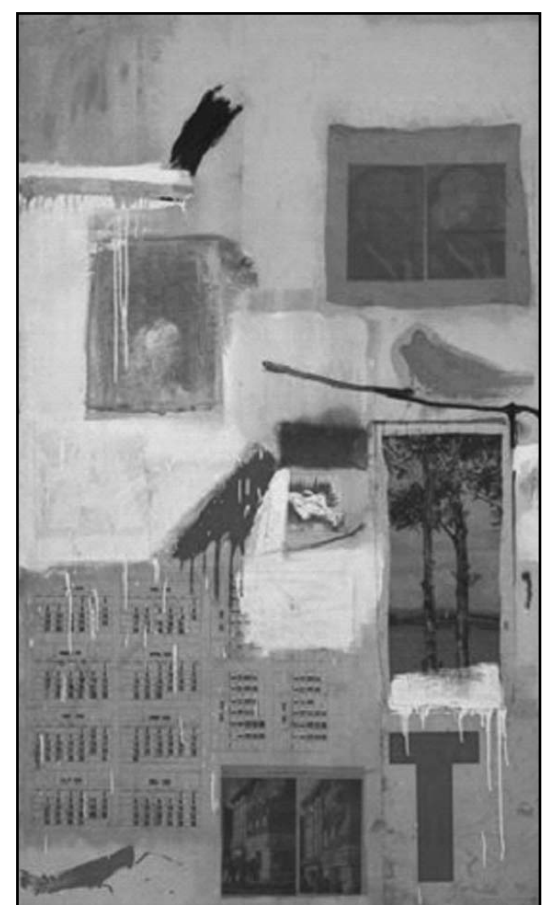


Figure 2: Robert Rauschenberg, *Factum I*, 1957 (Moca)

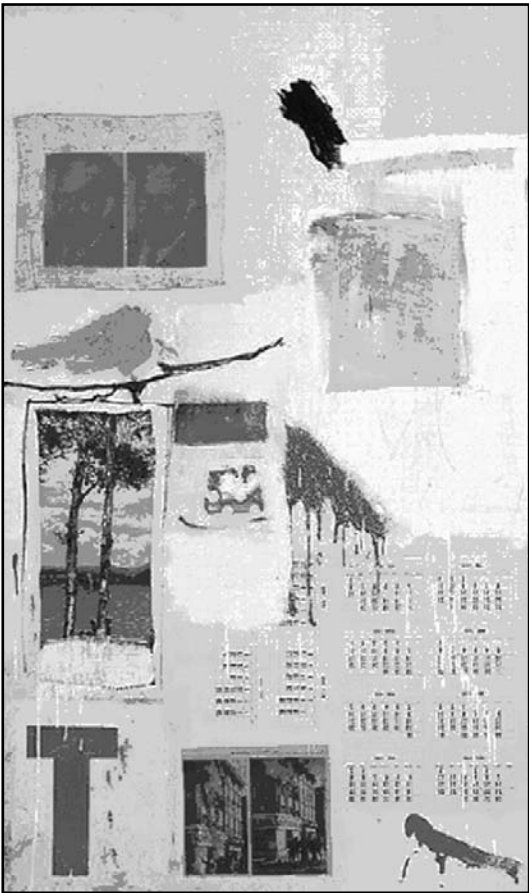


Figure 3: Robert Rauschenberg, Factum II, 1957 (Moma)

However, beyond the fact that they are commentary on uniqueness and simulacrum, originality and reproducibility, they are the emblem of the allagmatic. We can imagine *Factum I* and *Factum II* as the separate images projected into each eye: “An image appears on the right and the left retinas and it is then doubled. One object is captured by two images in a single system. But since there are two images, they are necessarily at two different locations; they cannot be completely the same. The fact that both identical images are captured in an ensemble “allows the formation of a unique ensemble of superior degree” (Debaise 1995: citing IPB 223. My trans.). The subtle differences within the reproduction of their content (which led John Cage to comment about the blind seeing) has led to speculation about differences within their repetitions (see Brandon 2001); the simple fact remains that they cannot be superimposed. The third dimension of depth that results from their incompatibility is the denunciation of illusions. They show the artificiality of the real by showing the flaws in the single (flat) image as the illusion of the original Abstract Expressionist gesture. Furthermore, Rauschenberg enacts the motion and takes into consideration the outer frame of the operation. But the differences between *Factum I* and *Factum II* dissipate according to their spatial location and provide the three-dimensional blur sticking out like an anamorphosis, underlining the operative touch of the artist’s hand.

The concept of the allagmatic is an operative theory that puts images on a single plane and inserts depth into the space of difference. This depth injects an ontological dimension into a simple comparison, rendering images into concepts. The allagmatic upholds the material ground of the analogy that sutures Simondon’s system and the notion of assemblage in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. Its manifestation in visual works of art only begs the question if it can be applied to other forms of expression; if, for example, it can fill the blind spot Deleuze sees in the works of “modern novelists” (Deleuze 1994: 199). If the

allagmatic can become a critical theory, it will have to do so with a sober strategy that nevertheless giddily bridges the flower to the cosmos.

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Notes

- ¹ “En effet, le pouvoir de découverte de l’analogie dans l’ordre de la pensée est lui-même conçu par analogie avec l’opération de cristallisation dans le domaine de l’individuation physique: ‘à partir d’un germe cristallin microscopique, on peut produire un monocristal de plusieurs décimètres cubes. L’activité de la pensée ne recèlerait-elle pas un processus comparable, *mutatis mutandis?*’ (IPC, p.62). Anne Fagot-Largeault, dans sa contribution au colloque consacré à Simondon en avril 1992, conclut de ce passage que la ‘fécondité de cette démarche analogique de la pensée est elle-même expliquée par une analogie physique’” (Combes 1999: 23-24). IPC refers to *Individuation psychique et collective*. The conference consecrated to Simondon that took place in 1992 that Combes has in mind has been published. The text in question is: Fagot-Largeault, Anne. “L’individuation en biologie.” *Gilbert Simondon, une pensée de l’individuation et de la technique*. Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège International de Philosophie 31 mars-2 avril 1992. Paris: Albin Michel, 1994, pp.19-54.

