

Editorial

Regaining Victoria Welby

By Luke Simons

At the time of her death in 1912, the Bishop of Winchester noted that 'People often went away puzzled, and often thought her disconnected and unsatisfying, but they seldom, if ever, failed to feel her power and to find that she had communicated to them abiding impulses or germs of serious thought'. (Bowsfield 1990: 277)

Reactions to Lady Welby have not changed much. Ninety-one years after her death, Victoria Lady Welby and her work on Significs still remains largely misunderstood. One of the most comprehensive studies (thus far) of Welby is that compiled and edited by Walter Schmitz, entitled *Significs and Language: The Articulate Form of our Expressive and Interpretative Resources*. Schmitz observes that "All the classifications and characterizations of Lady Welby's work to date . . . have been led astray by superficial aspects of her publications . . . which in the long run were obviously not understood, and thus arrived at biased judgements and systematizations." (1985: lxxvii) Schmitz then asserts his wish:

. . . to counter this development with the thesis that Lady Welby's significs as a whole can only - or at least better - be understood if it is taken as part of a tradition which in hidden or open form persists throughout the entire history of (at least) European civilization. Ungeheuer . . . has designated this tradition as that of the 'cognitio symbolica' because it bears all the features of 'symbolic knowledge' introduced by Leibniz in his 'Meditationes', which is contrasted there with 'intuitive knowledge'. (Ibid)

Schmitz defines symbolic knowledge as that which is arrived at "with the intermediary help of signs. . . . Here signs are used in the place of things, in thinking words are used instead of ideas." (Ibid) Schmitz thereby himself attempts to systematize and to recover this lost thinker

by lumping her into a category so broad ("the most widespread in the field of distinct knowledge") that it includes systems of thought, like Nietzsche's, fundamentally antithetical to Welby's. Schmitz is right in observing that Welby's work has been misunderstood and therefore misrepresented, but he rather quickly joins the group.

Despite Welby's intense interest in language, granting words primacy in the thinking process, for starters, is a precariously un-Welbian premise (as I will show below). More importantly though, Welby would never have contrasted Significs with "intuitive knowledge." To the contrary, intuitive knowledge, which appears in Welby's thinking as "Mother-sense," plays an important role in Significs, in fact a central one. And this is the point that Schmitz, and everyone else, misses, or simply refuses to address. It is perhaps to suit his own ends, therefore, that Schmitz, in publishing several of Welby's essays for the first time, otherwise laudably, sustains the term "primal sense," imposed by Welby's previous publishers, instead of recommending "Mother-sense," Welby's preferred, more accurate, and far more pervading concept (were one but to glance through her unpublished work). This grounding concept, at the root of Significs, had been completely ignored until Schmitz's study, but then appeared, and still appears, only, and inaccurately, as the transient precursor that became "primal sense."

If we really wish to better understand Welby, a recovery of what she means by "Mother-sense" is absolutely necessary and long overdue. It is in service to this concept that Welby develops the science of Significs in the first place, as she makes clear in the original essay, identified as "Last Written April 08," that Schmitz publishes as "Primal Sense and Significs": "Significs cannot adequately be defined as the science of meaning or the study of significance; since before it can become either, it has to be recognized and cultivated as the recovery, orderly development,

and strenuously practical application (before all else in education) of the *primordial method of mind*, one which is necessarily the precursor and condition of all forms of mental activity, including even that of logic itself."¹ As this passage suggests, Mother-sense (here called "the primordial method of mind" for the sake of publication) is everywhere in Welby's work, if only implicitly, and always only implicitly in her published work, hence the already-mentioned, enduring puzzlement. Schmitz, for example, correctly observes, but cannot really account for why Welby "constantly uses an organic analogy for language." (1985: lxxviii) The same declaration by Welby challenges the accuracy of another of Schmitz's assumptions, that Welby adds "primal sense" as an afterthought to her "central concepts" of "sense," "meaning," and "interpretation." (1985: xciv) Whether the Mother-sense, or "the primordial method of mind," or "the primal sense," Welby clearly affirms that this concept (howsoever named) should be at the *centre* of what Significs is all about.

The original, typewritten title of the essay that provides the passage above is "Mother-sense and Significs." "Mother-sense" is stroked out by hand, and "Primal Sense" is pencilled in above it. In earlier versions, such as that identified as "April 16: 1907," not yet tainted by the demands of editors, Welby explicitly outlines the relationship of Mother-sense to Significs: "The connection between Mother-sense and Significs may be put thus: Mother-sense is what takes up and supplies to us the material of immediate awareness, conscious and interpretive. It is the successor in evolution, or constitutes a further stage in value, of the animal's instinct." Welby here anticipates the need for, and summarily provides, a broadly-sketched but indisputable difference between Mother-sense and what it would get misunderstood as ("the animal's instinct" or "primal sense"). In any number of ways, which I hope to clarify, Mother-sense is something *more*.

Welby makes clear her preference for the term "Mother-sense" as well as the necessity for its substitution. She writes: "My own transition (as a matter of precaution) from 'mother' to 'primal' . . . sense is an illustration of the difficulties created by our neglect of Significs. . . . I find that everywhere I am supposed to use the term in a narrow and popular sense." (1908: ccxliii-liv) Welby does not merely "reflect there on the reasons for the change from a signific point of view," as Schmitz claims (1985: ccxxxviii); rather, she clearly means she has been misunderstood, and that she has conceded to "the narrow and popular sense" only for the sake of publication. She reluctantly sidles up to reductionist evolutionary thinking, while her ideas run in the opposite direction. The concession has stuck, and so, too, thus, have the perplexities and misunderstandings.

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Table of Contents

Editorial:

Regaining Victoria Welby 1-4
By Luke Simons

Back to the Future 4-7
By Scott Simpkins

On Translation 7-10
By Anne Urbancic

Architecture and Ambivalence 10-12
By Simone Brott

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Protecting the Throne from the Cosmos Herself

Almost by default, “Mother-sense” was not publishable. Two primary obstacles can be identified as responsible for blocking its reception: gender politics and a general metaphysical aversion. The gender-based resistance, once exposed, practically defeats itself. The skepticism about metaphysics, on the other hand, is still alive and well, which might help explain the ongoing practice of (convenient) mis-readings. What I hope to show, however, is that Welby was herself astutely aware of the prevalent distrust of metaphysics, but that she proceeded nevertheless with the assertion that most thought systems rest “unconsciously” on an unacknowledged metaphysical foundation, and that this should simply be openly explored instead of quietly masked or outright ignored.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, a deliberately crude misreading of Welby’s Mother-sense would have been all too easy. Following the Darwinian coup, Welby was recommending a Mother to the now-vacant throne of the Father. Notwithstanding its crudeness, the idea is not so far off; however, her feminist metaphysics simply did not have a fair trial. Welby describes the most common misunderstanding of Mother-sense: “I cannot possibly mean by Mother-sense, mainly, still less, only the shrewd or practical insight of the typical ‘mother’.” (1908: ccxliii) This type of misunderstanding, and its gendered motive, appears in a letter from F.C.S. Schiller: “The word ‘Mother-sense’ is a serious handicap. It at once suggests to all *men* that it is no affair of theirs. . . . If women can not or will not give expression to their side of the question, they condemn us to lasting ignorance and themselves to a secondary position.” (1907: ccxlvii)

Following this curiously contradictory logic (Welby *has* after all just given expression to her “side of the question”), which governs his entire letter to Welby, Schiller then recommends the substitution of “Common-sense” or “the maternal instinct” for Mother-sense. Like the Beadle’s arbitrary authority that drives Virginia Woolf off rich Oxbridge turf, Schiller’s “recommendations” repel Welby’s range, away from its grand metaphysical grounds, back onto ordinary gravel. “Primal Sense” is the outcome of this (male) prodding, an outcome that has persisted, and which clearly needs re-examination.

To properly recover Mother-sense, its metaphysical aspect also needs to be accounted for; there is no denying that at the base of Welby’s thought there is a belief in Truth (although Truth consists of working truths [see, for example, Welby’s reply to Schiller, published in Schmitz, undated: ccxlix]). For this reason, it is inappropriate to categorize her with Nietzsche (1844-1900), as Schmitz has done.