Remodeling Selfhood

Paul J. Thibault, *Agency and Consciousness in Discourse: Self-Other Dynamics as a Complex System*. London and New York: Continuum, 2004.

By Darin C. Bradley

Paul J. Thibault's second book-length examination of ecosocial semiotics, *Agency and Consciousness in Discourse: Self-Other Dynamics as a Complex System*, is a worthwhile and contributive volume to contemporary cognitive and semiotic sciences. It lengthens his discussion of the nature of discursive, ecosocial environments, specifically their roles in interpersonal meaning-making, first explicated fully in *Brain, Mind, and the Signifying Body: An Ecosocial Semiotic Theory*. The present volume (henceforth *Agency*) focuses primarily on the development and individuation of "self" as other-primary – in Thibault's words, "self-awareness may be an evolutionary innovation which first arose out of a growing social need to know the other" (3).

Thibault structures his examination around the idea that an infantile awareness of other precedes an awareness of self, in that the infant in question must necessarily effect what it needs (states of experiential proto-consciousness, we might say – Thibault's "iconic" awareness) through an agent more capable than itself. As the infant is, over time, entrained by over-arching ecosocial discourse into a self, it generates a "self" as a model of sourced agency. From here (Thibault's "indexicality"), the developing and individuating self comes to know the terrain between self and other, including its many topological hindrances. Negotiating through and around these hindrances is the nature of world-building, motivated perception, moral discourse, and a host of others.

To these ends, Thibault recruits a number of useful viewpoints, including J. L. Lemke's Principle of Alternation, Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiosis, Karl Bühler's deictic field theory, Gibson's ecological perception, as well as varied extrapolations of previous conclusions by theorists such as M. A. K. Halliday, Colwyn Trevarthen, Christian Matthiesen, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Ferdinand de Saussure. Further, *Agency* implicitly coordinates the work of other contemporary thinkers into ecosocial interactivity, including Daniel C. Dennett, Ernest Keen, David Bohm, Ulric Neisser, and Catherine Lutz.

In the course of the study, Thibault progresses through a number of salient methodologies for a discursive theory of agency and consciousness. Divided into four parts, *Agency* focuses first upon meaning and its discursive sources, introducing the reader to Thibault's central self-other dyad, the three-level scalar hierarchy, and social heteroglossia. Part two concentrates further upon establishing points of departure for a more fully realized developmental theory of agency, proto-intentionality and proto-language, egocentric speech, multi-modality, and the role of discursive interaction between micro- and macroscopic time scales

in the ontogenetic trajectory of selfhood. To these ends, Thibault analyzes a number of thoroughly explicated case studies. Part three, rather dauntingly titled simply "Consciousness," amplifies *Agency*'s earlier commentary upon reflexivity, semiotic perception, material friction, the role of grammatical mood and metafunction, and semiotic-dynamical heterarchy. Part four, in conclusion, focuses on metaphor. Here, Thibault engages in extensive discourse to situate his ecosocial primacy-of-others against Lakoff and Johnson's embodied realism, and congruency and the metaphorical nature of nominalization figure prominently. The study concludes somewhat abruptly with an eye to categorical distinction and the role of lexico-grammar and its (now-thorough) semiotic integration into the negotiations of self, other, and world.

Necessarily, *Agency* relies heavily on the groundwork established in *Brain, Mind, and the Signifying Body* as its primary concern is situating a theory of self within ecosocial discourse. However, this is not to say that *Agency* is not an independent study. While a reader will doubtlessly benefit from a familiarity with the first volume, the second does an apt job of summarizing the necessary discussions that it imports. For a comprehensive review of the first volume, see Scott Simpkins, "Ecosocial Semiotics" (2006: 5-10).

The Three-level Hierarchy

According to Thibault, "consciousness is always grounded relative to an intentional source, or a viewpoint" (20). Essential to his model of this process of grounding are three parameters: indexical, intertextual, and meta-discursive. These parameters correspond to a hierarchy of semiotic grounding: iconic, indexical, and symbolic (Thibault 2003: 343). Importantly, for Thibault, this three-tiered specification hierarchy does not involve a one-way, upward progression from iconic to symbolic meaning; rather, iconicity informs indexicality, both of which are increasingly decoupled during the individual's ontogenetic trajectories, resulting in the symbolic mode. The symbolic mode, in turn, recursively informs the various sensori-motor orientations that specify iconicity.

Thibault explains that "consciousness is iconically grounded in terms of one's relation to the world on the basis of one's physiology and perception... It is based on the body-brain's mediate relation to its physical-material milieu" (20). In the terms of Peirce's theory of semiosis, "iconic vagueness corresponds to Peirce's category of Firstness" (24). However, it would be a mistake to read iconicity as primary (a point Thibault later expounds upon in differentiating the discursive, ecosocially informed nature of his model of consciousness from Lakoff and

Johnson's embodied realism). As Thibault points out, perception is an essential component of iconicity; however, perception is itself a negotiated process (as with the symbolic to the iconic mode) that, in part, informs iconicity: "the ability to ground the act of perception in the perceptive of the SELF . . . is to posit a relationship between the self and the experienced phenomenon (world)" (167). Perception is a motivated, semiotic process (see also Bohm 2002: 4) determined largely by parameters (or existential concerns) dictated by the social heteroglossia (the many discoursing selves) that appropriately orient an ontogenetically developing individual in relation to the ambient flux (the changing "world"). This discursive model provides a much-needed elaboration upon earlier models, such as Ulric Neisser's ideas of generated expectation and confirmation (1967) and Ernest Keen's motivated perception (1992: 56). Further, it situates Mieke Bal's seminal theory of narrative focalization into contemporary cognitive theory, furthering the dynamic expansion of cognitive studies into literary studies.