The Mother-sense might be deemed transcendental, though it is inextricably linked to the material world. At various times, Welby refers to it as the “Matrical sense,” or the Matrix, that which is all things, living and non-living. Perhaps, in this way, it resembles the rhizomatic multiplicity of Deleuze (1987) that grows from the middle. To attain full(er) consciousness, it created the Father, tied closely to logic, to diversify and explore. It moves and adjusts with its semiconscious purpose, which is how Welby explains the stumbling procession of evolution.

Here, Mother-sense resembles the “Immanent Will” of her contemporary, Thomas Hardy. His agnostic response to the blow of Darwinism, itself largely derived from Schopenhauer’s ‘Will’, has been described as “the non-conscious basic force that underlies, is expressed by, and also is all phenomena, living and non-living; it is the force that impels all processes, creates all matter, and is immanent in all its expression.” (Bailey 1956: 88) Simply put, Mother-sense is the universe that radiates sense everywhere, the generative principle, the ‘Mother’ of all senses. But in the end, it must be noted, Welby deliberately avoids any rigid systematization or definition. (Cf. another of Schmitz’s observations that he cannot fully account for: “[Lady Welby] hoped that her diverse vague formulations would be taken as a stimulating impulse and would thus be the starting point for necessary systematic studies” [1985: xciv].)

For Welby, fixity was the enemy, but through various manuscripts seemingly never intended for publication, Welby imagines a knowable model of the cosmos. She explains: “*Mother is indeed or ought to be, the wide and general, ‘Father’ the specialised, term. The pre-sexual organism was the maternal, and included the paternal element.*” (“June 30th, 1908”) In another essay, Welby further imagines this pre-sexual organism, prior to its “giving birth” to the paternal element:

The Mother-sense did not merely feel and react, quiver and respond; it Knew - first its own ignorance and then its own power to learn, and last, the secrets of life all hidden and packed into its own astounding germ which within its very organism had grown and developed until at the Quickening it called out Life’s message - I am here, I move, I must break forth and conquer. (“March 23rd, 1907”)

In still another essay, Welby describes the moment that would enable the Mother-sense to “break forth and conquer”:

The original Parent, the Matrix, the Mater, says to the Patrix within—*Go forth, as Son to become Father. Go forth and leave me to Motherhood. Become my Strength and become my Reason while I conceive and create. Achieve thou and conquer, rule thou and regulate. I am Principle and Productive Order: translate Me and make laws and methods for conduct and for thought.* (“December 23rd, 1907”)

This analogy positions Mother-sense at the centre, as the original generative unity, and demotes the Father to a secondary position, as a regulatory force aligned with “rules” and “laws.” Although a much curtailed representation, this is Mother-sense in its most abstract, unpublished, and vulnerable form.

The criticism that would follow from this metaphysical vulnerability is of the variety already mentioned: some would argue (and have, see Hardwick [1977]), not entirely erroneously, that Welby is merely towing the remnants of Christianity. Her connection with Christian theology cannot be denied, nor should it be denied, but her model of Mother-sense is not Christianity any more than Einstein’s relativity is Newtonian mechanics, nor the Copernican universe the Ptolemaic cosmos. Welby’s model could be characterized as a revision of Christianity, but a revision that takes into

account up-to-date scientific knowledge. (For a similar attempt to reconcile theological and scientific modes of thought see Peirce [1995], one of Welby’s closest correspondents.) Because of this, Mother-sense is actually a dramatic break from Christian thought, but by Welby’s own principles, a “break from” does not have to be, and should not be, a total “disavowal of.” Indeed, “Significs can never become a denial of any opposite. It can never be controversial.” (“June 30th, 1908”) Her founding of Significs is (ironically) based on her observation of widespread misunderstanding, and subsequent conflicts, and inefficiency, among and between the various disciplines at the turn of the century. (Hardwick 1977: xxi) In true Welby fashion, she sought to employ all knowledge, cooperatively, in the search for the best model of ‘truth’ available.

Welby quotes a private correspondence to explain how “common sense” fits into the picture. She defines it as, the common or ordinary feelings or view of humanity in regard to any matter, or to matters in general, the “common feeling or sense” of humankind as to what is true, proper, wise, or the contrary. In this, an individual may share more or less largely, and is said to have *more* or *less* sense accordingly: the justifiable assumption being that “the great soul of humanity is just.” (1896: 26-27)

This passage makes clear why common sense cannot be equated with Mother-sense: common sense is a product of the intellectual sense, of the Father, and is subject to fallacy, while Mother-sense is pre-rational and, by nature, truth itself. Mother-sense is better identified with “the great soul of humankind that is just,” upon which the principle of common sense depends.

Pragmatics of Significs, or The Anchor of Sense

It is important to recognize that one need not extend one’s faith to the extent that the above analogy demands in order to appreciate Welby’s ideas. “Mother-sense” and “the Father” have their material counterparts. In fact, they are only arrived at through induction, as the culmination of material observations. They arise from, and always point to, the material world. Should they not, there should be no questioning that Welby would be the first to advocate the necessity of revision. Linked fundamentally by a profound humanism that allows for human progress, Welby’s assumptions are not dissimilar to Marxist assumptions (cf. any Marxist discussion of base and superstructure). Accordingly, critics such as Schmitz and Susan Petrilli (1990) have noticed the similarities between Welby’s ideas and Marxist language theory, mostly for their mutual emphasis on the practical, communicative aspect of language. In this regard, Peirce’s Pragmaticism could also be considered.

Welby’s development of Significs represents the material force of her thinking. The three tiers of the model of Significs are Sense, Meaning, and Significance. Each tier builds upon the last, not unlike Peirce’s categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, as Peirce himself enthusiastically observed. (Hardwick 1977: xvi-vii) In Welby’s model, Sense is the cornerstone of her continuum: “Sense is the inevitable starting-point and ultimate test of scientific generalisation” (1896: 26) She means primarily that the empirical method begins with

the collection of data through the senses, but she also calls into play the various and seemingly disparate 'senses' of sense (its semantic array). Welby concludes, "the word sense seems to give us the link between the sensory, the sensible and the significant: there is apparently a real connection between the 'sense' - say of sight - in which we react to stimulus, and the 'sense' in which we speak or act." (1896: 27) Sensory experience, that is to say, the Matrix sensing itself, becomes 'internalized', at which point an intellectual sense develops. When an intellectual sense is projected towards another part of the Matrix (perhaps another person), Welby calls this Meaning (i.e. what one *means* to say). At one more level of complexity, the intellectual sense may apprehend the Significance of facts or events.

In Peircean terms, Welby's first level, that of Sense, corresponds to a single triadic sign within a single subject; the second level, that of Meaning, corresponds to a preliminary expansion, bridging one sign to another sign (perhaps, or eventually, from one subject to another); the third level, that of Significance, corresponds to a greater expansion, akin to Peircean law-making - to recognize the Significance of an event as a complex though finite (hence ascertainable) parcel of infinite semiosis. In Welby's centring of Sense, as in Peircean Pragmatics, the complex and finite parcel of infinite semiosis needs always to be grounded. It is in fact through the grounding of the present, of actual experience, that events achieve their Significance. The traditionally troublesome dichotomy of nature and culture thus becomes a completely fluid, mutually interdependent continuum that determines and directs living reality - all living reality, but more specifically, living human reality, since it is in humans that the greatest complexity of this process occurs.²

Peirce's triadic sign unit, which corresponds to Welby's category of Sense, is the point of pivot between 'inner' and 'outer' experience. As Peirce writes, "Every sane person lives in a double world, the outer and the inner world, the world of percepts and the world of fancies." (1958: 5.487)

The sign connects the interpretant with the object in such a way that the inner world of concepts (fancies) always is, or should always be, dependent on the outer world of experience (percepts). Our concepts take the form of conjectures, though they are by no means always recognized as such: "Every concept, every general proposition of the great edifice of science, first came to us as a conjecture. These ideas are the *first logical interpretants* of the phenomena that suggest them, and which, as suggesting them, are signs, of which they are the (really conjectural) interpretants. . . . Meantime, do not forget that every conjecture is equivalent to, or is expressive of, such a habit that having a certain desire one might accomplish it if one could perform a certain act." (1958: 5.480)

That is to say, praxis is primary, and the necessarily theoretical interpretants are really only stopover points, though crucial in their role as essential links that creatively forge the map from one moment of praxis to the next. The "really conjectural" interpretants are tools meant for interacting with and shaping the tangible world. For this reason, they must always be open to revision, since the end-value of interpretants

lies only in their material application, without which, they are sterile. In language theory, this translates as the foregrounding of the utterance and its purpose, i.e. 'true' communication. This emphasis on "experience first" corresponds to what Hardwick calls Welby's "basic thesis[:] . . . that language follows experience, not the other way around." (1977: xx) Hence the hazard in the assumption, marked near the beginning of this essay, that Welby would grant primacy to words.