If iconicity is "concerned with being and potentiality" (24), then indexicality would be orientation based on this state of being. Indexicality corresponds to Peirce's Secondness, in that, as Thibault explains, "indexicality entails the creating of a boundary or a distinction between Firstnesses. In so doing, Secondness emerges. Secondness is concerned with here-now actuality and with individual existence, hence the creating of the distinction between self and non-self." As Thibault explains, "the indexical act of pointing and the object or location which is indicated by the point now enters into a simple redundancy relation" (21). No less than enculturated perception and the symbolic mode discursively informing iconicity, indexicality also negotiates itself in a recursive manner with what it is indexing. Thibault situates this negotiated, recursive process in terms of Lemke's "metaredundancy": "A redundancy relation exists between the combination of point and the object pointed to when not all possible combinations of points and objects are possible. . . . this means that the point and the object (or the word and the gesture) mutually predict each other's co-occurrence" (22).

As the self develops and individuates ontogenetically, primarily through dyadic interaction with caregivers as an infant, "the individual's cross-coupling to an emergent stratified linguistic system means, above all, that consciousness is increasingly de-coupled from its prior iconic and indexical modes and is now increasingly symbolic" (45). Thibault's symbolic mode occurs "in" Peirce's Thirdness, in that "the semiotically salient distinctions of indexicality pave the way for the emergent generalities of symbolic meaning-making. Thirdness entails the

mediation of instantiated sign-tokens by an ordered field of systemic regularities” (24). Thibault concludes that “the ensuing regularity allows for self-reference: a symbolic field of possibilities” (24). Importantly, the symbolic mode occurs during (as part of) an individual’s transition from the non-individuated dyadic phase of infant-caregiver interaction into the triadic arena of infant-caregiver-world (236). The triad, like the dyad, is discursive; it involves a negotiation of meaning sourced via attractors, projected into and through the ecosocial environment, theorized as (to simplify) “arriving” in the other, and then returning to the self as an awareness of this process. In this manner, each of Thibault’s three parameters progressively situates the others.

The Dyad

One of the most contributive aspects of Thibault’s theory is his deconstruction of the primacy of self. Traditionally, models of self extend outward, beginning from a burgeoning self’s exploratory interactions with the space-time of its environments (c.f. Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*). It is also a hallmark of the now much-disputed tenets of Cartesian dualism, that the division between mind and body is an insuperable one. Mind, according to this logic, is generated through personal realization, development, and individuation as the self learns to interact with the surrounding world and the others who people it. Conversely, Thibault argues that traditional models have had it backwards. Selves are generated by a primary need to interact with and know an other *before* knowing one’s “self.” In Thibault’s words, “the ontological firstness of the self (‘I think therefore I am’) is the result of a culturally particular semiotic polarizing of self-nonsel” (171). The correct semiotic entextualization, he argues, “could be ‘I am because others interact with and interpret me’ or ‘Others interact with and interpret me therefore I am’” (171). As evidence, Thibault presents analyses of early infant interaction with primary caregivers, predominantly the mother.

The infant, Thibault argues, prior to emerging into the symbolic mode, does not make use of a model of self. Indeed, infants at this stage of development lack the fully metafunctional and symbolically realized action-trajectories to do so: infants acquire these later, piecemeal, as they work their ways into ecosocial meaning-negotiation. Instead, infants as developing and proto-individuating selves exist primarily as iconic-indexical action sources. Their mothers interact with them hyponymically, in the sense that these mothers are already fully developed and individuated – they have been “properly” enculturated across a broad time scale into a social heteroglossia. As such, infants’ microscopic, episodic interactions with their mothers eventually begin to de-couple (as scenarios) from their iconic limitations as the infants move toward the symbolic phase that realizes the macroscopic world.

Prior to this move, however, infants orient to and interact with caregivers as agents who can bring about desired states in

the ambient flux. At this stage, “the child’s mental resources are pre-cultural and protolinguistic and are limited to the primary consciousness of perceptual phenomena and early forms of elementary social relations” (64). The child “wants” some existential change (e.g., affection, relief of hunger, alleviation of pain, etc.) in its iconic state of awareness. Effecting this change is sourced in the infant because “infants have an inborn capacity to attune to and to lock into more senior others such as parents and their meanings. This inborn capacity . . . is a primitive value bias” (2). As such, an awareness of other is primary, and there is no immediate distinction between the “self” of the other and the infant’s “self.” However, as the child comes to “know” his or her situation in the ecosocial environment (at this point, only proto-semiotically) via his or her caregiver, in time, Thibault argues, bodily activity and its relation to other-as-agent-of-self necessarily index the self sourcing the bodily activity.

Thibault’s contentions here provide systematized proof of earlier concerns. Ernest Keen expressed as much in constructing a similar body-brain model: “Our theory of the body will have to be a theory of human expression. The body’s expressiveness may even be more basic than its consciousnesses, in one sense, for we bodily express content about ourselves that we are not conscious of, or at least not conscious of expressing” (1992: 51). Keen’s expressiveness, in the case of Thibault’s infant, is its interaction with the caregiver who (importantly) is “connected to the higher-scalar system of symbolic meaning-making possibilities” (62). As Thibault shows, expressiveness is, in fact, decidedly primary in regards to consciousness, and this pre-conscious expressive interaction with the properly encultured adult participant sheds appropriate discursive light on Catherine Lutz’s intersubjectivity of consciousness (1992: 65) as well as her notions of the inextricability of culture (Thibault’s ecosocial semiotics) from consciousness (1992: 67).

Another important aspect of Thibault’s caregiver taking up and enacting the infant’s discursive role is that “she can make links beyond the here-now of the dyad to other space-time scales that are not available to the infant” (62). This temporal flexibility entrains in the infant the ability for consciousness to, as Keen points out, “time itself”: “Consciousness times itself in its own way, a way unlike that conceived in physics and extended to the analysis of functional relations between organisms and their environment” (1992: 47). The atemporality of conscious semiosis may not be an accident of iconic-indexical de-coupling; rather, it is an entrained technology for negotiating complicated ecosocial semiotic planes.

As the infant’s proto-lexicon expands (in accordance with its increasing grasp of proto-metafunctional organization), it necessarily re-voices the discourse genres of the enculturated caregiver. A realization of a spatio-temporal arena within which the I-You interaction must take place co-occurs with a shift into the symbolic mode, where “a sign is always made through the contextual integration in the perspective of the SELF of the two modes of conscious experience – the

conscious and the material – at the interface between the body-brain system and its external environment” (71). The material (the other-as-agent, the environment) interactively situates existential need and sourced-intention-for-change (in the infant) as the “conscious” mode.