To the point of juncture between Welby and Marxist language theory - underlying both Welby's and Bakhtin's thought is an emphasis on the *significance* of communication. (I use the term 'significance' in a deliberately Welbyian sense: the larger ramifications, consequences, or importance of an event.) Both Welby and Bakhtin (1895-1975) imbue communication with value, but why? Like Nietzsche, we might ask "about the *value* of this will. Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?" (9) By his asking these questions, Nietzsche calls into doubt a fundamental human assumption. Without going any further into this, I mean only to use Nietzsche's thesis as an antithesis that helps to establish the common ground between Welby and Bakhtin: both make the same choice-assumption that validates truth. In contrast to Nietzsche's positional nihilism, this humanist position, which champions communication, allows for the possibility of human progress.

Castles in the Air

"An odd paradox," Michel de Certeau (1985: 148) observes, "all the polemics and reflections on ideological content and the institutional framework to be provided for it have not . . . been accompanied by any elucidation of the nature of the act of believing." As a token, sacrificial lamb, Marxist thought, by and large, like most systems of thought, is not very good at recognizing its inevitable assumptions. The schizophrenia of Marxism rests in just this: it seeks to mill the world as material, expressly denouncing any and all metaphysics, but it does so with a purpose, a deep-seated *belief* in humanity. (Why else bother?) Perhaps the closest Marx comes to recognizing his assumptions is in his discussion of humanity as a "species being" - classically identified, ironically, as troublesome for Marxist scholarship. (Marcuse 1932: 15) In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx declares that humanity has a certain universal character (which is an empirical enough statement), and that in order for humans to be happy, we need to live in harmony with this character (i.e. not be 'alienated' from our nature). But by "species being" Marx also means (and this is where empirical observation ends and assumption begins) that the individual being *is the same as* the species, and vice versa:

Man is a species being . . . because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore a free being. (1932: 61)

And this tiny sleight of hand, which implies human moral and sympathetic unity, 'grounds' and motivates his entire communist conclusion.

Here I am only bringing to bear an observation of Welby's, that "too often the masters of reasoning reason from premises . . .

which are themselves illusory" ("r/v," undated). She provides a fuller explanation of this in a footnote to her essay "Meaning and Metaphor":

In an unmetaphysical age there is probably more metaphysics in the common sense (i.e. more *a priori* assumption) than in any other, because there is more complete unconsciousness that we are resting on our own ideas, while we please ourselves with the conviction that we are resting on facts. We do not consider how much metaphysics are required to place us above metaphysics. (1893: 522)

The boldness of Welby's thinking resides not only in her open acknowledgment of her premises, but also in her colourful assertion of these premises. Welby foregrounds her assumptions, rather than ignoring them, attempting to conceal them, pretending that they are 'common sense', or simply remaining unconscious of them. Thus, while most thinking may be said to happen at the fingertip of Michelangelo's Adam, outstretched to that of God - at the cusp of the breach, all the while pretending their fingers do meet - Welby imaginatively acknowledges and foregrounds the gap. Of course, in Welby's Chapel-fresco, the *Mother* stretches out to the Son.

Mother-sense, properly (re)positioned, (re)places the well-being of bodies before the tyranny of minds. In Welby's own Significs, Mother-sense and Father-logic manifest as the plasticity of living experience and the rigidity of institutionalized language. These premises, as noted, share much with Marxist thinking, in the primacy of the utterance, or in the tensions between base and superstructure; and maybe they share something with Foucault's deployments, or with Deleuze's "generative multiplicity" and "restratifying organizations." In relation to other timely contemporary avenues, such as feminism, libidinal economy, ecology, even legal theory, Welby's model is clearly relevant, and potentially a powerful paradigm. At the intersection of feminism and semiotics, for instance, Welby demonstrates a viable approach to the "ampersand problem." (Godard 2003) Mother-sense posits an important reality prior to any logic-based mechanisms of control.

The emergence of these possibilities would not have surprised Welby; she predicted it:

One may venture on a safe prediction. The next Age - over the threshold of which we are passing - will be the age of recovery of the Mother-sense. Then for the first 'time' shall we master the conditions of combined human action through a resumed intimacy with human nature. ("July 18")

"Combined human action" is the key phrase here: Mother-sense sustains this phrase, while Primal Sense does not. Mother-sense extols culture as the vanguard of a destiny that is larger than the individual. It is not at all the same as Primal Sense, which stunts this process and reverses its direction, pointing back to the individual by means of a Nietzschean will to (male) power. Mother-sense seeks something quite a bit different and undeniably more "cosmic."

As a final note, it might seem I have fallen under the charge of Schmitz of not examining Welby's work "for its own sake, but rather . . . in light of the heroes of semiotics." (1985: lxxvii)

Perhaps I have, but I think this a strange charge. Her ideas hardly come out the worse for it. To the contrary, Welby's thoughts are themselves heroic, and they deserve and require the comparison if their position is to be claimed. Any comparison only reinforces the value and uniqueness of her thinking, a process with which any semiotics aficionado should be familiar. The better charge against this editorial is that it could only half-complete any of its projected tasks.

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Notes

1. Welby (1908). The source of this and subsequent quotations not otherwise identified is Box 29 of the Welby Collection, York University Archives, Toronto, Ontario.

2. Cf. Peirce: "Every concept, doubtless, first arises when upon a strong, but more or less vague, sense of need is superinduced some involuntary experience of a suggestive nature; that being suggestive which has a certain occult relation to the build of the mind. We may assume that it is the same with the instinctive ideas of animals; and man's ideas are quite as miraculous as those of the bird, the beaver, and the ant. . . . With

beasts, however, conditions are comparatively unchanging, and there is no further progress. With man these first concepts . . . take the form of conjectures . . ." (1958: 5.480)

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Back to the Future

Niall Lucy, *Beyond Semiotics: Text, Culture, and Technology*. London: Continuum, 2001.

By Scott Simpkins

Projects purporting to go "beyond" semiotics have been actively underway for at least the last 30 years, so in this respect Lucy's *Beyond Semiotics* is not exactly new.¹ He does, however, offer an intriguing formal alternative that is suggestive of possible future advances in semiotics as a discipline. A few previous texts in this vein come to mind. Jean-François Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* and Roland Barthes' *S/Z* are probably the best examples, but works less directly related to semiotics (for instance, Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaux*, Jacques Derrida's *Glas*, or Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa") have undertaken similar endeavors from a formal standpoint.

This is, for me, the greatest contribution that such studies can offer for semiotics insofar as "The Beyond Enterprise," to use Marcelo Dascal's expression, inevitably posits a view of "mainstream semiotics" (Hodge and Kress) whose usefulness is directly related to the ways it portrays semiotics to begin with. This is the result, rhetorically, of defining something so that it can then be critiqued by virtue of the way it is defined. (This would be related to the "straw man" concept in argumentation.) The nature of this (arguably needless) approach is that it:

emphasizes structures and codes, at the expense of functions and social uses of semiotic systems, the complex interrelations of semiotic systems in social practice, all of the factors which provide their motivation, their origins and destinations, their form and substance. It stresses system and product rather than speakers and writers or other

participants in semiotic activity as connected and interacting in a variety of ways in concrete social contexts. It attributes power to meaning, instead of meaning to power. It dissolves boundaries within the field of semiotics, but tacitly accepts an impenetrable wall cutting off semiosis from society, and semiotics from social and political thought. (Hodge and Kress 1988: 1-2)

Possibly the best illustration of these consequences can be seen in John Stewart's *Language as Articulate Contact: Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy of Communication* and the companion volume he edited, *Beyond the Symbol Model: Reflections on the Representational Nature of Language*.² Still, these works offer insightful critiques of semiotics only to the extent that one is willing to grant their grounding premises, as well as the impetus behind projects of this nature to begin with.

"Two things immediately spring to mind when confronted with the title *Beyond X*," Dascal (1996: 305) notes. "First, that there is something wrong, unsatisfactory, or at least insufficient, with X. Second, that the author proposes a way to overcome the unsatisfactoriness of X. Such titles normally apply, thus, to texts that contain both a *critical* and a *hope* component." This is Lucy's book in a nutshell. *Beyond Semiotics* is touted in its back cover blurb as an attempt to "show what semiotics has always had to marginalize, forget or not see in the quest to professionalize itself." The shortcoming to this argument is that this view of semiotics is both true and false. It, again, is true to the degree that its portrayal of semiotics

is accepted; it is false beyond such a point.

In *Beyond Semiotics*, every time Lucy offers an assertion about what semiotics is and what has to be done to go "beyond" it, his study suffers from this problem. Since these theoretical/rhetorical shortcomings have been so widely observed already, it may help to, instead, examine the elements of this study that transcend or are unrelated to this dilemma; indeed, these formal elements provide a serious potential for growth in semiotics and Lucy should be commended for his efforts here.

First, though, it is useful nevertheless to consider an overview of Lucy's assumptions about semiotics that he then says he is going to go beyond. A good example of his portrait of semiotics is found in his description of the way in which it conceives of a sign. "As a science (or simply as a discipline), semiotics has by and large refused the sign's internal forces of disruption, preferring to set limits on the meaning of any sign according to a set of systematic principles of interpretations," Lucy contends. "Such limits (like any limits) mark a division, in this case between what is inside and what is outside any sign." (4) These tenets, he claims, hinder its progress as a discipline. Thus, to go beyond semiotics, "we will become increasingly less reliant on a standard set of terms and concepts associated with semiotics-as-such." (40)

This is not unlike the rhetorical strategy some theorists - and especially feminists, again, such as Cixous - use to attempt to free themselves from (what they see as) the ideological baggage that attends conventionally accepted

nomenclature related to a given body of thought. Lucy demonstrates his own way of doing this when, while defining his terms, he remarks that he is using “text” to mean to “the sign’s capacity to remain, as it were, open to interpretation, chance encounters, indeterminate associations and relationships, a capacity, which semiotics suppresses, for remaining open to the other.” (7)

By establishing his own project as something akin to a process-oriented semiotics, Lucy endeavors to avoid the strictures of a semiotics he views as hampered by voluntary acceptance of superfluous limitations. “We need a semiotics of dynamical systems, a science of signs which is a science of process rather than of state,” he argues, seemingly aligning himself with those who attempt to develop a flexible, “organic” semiotics. (63) And, in this respect (i.e., at least formally), Lucy succeeds in making some advances.

Unlike many American semioticians who elevate Charles Sanders Peirce to the pre-eminent position within the founding fathers, Lucy grants Ferdinand de Saussure this status, but only insofar as he establishes him, once more, as an easy target. “We shouldn’t forget that Saussure inherited a ‘discipline’ without any principles,” he says, “but we need to remember that his over-correction of the problem put semiotics in debt to an all too conservative faith in the metaphysical certainty of things.” (71)

Lucy also charges that semioticians believe the existence of the transcendental signified is guaranteed by the presumption of immanent structure. “Despite what traditional or conservative literary criticism regards as semiotics’ heretical desire for a science of the text, a science of literature, structuralism and semiotics remain committed to a philosophy of grounds, of integrity, and even to a species of origin,” he contends. “For *something*, for semiotics, grounds the text and lends it self-identity, and may be traced therefore to a beginning: if not the author or his or her community, or moment in history, then *structure* is what is held to hold the text together, albeit in ways which are not always obvious to the professional let alone the common reader.” (84-85)

These assumptions about a necessary ground for semiotics to operate are valid to a certain extent, but certainly the impact of post-structuralist thought has powerfully questioned this need; one, moreover, that is by no means universal in semiotics.

As the author of *Debating Derrida*, Lucy’s vocabulary and approach not surprisingly reflect, in many respects, that this study is “perhaps merely” an attempt to extend the Derridean critique of semiotics. (For example: “In attempting to go beyond semiotics we are attempting to go beyond the speech/writing opposition, but within thinking to escape it” [7]; in this endeavor Lucy says he is working “against a certain certitude within semiotics that defines its disciplinarity and makes it hostage to logocentrism” [148]) Given the degree to which Derrida has an “interested” view toward semiotics, the evident limitations of this investment are clearly established by now.

Stylistically, *Beyond Semiotics* continues (at least in some ways) the legacy of the playful, non-serious tone of *A Thousand Plateaus*, with the concomitant conceptual implications. Consider its opening sentences addressing the reader:

I wonder what the chances were
(they must have been astronomical)

against it being you, wherever you are,
you of all people, who should happen
to be reading this right now. Try as I
might to nullify the mystery of this
chance event (*I am but a publishing
function, you are just a sale*), still I can’t
get over the absolute improbability that
at this very moment it is you, out of
everyone, who is reading me. At this
very moment, *you*. Needless to say, you
arouse my curiosity, though of course
the chances are that we will never meet
and nothing else will pass between us.
(1)

Obviously, the whole book isn’t like this, but the dialogic tone it establishes carries on throughout. Or, if not “dialogic” per se, at least it follows the illusion of conversational *sprezzatura* characteristic of the Socratic dialogues. While this clearly will bother many readers, it admittedly creates a different texture than that typically found in more “serious” semiotic studies. There is undeniably a specific effect created by this loose, carefree, even “chatty” approach, one that clearly influences the ways in which the reader interacts with the text.

The use of paratactical composition indeed fosters a reading experience full of surprises, difficult to predict, and perhaps liberating as a consequence. “In moving beyond semiotics,” Lucy remarks, “we continue to open ourselves to unexpected ways of relating to things in the world around us, and to do so without looking for a systematic approach or a consistent method.” (70) And, as system theorists would argue, *systemic* does not necessarily imply *systematic*, which therefore allows for a type of organicity without the imposition of symmetry. In fact, Lucy goes so far as to invite error and carelessness into *Beyond Semiotics*, positing the potential benefits of such an approach that may not be possible with a more conventional compositional strategy. “No one reading this really knows whether I’m sincerely committed to the topic of this chapter,” he says at one point, “or if I’m sincerely trying to make it ‘work’, or even whether I’m sincere about the responsibilities of my job in general, though it is probably fair to say that the answer to all these questions is that I appear to be, which is a perfectly sufficient condition for you to believe that I am.” (49)

An additional component of this approach involves a type of thick description without an accompanying subsequent hierarchy of likely accurate readings. In other words, Lucy will entertain several views of the same topic, and leave it at that. This resistance to a determination of accuracy or correctness allows him to produce a multifaceted discourse without resorting to a final, synthetically designated interpretation. At the same time, however, he questions the efficacy of such a rhetorical strategy, one that might ultimately blunt its political force by virtue of its non-subordinated inclusiveness.

Nevertheless, it is with compositional approaches of this nature that Lucy foresees a future beyond semiotics. A firmly entrenched semiotics, in his view, has to sacrifice semiotic openness in order to secure its status as a discipline. “There can be no doubt that while it is possible to overstate the importance of invention to cultural criticism, some forms of cultural criticism (Saussurean semiotics, for

instance) have sought to suppress the aleatory and asystematic relations between things in favour of imposing an order on them by way of a regulating method,” he suggests. (70-71) Consequently, “something has been lost to semiotics, that semiotics exists today as something less than it might have been. While there is no doubt that semiotics is now well-established institutionally, through specialist journals, research centres, international conferences, professional associations and the like, it could be that its institutional well-being has been achieved at the cost of an earlier revolutionary spirit that was once the heart and soul of semiotics.” (25)

With this point, Lucy’s study makes significant inroads for semiotics, including his attempts to liven up his discussion with a form of textual pleasure somewhat different from that imagined by Roland Barthes. On the book itself, Lucy declares: “In its many dispersals, changes of direction, shifts in modality and other apparatus designed to work against the idea that there’s a systematic way of moving beyond semiotics (the point is that there isn’t), the book is actually meant to be enjoyable to read.” (11) This won’t be the case for many readers, however. My experience with the bulk of my colleagues (and most of my students, surprisingly enough) makes me suspect that this kind of compositional play will more often than not come across as irritating.