Consciousness

The recursive nature of Thibault’s three-level hierarchy is a fundamental element of his larger theory of consciousness. As he says, “in terms of the three-level hierarchy view, the self and its system of interpretance are boundary conditions or constraints on lower levels” (165). Each “level” necessarily delimits the orientations of the others in the system, essentially building “world” and “consciousness” simultaneously by defining what aspects of the ambient flux warrant (conscious) attention in alleviating or sustaining the overarching concerns of self. Thibault’s articulation speaks to Dennett’s conclusions, albeit in an explicitly semiotic fashion. To reiterate Dennett’s conclusions regarding perceptual world-construction: “In such a cycle, one’s current expectations and interests shape hypotheses for one’s perceptual systems to confirm or disconfirm, and a rapid sequence of such hypothesis generations and confirmations produces the ultimate product, the ongoing, updated ‘model’ of the world of the perceiver. Such accounts of perception are motivated by a variety of considerations, both biological and epistemological” (1991: 12). Indeed, “world” and “consciousness” necessarily co-occur because “the self-perspective which necessarily informs consciousness is a self which is embedded in the supersystem transactions which inform its perspective. (Self-)consciousness connects these supersystem transactions between self and nonself to the Meaning System in the individual’s *Innerewelt* at the same time that it includes itself in its domain” (164).

Even more importantly, in Thibault’s model, consciousness is not discrete. Traditionally, it has been held as an exclusively interior, black-boxed phenomenon; however, Thibault posits that “the meanings we make within our own consciousness, however idiosyncratic and personal they are, are always part of a larger ecosocial semiotic dialogue. Our minds are not separate, individual entities, but are shaped by the meanings and the patterns of action in which we participate with others along our historical-biographical trajectory” (201). Or, in Dennett’s words “selves are not independently existing soul-pearls, but artifacts of the social processes that create us” (1991: 423).

Equally important to the non-discrete concept of consciousness and the co-occurrence of self and world are the recursively negotiated natures of self-other. Indeed, a self’s projected model of the other who will receive his or her re-voicement of normative heteroglossic discourse genres is a projection of self-as-other, which is used as a self-reflexive measure of self (180). It is this measure which, to a large degree, delimits, attracts, and sources bodily interaction (viz. expressiveness and language). This aspect of Thibault’s study offers systemic expansion of

Neisser's extended ecological self. Neisser's expanded self as an anticipatory agent, in Thibault's model, is also a semiotic technology for constructing the aforementioned self-regulating self-as-other. Neisser theorizes that "in imagining what may happen and recalling what has happened, we leave the realm of objective awareness. Our consciousness *extends* to the possible as well as the actual . . . The extended awareness of imagination requires an analogously extended ecological self" (1992: 8). Neisser's extended self precedes the imagining self in Thibault's model: it is a system of discourse genres, inter-textual formations, and other normative trends defined by the social heteroglossia. The extended self is simply a strategic assembly informed by the imagining self's to-date ontogenetic trajectories that, in turn, recursively delimits the extension. The same is true for the expansion of self into self-as-other, for interactants are necessarily anchored to their ecosocial environments.

Overall, *Agency* comprehensively reveals that individuals negotiate self, self-as-other, and other via interactive discourse. The negotiation of meaning between self and other primarily occurs in the linguistic arena, and it does so via metafunctions and the mood system. The metafunctions primarily determine the assembly and selection of an individual's re-voicements of the social heteroglossia. Here, Thibault relies on the work of M. A. K. Halliday and others for the categories (experiential, interpersonal, textual and logical [4]), for a system of linguistic self-organization. This self-organization is sourced in an individual, who embodies an array of attractors (discursive orientations or likelihoods) that network themselves based on past experience and future projection of the self's ontogenetic trajectories. However, the discursive negotiation of self-other meaning is not simply an instantiation of probabilities. As Thibault points out, mood categories of language are also attractor-networks themselves, and they organize subject-object,

nominal-complement, figure-clause viewpoints. It is useful to conceptualize these viewpoints as loops that posit action-trajectory points of departure while at the same time charting the roles that the participants are likely to adopt in regards to each other. Thibault explains modal discursive teleology as "projects which entrain the goal-seeking trajectories of agents. Projects are higher-scalar attractors of the dynamics of the trajectories – ontogenetic and logogenetic – of the individual" (205). These projects are themselves the results of "appeals from a state," which are "the ways in which desires function as attractors of the dynamics of the system" (205). Both of these processes, metafunctional and modal, are themselves the nature of discourse information, which is the probabilistic restriction of possible meaning. Maneuvering through these restrictions is the process of agency, which, for Thibault is self-reflexive evaluation and selection resulting in moral consciousness (e.g., an implicitly invoiced discursive sign-system for an overarching ecosocial system of behavioral tolerance; see also Robert Hodge's and Gunther Kress's ideological complexes and the logonomic system [1988]). The essential component in the agency/consciousness segment of Thibault's study is the discursive nature of simultaneously negotiating self, world, and other (194). Further, consciousness is not a state (or access to a state); it is a meaning-making process. *Agency* reveals, quite aptly, that diachronically, consciousness is a trajectory, not a series of discrete locations, opening new insights into a number of linked disciplines that concentrate either on selfhood itself or the visible (and recorded – or artistically modeled) effects of selfhood.

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SRB Insight:

Take Five: Visions of Deely

By Inna Semetsky

This 'SRB Insight' is a reflection on John Deely's tome *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-first Century* (2001). The essay will specifically focus on the triadic structure of a Peircean genuine sign. Contrary to the dualistic division between man and nature, the triadic relation establishes a semiotic bridge between the two. What constitutes such a triad? Building on Deely's explanations of the types of causality and Peirce's three (onto)logical categories, this essay will propose a mathematical structure of a genuine sign constructed on the complex plane. This approach, as the argument develops, will help to solve at least two "mysteries": first,

the paradox of new knowledge, and second, the as yet unexplained relationship between "three worlds" posited by Roger Penrose (Penrose [Penrose, Shimony, Cartwright, Hawking] 1997; Penrose 2005). The corollary is such that the semiotic structure of the natural world – defined as a semiosphere by Lotman (1990) and Hoffmeyer (1993) alike; or later as signoshere by Deely (2001) – is not only a physical possibility but also a logical necessity. The essay concludes by asserting that in order to participate fully in a play of semiosis we have to understand the language of signs. Will it then become the 5th Age of Understanding?