Lucy talks about personal connections with his topics, the background music he listened to while composing the book, the book itself, and relatively lame jokes he unsuccessfully tries to imbue with life. He likewise attempts to turn his efforts to a remotely “serious” task, while also retaining its haphazard, “make do” lightness. Thus, at one point, he proposes the concept of “collagewriting”: science and (and as) bricolage at once.” (123)

The one chapter in particular that, for me, best embodies what Lucy claims he is trying to do is “Gilligan’s Wake.” There, Lucy discusses Gregory Ulmer’s *Teletheory* in relation to undecidability in all types of texts, not just literary ones, and draws upon the ludic tenor of the popular American television show, *Gilligan’s Island*. He characterizes *Teletheory* from a sympathetic perspective as “a project at risk, an errant project.” (130) The same could be said of *Beyond Semiotics*, in which Lucy explores a “more ‘inventive’, disrespectful, Gilliganesque approach” to semiotic analysis.

In this chapter, for instance, Lucy employs a technique that well represents a formal openness he is promoting by, at one point, reviewing what he has just written and re-presenting it by “quoting the first sentence of each of our own paragraphs above.” (118) At another point, he takes the first letter of each mythic unit he employs from Claude Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of the Oedipus legend and constructs several different sentences from the list phonetically. (e.g., “Can you see my terrible owl who can hoot like a hawk?” [125])

To be charitable, this certainly provides a different and new perspective, although for many readers this will probably come across as Lucy merely fooling around and wasting their time. Lucy claims, however, that these approaches allow for an analysis beyond that of “academic discourse” because “what it seeks to occlude (the personal, the popular, the psychical, etc.) is precisely what grounds its scientism, its

anonymity, and its careful sorting of facts.” (127) And, indeed, Saussure’s anagrammatical analyses certainly provide just one example of the possibility for techniques of this nature.

In fact, Lucy explores both sides of this compositional issue in a manner that offers a clearly productive model for a future semiotics. “If this (analytico-referential, historico-cultural) discourse is indeed in error, then the question of what it *misses* is of great concern,” he says. To make this distinction, he adds, “might not be a matter simply of ‘improving’ the explanatory and classificatory powers of academic discourse; it might not be a question of better clarification and further precision, but of understanding the necessity of accident, eureka and error in the formation of knowledges both popular and institutional.” (127) Of course, this might “sound like a bit of a hoot,” as Lucy says of possible responses to Ulmer’s book, which could be seen as “another trivialization of popular culture by the English Department put forward as an earnest desire to get hip, but only to service its own expansion.” (129) A successful manifestation of this project (presumably what Lucy believes he has accomplished here) would pursue:

not the chance of clearing things up anew, but of getting it all wrong and starting (writing) again. Just when a (new) name is in the offing. For it can never be an other form of writing-as-such, a new discursive genre, that sets us going always on the move, in perpetual errancy, but only an other way of thinking, against itself as much as other (critical) habits. A way of thinking that issues from a continual desire to think afresh and which performs itself as something to be passed over as well as to be passed on, discarded. (131)

The single greatest theoretical hitch in *Beyond Semiotics* derives from Lucy’s unwillingness to commit himself completely to decoding freedom, something which is decidedly odd in light of his calls for maintaining semiotic liberty. As is seen in works such as Umberto Eco’s ironically titled *The Open Work*, here Lucy insistently retreats to a form of timid restraint, respectful obeisance, a limit to no limits, when it comes to sign interaction. The arena he establishes is thus more like a formally regimented playground than an improvised, informal field of play. Somewhat unexpectedly, Lucy concludes with a meditation on his book’s agenda being, ultimately, “against certitude,” (147) which he proposes to change its name to in the final chapter. *Against Certitude*, however, can never really go beyond Eco’s notion of openness in decoding, which is, finally, a semiotics of closed openness which I have called elsewhere “finite infinite semiosis.” (In this respect, he could have just as easily renamed his book: *For Certitude*.)

Lucy’s hesitance along these lines can be seen when he offers “contextuality” (not unlike “structuration”) as opposed to the presumably more rigid and reductive “context,” and yet immediately has to pull back before going too far “beyond.” “In taking a stand against the terror and tyranny of the unities,” he declares accordingly, “*Beyond Semiotics* is therefore a-programmatic [or ‘adestinal’], its principal assumption being that there is no such thing as a ‘decontextualized’ meaning, or a decontextualized anything.” (9) Citing the

position popularly associated with Derrida (“There is no outside the text.”), Lucy maintains that “what this statement means takes us beyond semiotics: it means that nothing ‘is’ outside of a context!” This leads to a contextuality, he contends, that “goes beyond semiotics, since it is certainly the case that, for semiotics itself, the meaning of any sign is always taken to be contextual, an effect of sense-producing rules and procedures belonging to particular sign-using communities.” (10) This is surprising for someone who is undoubtedly familiar with Derrida’s attacks on naive conceptualizations of context in essays such as “Signature Event Context” and “I have forgotten my umbrella,” which have helped to make semiotics much more nuanced as a consequence. Yet, we can find Lucy claiming:

It should go without saying that contextuality is not, for deconstruction, a license to say anything at all about everything under the sun. The statement ‘there is no outside the text’ is not philosophical code for ‘anything goes’! [something he repeats a number of times] It’s an acknowledgement rather than when it comes to textuality there is no ground, no rock-solid philosophical substratum or transcendental baseline we could use or refer to in decoding a text’s ‘ultimate’ meaning. Because semiotics continues to work with an idea of context which remains stubbornly logocentric, its idea of the sign is less radical (less democratic, in a sense) than it potentially could be.

“Although the *arbitrary* sign is the core unit of any semiotic analysis, in its *structure* the sign remains a fundamentally stable unit grounded in a taken-for-granted ideal that everything has its limits, despite the fact that semiotics offers a radical account of those limits of community-based conventions,” he continues. “In order to go beyond semiotics, then, we need to unsettle the idea of a unit by taking up what might be called the idea of a unit-without-unity: from the sign to the text.” Again, just like Eco, Lucy has to hold back, and at the very point where he is starting to rise out of the morass of conservative semiotics that has so hindered the growth (in more than one sense) of the discipline. This can be seen when Lucy, while discussing the limitations he accepts for decoding texts, asserts that “the existence of the text itself is the first condition of the many readings that can be got from it. But ‘many’ must be kept from becoming ‘any’, or there will no longer be grounds for doing criticism.” (94) “Texts do not come pre-packed with a determined set of specific meanings and uses.” Lucy adds that “while I do not think they can be used willy-nilly and made to mean anything at all, I do think that their possible meanings and uses must always exceed any concept of an ultimate structure constraining them to mean and be used in this, but not that, range of ways.” (145-46) You can see that he offers a clear potential for broadening, in this case, literary semiotics but then establishes boundaries that really don’t have to be there. After all, an “open” semiotics hardly presupposes a fixed ground for its operation.

In order to truly go beyond semiotics, perhaps Lucy needs to rethink the possibilities offered some time ago by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 4), who argue that form is inextricably entwined with content. “There is no

difference,” they suggest, “between what a book talks about and how it is made.” If, as he contends, Lucy wants to take writing in what Deleuze and Guattari call a “rhizomatic direction,” it is arguable that he will then have to “know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings.” (25) This is clearly the case in *A Thousand Plateaus*, as Deleuze and Guattari indicate while discussing their compositional strategy:

We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. We have given it a circular form, but only for laughs. Each morning we would wake up, and each of us would ask himself what plateau he was going to tackle, writing five lines here, ten there. We had hallucinatory experiences, we watched lines leave one plateau and proceed to another like columns of tiny ants. We made circles of convergence. Each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau. To attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively constructs it; no typographical cleverness, no lexical agility, no blending or creation of words, no syntactical boldness, can substitute for that. In fact, these are more often than not merely mimetic procedures used to disseminate or disperse a unity that is retained in a different dimension for an image-book. *Technonarcissism*. (1987: 22)

This is probably what they would have said, in the end, of *Beyond Semiotics* as well.

It is difficult, then, to take Lucy’s claims of radicalism too seriously, so to speak, as long as he continues to duck behind the skirts of conservatism whenever things get too open. His claims ring a little hollow when they are made so consistently from within the realm of a “safe” undertaking. “In continuing to move beyond semiotics,” for instance, he avers that “we need to continue to try to find ways of causing trouble not for semiotics, but for metaphysics (remembering all the while that to cause trouble is not necessarily to surpass or bypass) - we might do a little mischief.” (71) That, perhaps, is all he does here, however.

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Notes

1. *Literary Semiotics: A Critical Approach*, Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2001 and “Postsemiotics,” *Encyclopedia of Semiotics*, Ed. Paul Bouissac. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 509-512, along with the online course, “Critical Semiotics,” Cyber Semiotic Institute, are some of my own contributions to this critical project, either conceptually or formally (or both).

2. Reviewed, respectively, in the SRB: “The Semiotics of Post-Semiotics,” 7.1 (1996): 8-10 and “Alternative Semiotics?” 9.3 (1998): 4-9.

References

Dascal, M. (1996) “The Beyond Enterprise,” in *Beyond the Symbol Model*:

On Translation

Umberto Eco, *Experiences in Translation*. Translated by Alastair McEwen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000.

Tim Parks, *Translating Style: The English Modernists and their Italian Translations*. London: Cassel Academic, 1998.

By Anne Urbancic

A laminated sign in my favourite pension in Florence reads: “We beg you do not squash the bugs when at the wall. The pharmacy sells things for them.”

This rather ambiguous and amusing message finds its true meaning only on summer nights when the sui generis Florentine mosquitoes torment sleep, and the thought of a Vapemat tablet, impregnated with insecticide, and plugged into the little Vapemat tray whose heat releases the toxins noxious to insects (and only insects, we hope) points us to the nearest pharmacy. At other times of the year, the message remains only half clear, revealing however, the less than deft hand of an amateur translator, who, as it happens, was a Flemish teenager with passable English and survival Italian and who was asked by the frustrated Italian pension owner to produce, in various languages, a sign that might diminish the ominous blood spots splattered randomly on the white walls of the pension bedrooms.

This is a forgivable translation, one with an eventual message if the circumstances and environment are right. At those times when it denies us full meaning, it does not cause a crisis. More than anything, it illustrates the TIANA principle of translation described below by Andrew Chesterman. TIANA is the acronym for “There Is Always an Alternative”. On the other hand, there are situations in which precision in translation is of tantamount importance, as we have seen in the missives sent by terrorists to a panicky post-9/11 world. The video tape of Osama Bin Laden threatening further activities had teams of translators trying to pin down the meanings of the words, of the phrases, of the whole text. At such times, we are acutely aware of how delicate is the work of translating, of teasing meaning from one communication system so that it has the appropriate effect in another.

Three studies have recently come across my desk, all dealing with translation theory from a semiotic perspective. All three are the work of thoughtful practitioners in the field and by pure coincidence, they come together in a particularly felicitous combination that offers to us, in one package, the expertise of three academics, two award winning novelists and two semioticians. One of the books, Umberto Eco’s, has the added fascination of being itself a translation from the original Italian.

One of the basic premises of all semiotic enquiries is that we are dealing with signs, and if I am allowed the tautology, mediated signs. The nature of the mediation as the signifiers of one language are being interpreted as signifieds in the same language, is not always apparent. Shifts and (mis)interpretations are

intralinguistic. Translations, on the other hand, admit from the outset the fact that they are mediated by highly vulnerable interlinguistic shifts: vulnerable because signs become distorted the second a translator chooses an intralinguistic signified and promotes it as a new signifier in a completely new code. As all language students who try to sneak into their assignments phrases and paragraphs from automatically generated translating internet programs are aware, such major code shifts are fraught with linguistic peril. Just recently a student of Italian requested that I cut down a hydro wire when all he meant was that I drop him a line.

Translation theories and translation manuals are abundant but none has yet solved the problematics of the process of translating. Translation practice is of undeniable import to semioticians who quickly realize that interlinguistic code shifts implicate not only a simple version of the Saussurian axes (paradigm and syntagm), but create infinite, mirror-like complications because these signifiers are interpreted not only across verbal codes, but across time and space as well. As a simple illustration of this, I am reminded of the wonderful Japanese translator in David Lodge’s novel, *Small World*. (1984: 294) He continuously requests further information through mail from the author he is translating; consequently his words become almost literally floating signifiers, signifiers that can never be definitively signified, and whose message even the original English code cannot signify once mediated by a Japanese code. Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* has suddenly become “The Strange Affair of the Flesh and the Bosom.” A perfect example of Chesterman’s TIANA principle at work.

In his book, *Experiences in Translation*, Eco also acknowledges the TIANA principle, although without specific reference to it. His anthology of essays on translation was the backbone of a series of lectures he gave at the University of Toronto in the fall of 1998.

Divided into two main sections, “Translating and Being Translated” and “Translation and Interpretation,” the book readily reveals that Eco is also preoccupied with the exchange of cultural information in the practice of translation. While the other two writers discussed here, Parks and Chesterman, investigate and experiment with their observations, Eco is more interested in theorizing, albeit through a discussion of “[his] experiences in the light of a ‘naïve’ concept of translation” especially given that “[e]very sensible and rigorous theory of language shows that a perfect translation is an impossible dream” (ix). He ends his preface with an apology for “relying so much on common sense.” (x)

Methinks the professor doth protest too much, to paraphrase another author, especially since Eco, not many pages later, reiterates that his observations depend on having undergone the very practical experience of his being both a translator and a translated author (6), an experience where common sense is an ineluctable requirement. But something went awry with his first example, a dialogue taken from his own *Foucault’s Pendulum*. In his discussion of the English translator’s choice to use “epistle” for the original Italian “lettera” in order to maintain the allusion to St. Paul and sustain the joke in the line that follows (ie., “To the Thessalonians, I guess”) there is a problem. The fact is that “epistle” loses the connection with *lettera/letter* because it belongs to another register. Of more relevance is that, contrary to Eco’s statement, today church liturgy regularly chooses letter over epistle to describe the messages sent by Paul to various early Christian communities. Thus the joke would not be lost at all. Instead, the main problem of comprehension and interpretation would far more likely occur in the Latin phrase “Fiat lux,” which remains unchanged from the original in the English translation, and thus would be lost on most readers unfamiliar with Latin.

There are several other similar examples and statements which serve to undermine the many fine observations made in the volume. Another instance occurs in Eco’s discussion of another passage from *Foucault’s Pendulum*. Explaining how his French and German translators missed the cultural allusion in the declaration of the character named Belbo that “I, too, am a Tiger,” (24) Eco writes:

For Italian readers, [the declaration] is a clear reference to Emilio Salgari (a popular novelist of the second half of the nineteenth century) and to a phrase pronounced by his hero... I forgot to inform my translators about this intertextual joke, and they translated literally... . If they had understood the reference (but it was really a matter for sophisticated Trivia Games), they would have easily realized, without my help, that this sentence had no referential purpose... . (Ibid)

In preparing to do this review, I asked, as a quick, empirical test, about 50 Italians (mostly academics both in Italy and in North America) of my acquaintance if they recognized the intertextual allusion to Salgari. Only one (a graduate student!!) actually did. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the holistic impression of the passage (ie. the idea of “a collage of bombastic expressions”) is lost at all, not to those Italian readers who overlook the original

allusion, nor to French and German readers who only have access to the literal version of the phrase. Chesterman will develop this concept further in his proposal of memetic mutation.

Eco himself recognizes that the source of the problematic aspects of the first section of his book is in the lack of authorial distance from the examples he cites from his own literary work. In a footnote he writes:

... I invited the translator to disregard the literal sense of my text in order to preserve what I considered to be the 'deep' one. It may be objected that in such a case I was providing an allegedly 'correct' interpretation of my own text thus betraying my conviction that authors should not provide interpretations of their own works. As a matter of fact, even authors can act as good readers of their own texts, able to detect the *intentio operis*..., that is, what the text actually says, independently of the author's intentions. Usually I invite my translators to pay attention to a certain passage which, according to the general context of the novel, should suggest something beyond its literal sense. (n 1, 61-62)

That something beyond the literary sense is in fact, rightly or wrongly, a brand new encoding.