Peirce's triadic structure of a sign presupposes a sign-object-interpretant

relation (Fig. 1), and the triadic relation as pertaining to reasoning includes also the First category of abductive inference.

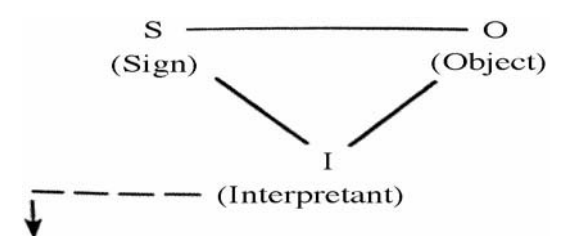


Fig. 1: A triadic relation

Peirce gave the name *semiosis* to the process of generation, exchange, and interpretation of signs, that is, a continuous communication and interaction between

signs by virtue of quasi-utterer (that, for example, utters the signs of the weather) and quasi-interpreter. Due to the infinite stream of interpretants, that is, the systems relating a sign vehicle to its object, the total number of meanings is potentially infinite. At the ontological level, the Peircean category of Firstness is a mode of being as possibility, Secondness – actuality, and Thirdness – potentiality. But because thoughts as the signs in the category of Thirdness must include Firstness as qualities and Secondness as facts, the ontological and experiential levels interpenetrate: the *potentia* of Thirdness is what connects the possible with the actual.

Although Peirce assessed meanings as “altogether virtual ... [because located] not in what is actually thought, but in what this thought may be connected with in representation by subsequent thoughts” (Peirce CP 5.289), *in futuro*, this realm of the virtual nonetheless constitutes “Reality which by some means contrives to determine the Sign to its Representation” (Peirce CP 4.536); the representation ensuring that thought has passed from a genuine doubt to belief. Peircean doubt is, however, not a personal uncertainty of a Cartesian subject, but has an objective, external, origin.

Deely (2001) expresses the difference in the following way: “Modern philosophy began with the universal doubt whereby Descartes had made being a function of his thinking. Pragmaticism [Peircean pragmatism] begins rather from a belief in the reality of what is more than thought, and proceeds by continually putting to test the contrast between thought and what is more than thought, between merely objective being and objective being which also reveals something of the physical universe” (Deely 2001: 627, brackets mine).

The problem of *being* as first known – *the primum cognitum* – is addressed by Deely more than once in his book, beginning with the famous Plato’s *Meno* dialogue, to which Deely devotes ten pages. Elsewhere¹, I attempted to solve the paradox of new knowledge that has been haunting us since Socratic times by means of introducing Peircean abduction as capable of creating an “irreducibly triadic” (Deely 2001: 614) relation between experience and cognition. The abductive understanding “comes to us as a flash. It is an act of *insight*” (Peirce CP 5.181), which is fallible but still has a mysterious power “of guessing right” (Peirce CP 6.530) even while being pre-conscious and not rationally controllable. Peirce noticed that “the first premise is not actually thought, though it is in the mind habitually. This, of itself, would not make the inference unconscious. But it is so because it is not recognized as an inference; the conclusion is accepted without our knowing how” (Peirce CP 8.64-65).

Abduction appears to function instantaneously not because there is no temporal interval of inference, but because the mind is unaware of when it begins or ends, and represents intuition blending into intellectual knowledge. Intuition for Peirce does mean cognition that will be determined by the object outside one’s personal *cogito* and is not by itself capable of representation

but needs thought as Thirdness, which “is... a synonym for representation” (Peirce CP 5.105). In the absence of mediation, though, it is indeed the “first, present, immediate, fresh, new, initiative, original, spontaneous, free ... Only, remember that every description of it must be false to it” (Peirce CP 1.357).

Keeping the paradoxical flavour of Peirce’s words in mind, I suggest the following model of a sign as a thought-process shown diagrammatically on a complex plane (Fig. 2). Abduction – as an insight, or intuition, or imagination – is modeled by means of imaginary numbers “located” on the vertical axis of the complex plane, and complemented by discursive reason (or physical action alike, capable of being expressed in verbal signs or propositional language; language as a mode of action). It is modeled horizontally along the real axis. Represented by vectors, that is, having in principle both mathematical and physical properties, together they form the triangle on a complex plane (Fig. 2), analogous to the genuine triadic sign as shown in Fig 1.

A real *general* then, as an “indispensable ingredient of reality” (Peirce CP 5.431, quoted in Deely 2001:621), will be modeled by a point on a complex plane expressed by a complex number (the vertex of the triangle in Fig. 2) that has both real and imaginary components, $a+bi$. It is at this point where “the physical universe ceases to be merely physical” (Deely 2001: 621) – that is, becoming irreducible to its description in terms of classical mechanics – because this is where “[t]he realm of brute force and physical interaction as such ... becomes caught up in the semiotic web, and the universe becomes perfused with signs” (Deely 2001: 621).

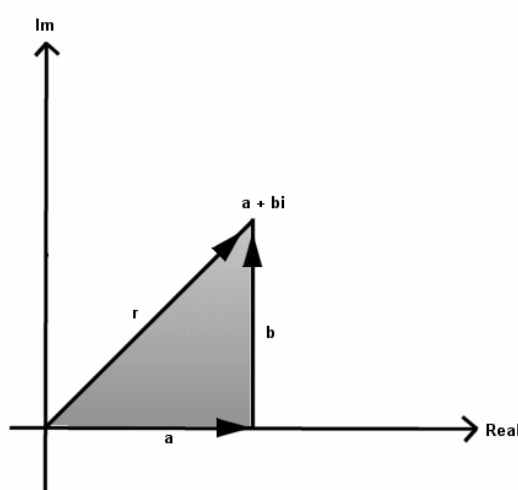


Fig. 2: A triadic relation on the complex plane

This diagram dissolves the analytic paradox: It is the Thirdness as a diagonal transversal line represented by the resulting vector r that enables the coming into being of the new objects of knowledge; it casts its own shadow a as a projection on a horizontal axis as if in Plato’s infamous cave. The dyadic relation alone would not lead to the creation of meanings: a sign, “in order to fulfil its office, to actualise its potency, must be compelled by its object” (Peirce CP 5.554); therefore it strives to abductively (bi) leap from the unconscious into being integrated into consciousness.

If we imagine positioning ourselves in the very midst of this resultant line, there are

two perspectives that may emerge: “Viewing a thing from the outside, considering its relations of action and reaction with other things, it appears as matter. Viewing it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness” (Peirce CP 6.268).

The abduction as a quasi-instantaneous action is informed (as *informare* in Latin means giving material form) by the instance of the real, here-and-now experience, and the magnitude along the vertical axis of imaginary numbers would inadvertently affect the direction the resulting diagonal vector would have taken. A novel hypothesis might literally, as we can see from Fig. 2, bring a new direction into the line of reasoning. Abduction (or intuition, or imagination, or insight, in mentalistic terms) creates a *magnitude* along the vertical axis equivalent to logical depth (cf. Hoffmeyer 1993). Peirce’s semiotics reflects the novelty that alone provides “*uberty* or richness of thought” (Deely 2001: 627) contained in the Thirdness-of-Firstness that carries the level of reality over and above the customary mechanistic Secondness usually considered as constituting “the whole truth about existence” (Deely 2001: 627).

The diagrammatic representation expressed in Fig. 2 is conceptualised on the premise of what Peirce called “a portraiture of Thought” (Peirce CP 4.11). As such, it conforms to the semiotic categories of representation, relationality and mediation and appears to be capable, albeit in a static format, of “rendering literally visible before one’s very eyes the operation of thinking *in actu*” (Peirce CP 4.571), or demonstrating the very dynamics of the reasoning process. The field of the complex numbers is undifferentiated and would appear to be, in Peirce words, “what the world was to Adam on the day he opened his eyes to it, before he had drawn any distinctions, or had become conscious of his own experience” (Peirce CP 1.302).

The complex plane as a whole contains what Peirce would have called *an admixture* or, in other words, the weighted sum (cf. Penrose 1997) of real and imaginary components, a and bi . Peircean holism anticipated a peculiar parts-whole system’s organization, which conceptualises all causal relations as if flowing in two directions at once, bottom-up and top-down, thereby creating a strange feedback loop. The triangle as per Fig. 2 represents, in terms of the logic of explanation, a self-cause disregarded by modern science that has reduced the four Aristotelian causes, including formal and final, to a single efficient causation.

As Deely points out (2001: 611-668), based on Aristotle’s fourfold scheme, the Latins later refined the concept of causality to account for the objective order of physical phenomena thus abolishing, in a sense, the dualism between cause and reason. The external, ideal, causality – a type of blueprint, or plan, or design – is introduced from without, in contrast to the natural Aristotelian formal cause that organises its material from within. One more causal type, however, pertains to the role of observer who exercises a type of objective causality. Deely

(2001: 633) explains its functioning in the following way: “On the subjective side, a thinker may try to turn attention toward or away from [the object]; but the measure of success lies not in the subjective effort but in the objective content surviving the effort. And since presenting objects is exactly the function of signs, the action of signs is a species of this...extrinsic formal causality, called ‘specificative’,” which is irreducible to either ideal or intrinsic formal cause but retains, as embedded in the total system, the *objective* significance for the human *subject*.

Peirce’s categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness demand such an admixture of mind-dependent and mind-independent relations that are ultimately supposed to solve the problem of intelligibility and understanding. The field to which Adam awoke is indeed the weighted sum of “dream and reality, possibility and actuality” (Deely 2001: 645) in its as yet undifferentiated state of both mind-dependent and mind-independent relations that comprise the totality of human experience. In other words, the causal loop demands accessing a quasi-mind, that is, a dialogical organism-environment communication as an interaction so as to ensure the sign’s potential relation to itself as a condition for ultimate intelligibility.

The triadic structure is a must: it has to comprise all three Peircean categories so as to reason (Thirdness) in a right way, that is, analytically (Secondness) but also insightfully or intuitively (Firstness). As Deely points out, this is logic as an ethics of thinking (2001: 622), which for Peirce is inseparable from human conduct, that is, an ethics of action. The very function of abduction consists in creating a semiotic bridge that would have joined the infamous gap between existence and essence. Its effect consists in the “inward [or] *potential* actions...which somehow influence the formation of habits” (Peirce CP 6.286) precisely because these actions were initiated due to the causal loop, the circularity of Thirdness having provided conditions for the flight of abductive inference at the level of “practical, experimental effects” (Deely 2001: 617).

In fact, an abductive guess is essentially an experiment. If there were no triadic structure, then the leap of imagination or insight as a sign of Firstness, if such indeed were to take place, would have sunk back into the dyadic existence, back to the point of its own departure and, worse, we would not even know this as there would not be any difference for us to interpret and, respectively, to make a difference in the world of action, to create novelty.

Deely (2001: 617) notices the importance of metaphysics for Peirce: “there was more to metaphysics” than posited by a reductive British empiricism. It is only at the level of Secondness that the natural world is limited to its solely mechanical aspect, similarly to experience being reduced to action and reaction. Nature is much broader and includes its own virtual or semiotic dimension, which is however never beyond experience. But in semiotic terms experience itself is a relational category. Structured by sign-relations, human experience is an expression of a deeper semiotic process.

Because every sign conveys a general nature of thought, and Thirdness is ultimately a mode of being of intelligence or reason, generality does come about from a quasi-mind (the complex plane, in terms of Fig. 2) called by Peirce a repository of ideas or significant forms.

Signs are capable of getting information, transmitting something of the thought’s general nature, and transforming it into significant meanings that cannot be reduced to either “merely a physical [or] even merely a psychological dose of energy” (Peirce c.1907: ISP nos. 205-6 as quoted in Deely 2001: 629). This level of significance is semiotic in its core and, by analogy with the *biosphere*, it has acquired the name *semiosphere* during post-Peircean time (Lotman 1990; Hoffmeyer 1993). Deely (2001: 630) suggests the all-encompassing term *signosphere* to pay tribute to what he calls Peirce’s grand vision that has an advantage of being rooted in science rather than in mysticism.