In Part two of the volume, *Translation and Interpretation*, Eco is far more successful in showing how translation theory elucidates some of the work of changing a message from one system of communication to another. His point of departure is Roman Jakobson's essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959) in which three categories of translation are described: intralinguistic, interlinguistic and intersemiotic. According to Jakobson, the first category refers to rewording Language A into another verbal aspect of Language A; interlinguistic translation is the transfer of Language A into appropriate verbal versions of Language B, and intersemiotic translation refers to the transfer of verbal system of language A into another semiotic system (a novel into a film, for example). Eco further describes intersemiotic translation as transmutation. (68) With this one ancillary definition, he brings his work on translation into the theoretical sphere being investigated also by Parks and Chesterman.

Eco begins the essays of the second section by showing how Jakobson was indebted to and fascinated by studies in interpretation undertaken by C. S. Peirce, who had no experience as a translator. Using the American semiotician as his guide, Jakobson was able to conclude that translation and interpretation were equivalent notions. This means, to paraphrase Paolo Fabbri, that every interpretation began as a translation. An interpretation goes beyond simple translation, however. Here Eco adds a comment of his own that echoes Parks' conclusion:

[Fabbri] is aware (as many people are not) that there is a limit to translation, when we are confronted with 'diversity in the purport of expression'. Having identified this limit, we are forced to say that, at least in one case, there are forms of interpretation that are not wholly comparable to translation between languages. (73)

As a first illustration of what he means, Eco provides us with a French version, produced by

Altavista's computerized translation program, of a previously published English translation of the first quatrain of Baudelaire's *Les chats* (originally written in French, of course). He shows, as was clearly expected, that when translation is done by definition only, the result is at times incomprehensible, a joke, because it is far from an interpretation. A software program is not yet able to interpret; in the same vein this is precisely the type of error that results when the most typical of inexperienced translators, the beginners in International Language courses, falsely rely on a one-to-one correspondence of words and expressions between Language A and Language B. They also rely on definition and eschew interpretation. Eco reinforces his observation by citing Hjelmslev's concepts of content vs. expression. Although he elaborates on Hjelmslev's ideas, he does not enter into a discussion of how the cultural ramifications of content can alter the expression of it. A recent conference I attended has provided a particularly good example of this alteration. One of the speakers, an Italian professor working in Australia, addressed the issue of how food items were translated into various editions of Collodi's *Pinocchio*, originally published in Italian in 1883. Clearly there are temporal hurdles to be overcome in translating the story, in addition to the linguistic and cultural ones. At one point she spoke of fairy floss to the complete puzzlement of her audience of American and Canadian professors of Italian. It was only when she translated the term into French, a language familiar to but not native to her audience members, and said that fairy floss was the equivalent of *barbe à papa* that the Canadians understood candy floss and the Americans cotton candy. Each group had gone beyond the expression stage of translation of *barbe à papa* (no one even considered the literal association with a beard); the content stage, however was culture-specific, even beyond language which, curiously, for all three groups, was English. These are the kinds of fundamental issues that enhance or detract from the aesthetic value of a translation and Eco, following Wittgenstein, rightly points out, "[a]esthetic appreciation is not just a matter of the effect one experiences, but also involves an appreciation of the textual strategy that produces it." (94)

Eco's strongest pages in this volume are those found in the chapter entitled "Interpretation, Translation and Transmutation." There he gives us the perspective of a semiotician, author and teacher. His table classifying the different forms of interpretation that he discerns becomes an excellent vademecum for translators, a sort of guide illustrating where, inevitably, there will be pitfalls and problems. He provides many fine examples to illustrate his points (maintaining in these last pages the authorial objectivity that was not present in the first part of the book). He has clearly enjoyed writing the pages on the translation of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, which, as he says "is not written in English, but in Finneganian." (109)

The volume ends as it began, with an apology:

All I have tried to do in my table is to establish some macroscopic distinctions, as I am well aware that there will always be an overlap between one category of the typology and another. Such zones will be imprecise and of a kind liable to generate endless subcategories, at least until such time as

we are free to think up infinite forms of interpretation of a text. (129)

The imprecisions of which he speaks, the endless subcategories are the stuff that interpretation is made of, and which brings much aesthetic appreciation and pleasure.

Translating Style by Tim Parks, unlike Eco, does not openly reveal its contribution to semiotics, but makes observations important to the discipline. Parks directs his focus upon English modernist writers, including Samuel Beckett, T.S. Eliot, Henry Green, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Barbara Pym and Virginia Woolf. His perceptive analyses of strengths and weakness in producing a good translation have as their point of departure the very practical application of translation theory. Parks, an author of English prose, is also recognized for his translations of Italian works, including Roberto Calasso's *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. (1993 [1988]) We are reminded by Calasso and by Parks, his English "voice," that Cadmus, as his parting gift to man, bestowed upon the world the alphabet, the most rudimentary element of our sign systems, and the basis of intralinguistic and interlinguistic code-making.

Parks begins his work by recounting an exercise he presents in class in which students of translation, Italian to English and vice-versa, are asked to identify which of two versions of a passage is the original language. He wonders why it is that the answer is quickly arrived at; he asks his students to identify the instances of lexical interference, of syntactical interference and finally of cultural interference that betray the translated text. This last category of interference, more than the other two, would be of most interest to Eco. Indeed, while Parks' students quickly identify, and easily remedy, lexical and syntactical difficulties, they find, as do all translators, cultural interference to be far more problematic. Cultural interference intrigues us from the semiotic point of view as well, since it involves Richard Dawkins' (1976) meme hypothesis. In his intriguing and important essay about the work of Dawkins entitled "Memes Matter," (SRB 5.2 May 1994: 1) Paul Bouissac has pointed out that the term "meme" has its origin in a playful phonetic allusion to the French word "même" (the same), with further allusion to mimetic, to memory and to gene.

How does the meme hypothesis apply to translation? Dawkins presented the concept as one of interconnecting ideas, ideas, that is, that become appropriated and diffused by others, without necessarily being made overt or explicit. Examples abound in the histories of ideas; recently the meme hypothesis has come to the fore in the re-assignment by the American government of the invention of the telephone from the previously lauded and acknowledged Alexander Graham Bell to the less known Antonio Meucci. The two, and a host of other now forgotten tinkerers and inventors, worked on the same idea in the same manner at more or less the same time; in their case, it was a matter of the latter not being able to afford the patent fee that prevented him from being credited with the invention. The similar ideas that informed this innovation, despite the geographical distance, can be called memetic. Dawkins preferred to explain the concept of memes from a genosemiotic perspective:

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain. (Dawkins 1976: 206)

The genosemiotic description offered by Dawkins implies also the possibility for genetic mutation to go awry; similarly for memetic propagation, much as computer viruses go awry as they leap from disk to disk, from computer to computer. In this way, cultural interference that results in erroneous translation may also be seen as memetic, as it passes from concept to concept.

The intriguing conundrum of Cinderella's slippers is a case in point: are the slippers made of glass (=verre) or is the term a mistranslation of fur (=vair) from an early French version of the story, before Charles Perreault retold it? For Parks, the most plausible loci for such misappropriations or mistranslations are in the ways a text presents cultural minutiae. These elements of culture are never explicated but always assumed; overwhelmingly they resist a clean transfer to another communication system. This is what occurs in the translation of Barbara Pym's works, for example. Parks chooses several instances where cultural aspects create misunderstandings. He warns the reader to be ever watchful because "attention to local detail is incessant." (154) I cite only one of his examples because it illustrates particularly well what is meant by memetic mutation: 'Would you like a drink?' Emma had almost said 'nightcap', the kind of thing associated with milkiness and a generally more cosy atmosphere.