An active interpretation is what transforms the brute facts of the natural world into interpretable signs with which the universe is always already perfused. And interpretation creates the meaning (for the interpreter), or provides an experience with *value* that, albeit implicit in each and every triadic sign, is as yet absent among the brute facts of Secondness.

Process metaphysics and the absence of ontological dualism therefore presuppose what physicist Roger Penrose, non-incidentally, has defined in terms of a “contact with some sort of Platonic world” (Penrose [Penrose, Shimony, Cartwright, Hawking] 1997:125), the latter seemingly analogous to the Peircean quasi-mind. The relationship between the three worlds, namely the physical world, the Platonic world of ideas, and the mental world has been considered a mystery, heavily debated, and dubbed as gaps in Penrose’s toilings (Grush & Churchland 1995).² The core of Penrose’s argument is that the physical world may be considered a projection of the Platonic world and the world of mind arises from part of the physical world, thus enabling one in this process to insightfully grasp and, respectively, understand some part of the Platonic world.

Because the Platonic world is inhabited by mathematical truths, but also due to the “common feeling that these mathematical constructions are products of our mentality” (Penrose [Penrose, Shimony, Cartwright, Hawking] 1997: 96), the mysterious dependence of the natural world on strict mathematical laws and the tri-relative relationship can be inscribed in the following Fig. 3:

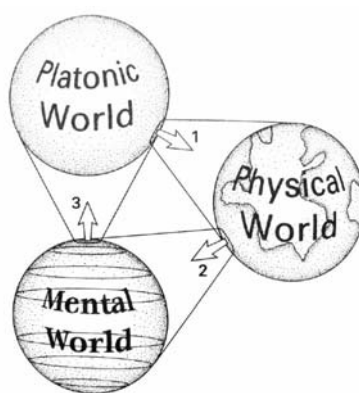


Fig. 3: Three worlds and three mysteries (Penrose [Penrose, Shimony, Cartwright, Hawking] 1997: 96)

The relations stop being mysterious if we consider Penrose’s three worlds as constituting a semiotic triangle (cf. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) and encompassing Peirce’s three modes of being. The laws expressed by the Peircean Thirdness of habit-taking would then be represented, for Penrose, by a “part of Platonic world which encompasses our physical world” (Penrose [Penrose, Shimony, Cartwright, Hawking] 1997: 97) of matter, or Seconds. Bits of Thirdness, we may say, are “accessible by our mentality” by virtue of the Firstness of insight or abduction, the latter intrinsically non-computable. Indeed, what *in-habits* the Platonic world is not only the true but also the good and beautiful, which are all “non-computable elements – for example, judgement, common sense, insight, aesthetic sensibility, compassion, morality” (Penrose [Penrose, Shimony, Cartwright, Hawking] 1997: 125), all the *moral* attributes of the psyche that necessarily mediates between world and intellect. The causal circuit closes up on itself in the process of creative semiosis.

The rules of projective geometry (which served as a basis for conceptualising the diagram as per Fig. 2) establish the one-to-one correspondence as in a perspectival composition towards a vanishing point implying therefore isomorphism, or mapping of the archetypal ideas of the Platonic world onto the mental *and* physical worlds³. The level of meanings would exceed references because it encompasses our thinking (mental world) together with our doing (physical world, the world of action). Abduction enables the grasp of moral meanings as *primum cognitum* making therefore “a *transcendental relative*” (Deely 2001: 619) in fact immanent in (a fine-tuned!) perception.

The brute facts of the physical world intervene in practice and not only supervene in theory: “Firstness is a dream out of which *ens reale*, the category of Secondness, inevitably at times awakens a sleeper” (Deely 2001: 661). An ex-sleeper who has been awakened has changed her perspective or her point of view quite literally: a perspectival point is now in the mental world, leading to isomorphism appearing between a generic mental representation and the other two worlds, the world of ideas *together with* the world of action. The archetypal ideas that are, intrinsically, Platonic forms without content acquire this very content relationally within the dynamics of semiosis. The informational content therefore always already *is*, albeit potentially or unconsciously. What in analytic philosophy is called the language of thought must therefore be extra-linguistic: it is a semiotic system comprising the “language” of signs that, by definition, would have included not only verbal symbols but also icons and indices as per Peirce’s triad. While the language of thought hypothesis considers the Mentalese to be innate, the grammar of the language of signs functions as a semiotic bridge over the public-private split thus creating the meaning for an expanded experience in which human mind does not simply observe, but participates in the world. Conversely, our pre-reflexive actions are instantiations of the language of signs. It is only logical that in order to participate *fully* in a play of semiosis we have to learn how to

read and understand its language. It is the knowledge of the language of signs⁴ that will move us closer into what, I believe, we (and Deely) shall call the 5th Age of Understanding, which would have provided us with an unprecedented freedom to act intelligently and wisely in the world perfused with signs.

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Notes

¹ See Semetsky, I. (2005) "Learning by abduction: a geometrical interpretation," *Semiotica* 157, 1-4: 199-212.

² Rick Grush and Patricia Churchland (1995) argue against Penrose's positing a possible direct insight into Platonic truths, and therefore understanding the meanings of the (mathematical) concepts, over following the logic of computational rules. But the logic and psychology of abduction, as advanced in this paper, would have refuted the claim.

³ This is my conjecture solely, albeit supported by Roger Penrose's positing of the Platonic world as being projected onto the physical. Rigorous proof would have required a detour to set theory and the concept of infinite cardinality and is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴ See Semetsky, I. 2006 "The language of signs: Semiosis and the memories of the future," *SOPHIA: International Journal for philosophy of religion, metaphysical theology and ethics*, 45/1: 95-116.

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THE SEMIOTIC REVIEW OF BOOKS

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Editorial

The Lesson of Durkheim

Paul Bouissac

Two main considerations prompted the Toronto Semiotic Circle to launch a new journal primarily devoted to the publication of review articles. Firstly, the sheer number of books appearing every year under the banner of semiotics makes it increasingly difficult to keep abreast of the developments in the field. Secondly, a still greater number of publications in many other disciplines have substantial content eminently relevant to the intellectual interests of semioticians; however, many of these important books may go unnoticed if no attempt is made to systematically monitor such publications.

Journals such as *Semiotica*, *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, *RSSI*, *The American Journal of Semiotics*, and others regularly make commendable efforts in this direction, but their primary function is to publish the results of research in the form of original scholarly articles and, consequently, the space they can allot to reviews is necessarily limited. Their excellent review sections can cover only a very small portion of the semiotic literature appearing in any given year, let alone books published in other disciplines. However, the contents of many of these books make important, albeit often indirect, contributions to the science of signs.

In view of this general situation, the aim of *The Semiotic Review of Books* is twofold: to keep its readership informed of the state of the art in semiotics and to monitor the literature in a range of other disciplines which, at least in some respects, are important for the advancement of semiotics. It is also hoped that specialists in a variety of disciplines will benefit from the pluridisciplinary scope of this new journal.

Obviously, the focus on other disciplines is the most challenging part of this endeavour. It is also, probably, the most urgent. Many semioticians share the view that semiotics has reached a critical turn. Some speak of epistemological crisis, others wonder whether the theoretical innovativeness and pioneering spirit which marked the beginnings of modern semiotics have not petered out. The exclusive interest of some semioticians for the classical and medieval roots of the movement tend to defuse C.S. Peirce's and F. De Saussure's revolutionary thinking. On the other hand, those who treat their programmatic statements as axioms or dogmas run the risk of locking semiotics into a circuitous exegesis which blatantly belies the venturesome thought of those who started the process of surveying - from a distance - this *terra incognita*.

Indeed, Peirce and Saussure wrote and said in many ways that they envisioned semiotics as a science to be; they were convinced of the novelty of their epistemological forays; but they were also aware of, and even at times discouraged by the immensity of the task they had undertaken. They both used the term "science" to characterize the program of research which they contemplated. In spite of the current nihilist temptations of anti-theoretical essayism and textual hedonism a great many semioticians today continue to strive to construct the Promethean discipline adumbrated a century ago.

A reflexion on the history of sociology may cast some light on the current position of semiotics. Almost a century elapsed between Auguste Comte's conception of sociology as the science of social phenomena and the paradigmatic institutionalization of French sociology during the first decade of the XXth century. In this process the role of Emile Durkheim and his group was crucial, in particular through the founding of *L'Année sociologique* in 1898. We must remember that

when Durkheim began lecturing in "education and social science" at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bordeaux in 1887, "there was no working institutional provision in France to foster scholarship in matters Auguste Comte had defined two generations earlier as the object of sociology" (Karady, 1983: 72). There existed an abundant sociological literature, mostly speculative, but none of those who shared an interest in the advent of a science of social phenomena was a professional sociologist. Their institutional anchorage was spread across the range of a variety of established disciplines: law, history of religion, history, economics, linguistics, education, art history, sinology, geography, music, etc. - a situation familiar to modern semioticians. It is generally considered that the turning point was the creation of *L'Année sociologique* (Clark, 1968; Karady, 1983). This yearly publication was at first largely, and eventually exclusively, devoted to reviewing, from a sociological perspective, the research published in all the other disciplines whose contents pertained to a would-be science of social phenomena. Durkheim's justification for this editorial strategy in the preface of the first issue contains a lesson whose pertinence goes beyond the situation to which the Durkheimians were confronted: "*L'Année sociologique* has not as its only purpose, not even as its main purpose to present the current state of the art concerning the sociological literature proper. In our opinion, (researchers) have a pressing need to be regularly informed about the research that is done in the special sciences: history of law, of manners, of religion, statistics, economics, etc. because there lies the *prima materia* from which sociology must be built. Indeed, if a sociologist is not to waste his time in vain dialectical exercises, he must acquire a vast and diversified knowledge and collect data which are so scattered that it is always possible to miss essential ones."

Durkheim goes on to criticize sociologists who dogmatize about law, ethics, religion, etc., using *ad hoc* examples or, still worse, doing away with data altogether, and exclusively relying on "natural philosophy", not noticing that considerable relevant materials have already been accumulated in the data-oriented disciplines. But Durkheim's plea for closer contacts between sociology and the disciplines he lists is not intended for the sole benefit of sociologists. According to Durkheim, the "special sciences" often operate within narrow conceptual frameworks and sociology could help them to widen their theoretical scope.

Durkheim's seven-page preface and the historical situation it describes may help semioticians to assess their own position in current academic structures. Some may even find the Durkheimians' strategy inspiring and they may wish to join the editorial team of SRB in attempting to create an organ through which the semiotic substance of the current "special sciences" can regularly be brought to the attention of the semiotic community. To Peirce and Saussure, the construction of "semeiotic" or "sémiologie" appeared as a colossal task in part because they were keenly aware of the vast areas of knowledge still waiting to be discovered. The stunning advances made on all the fronts of scientific research during the last hundred years have not made the task easier. More than ever scientific hyper-specializations with their cornucopia of data cry out for a theory which could provide a comprehensive model. In particular the disciplines which deal with some aspects of the ways in which organisms have developed the capacity to store, structure and share information, wittingly and unwittingly, both within the groups or societies they form and across generations, lack the theory which

would not only help to integrate the various levels of complexities uncovered by the "special sciences", but also afford some degree of understanding of how those processes relate to more fundamental laws on the one side and to mental abstract constructs on the other.

Inspired by Durkheim's example, SRB will try to play its modest part in this process. But launching a new journal is always a challenge, particularly if it does not fill a "natural" slot, so to speak, in the disciplinary grid of the academic framework. Raising the small budget which made it possible to plan and sustain the first year's three issues has not been easy. SRB is meant to be a no-frills journal. Production costs have been kept to a minimum: no extravagant design, plain paper, no dead weight so that the postage can remain reasonable. There is no need to add that SRB will achieve its goals only with the support of a large, international constituency of subscribers and collaborators.

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