Parks pauses at this point to show the problematic of rendering nightcap in another linguistic system, in this case, Italian. There is a further cultural problem in associating nightcap with milk. The Italian translator of Barbara Pym opted for "il bicchiere della buona notte", (literally the good night glass), but with this lexical selection, lost the idea of "milkiness" because the Italian rendering would refer to an alcoholic drink, providing a more appropriate cultural perspective. Parks is correct in observing this misappropriation; interestingly, a native speaker of Canadian English would, like the Italian, not associate "nightcap" with "milkiness" but instead would understand the drink to have been alcoholic.

That a signifier of Language A would mutate when appropriated as a signified in Language B is a common enough occurrence. The phenomenon becomes truly fascinating when the signifier of Language A reveals different signifieds in the different cultures even where Language A is spoken, signifieds that are imitated or "memetized" by the culture of Language B.

Still in the same chapter, Parks focuses on further aspects of translating that are particularly fascinating in Barbara Pym's writing. How to translate silence, especially as it is implied through ellipsis? Or, how to translate into Language B allusions to other literary works from Language A, or on a more banal scale, how to

translate references to products or commonplace items? In his character of Akira Sakazaki, the Japanese translator, described to such comic effect in *Small World*, novelist semiotician Lodge has also grappled with this problem. In his case, and in the fictional context he creates, he does not feel obliged to provide any solution. Parks, however, accepts the challenge of the translation knowing full well that a solution may well be impossible:

...a final and curious question: is it possible that a writer might be truly great, but truly untranslatable, un-exportable? If Pym is to be considered great it is in the way she uses the claustrophobia of a particular milieu and its language to express a common human condition. Her untranslatability lies first in the difficulty of recreating in the target language a convincing wealth of recognizable commonplaces while remaining within the limits of the semantic content, and second in the way unfamiliarity with the milieu Pym describes, and with its idiom, may distract attention from her underlying vision. The question as to greatness and translatability, however, brings us, I suspect, into the realm of the imponderable. (165)

While this review has concentrated only on the analysis of Barbara Pym's *A Few Green Leaves* and its Italian translation *Qualche foglia verde*, it must be pointed out that Parks is keenly perspicacious in capturing the essential difficulties of translating other English authors as well. In his discussion of *Women in Love* by D.H. Lawrence, he finds that the author deliberately subverts the language he uses. The translator cannot avoid diverging from the original text, and in striving to equal it or to compensate for it, only emphasizes its peculiar nature.

Translating Style is a delightful and thoughtful study of the problematic of translating literary texts. It is, furthermore, of a practical orientation, clearly the book of a translator who has had to grapple with some of the challenges he describes. In his last chapter, "Seen from both sides," Parks resumes the role of the teacher of translation theory and technique. He gives us various passages for our consideration, encouraging us to acknowledge that "comparison of the differences between original and translation provides material for reflections that lead straight to the heart of a writer's poetics. Equally, a thorough critical analysis of an original text gives a translator a better sense of what it is he should be translating." (200) He concludes this fine volume by asserting that "translation, one way or the other, obliges us to consider what might have been written in place of what has." (238) Andrew Chesterman will concur, far more succinctly, by describing the principle of TIANA (There Is Always an Alternative).

Chesterman warns us, however, that TIANA is already a reworking of another more rigid principle, TINA, the acronym for There Is No Alternative, which is often promoted by politicians and economists. In the matter of translation, Chesterman argues, there is no possibility of TINA for no two translators will ever translate in the same way. He elaborates on other features of a translation, providing us with a philosophical overview of his approach. Besides adhering to the concept of TIANA, all

translations are also necessarily dialogic in essence and intent. This principle, derived from the enquiries of Mikhail Bakhtin, states that collaborating with the translator are several other partners, including original author (an attitude that Eco confesses he takes literally), publisher, readers and other translators. While in the latter category he intends members of a profession, I will add that all readers are potential translators and mistranslators. The Italian language has openly acknowledged this in its aphorism "traduttore, traditore," that is, 'translator, traitor'. This suggests Chesterman's third principle of translation accountability: "I alone am responsible for my contribution, and I have a loyalty also to myself. The words are mine." (194)

Chesterman envisages translation as a web, following the idea of Karl Popper's "biological analogue." Although he admits that a web is full of holes and gaps, he points out that nonetheless it represents a wholeness, a completeness unto itself. Thus he would like to describe his attempts at translation theory. Nor can it be denied that in this brief volume he does an admirable job of reaching his goal.

Popper's biological analogue fits well with Chesterman's opening premise, recalling Dawkins, that "translations are survival machines for memes" (5) and constitute a rather special category that he terms a "genetic metaphor." (8) According to Chesterman, there are five highly generalized areas of translation, which he elaborates to varying degrees of detail. These are: Source-target (going from A to B), Equivalence (B is more or less equivalent to A), Untranslatability (there is no perfect equivalence), Free vs literal (holistic as opposed to what Eco will call translation by definition) and finally, the concept of All writing is translating (in semiotic terms this is to be understood as the assignment of signifieds onto signifiers). We can see how closely Chesterman parallels Parks, the main difference being that Parks is far more intent on showing practical illustrations of these theories.

Chapter two, "The evolution of translation memes," presents the most innovative part of the volume. In reviewing the theories of Popper, Chesterman discerns eight stages in the evolution of translation memes, each with its own theoretical precepts and insights. From an overview of these, the author hopes to structure what he refers to as "a meme-pool of ideas about translation." (20) The concepts that motivate each of the stages point to an eventual theory, but in fact, the questions that Chesterman asks are those of a practitioner, who like Parks before him, has asked the questions that befuddle the researchers who deal with words and meaning and how these interact between communication systems. The ideas he offers are complex and include a reflection even on the source of all sources, the Word of God. It is to Chesterman's credit that he is able to present them so clearly and concisely. There are gaps, of course. Derrida's work in the field merits a much longer treatment. On the whole, however, the chapter effectively focuses on all the necessary components of a translation, from the words themselves, to the language, to the translator, to the readers, and finally back to the translator who is compelled, in the end, to opt for a particular choice.

Why do translators make the choices they do? The immediate answer recalls for us the idea

of translation norms, which are the focus of the following chapter. Here Chesterman provides a taxonomy of the types of norms that are most fundamental to theories of translation. He then proposes a “mission statement” of sorts for translators, which he will set out in far greater detail in the closing chapter of the book, “On translation ethics.” Here he stands out among the three theorists under review: while the other two accept that responsibility and accountability are key concepts from which translators may never distance themselves, Chesterman articulates those reflections that comprise responsibility and accountability. (68-69) It is here also that we can see how translation and meme theory coincide, and how the result, although not necessarily incorrect or a mistranslation, is nevertheless a memetic mutation. Nor can it be otherwise; translation admits no clones.

As translation memes normalize, they develop certain strategies that facilitate problem solving for translators. In this area, practitioners have learned much from studies in communication theory and in language learning theory. Although Chesterman does not mention the field, second (third) language learning acquisition theory is of seminal relevance here, for every translator has been a student of another language. On the other hand, neither has meme theory been applied to second language learning, although it appears to be a natural combination. The topics dealt with in this chapter are dear to every second/third language teacher’s heart including the focus on semantics, syntax, intersubjectivity, literalness, false cognates, register shift, paraphrase and information change that problematize language learning as well as translation theory. Wisely, the author chooses only two brief texts from which to derive his examples; thus the reader can follow both the context and the coherence of the pieces. As Parks had limited himself to English and Italian, so does Chesterman limit his observation to English and German.

Finally, Chesterman also addresses the issue of translational competence. What makes a good translator, and what makes a good translation? The two are not synonymous. Again here he enters the realm of second/third language acquisition; in enumerating categories that

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) have established for translational competence, Chesterman is implicitly reiterating many of the steps through which a language learner passes in order to achieve proficiency. And here is an exemplary instance of meme theory at work: while Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), Steiner (1988), Gile (1995) *et al.* have concentrated on translation theory their research has produced results that remind us of the work done by second/third language pedagogy theorists such as Stern, Krashen (1982), Widdowson (1978), Omaggio Hadley (1986) and a host of others, all working at more or less the same time. Sandra Savignon (1988), well known for her work in communicative competence, would not have appeared misplaced in this chapter; one of her articles, entitled “In Second Language Acquisition/Foreign Language Learning, Nothing is More Practical than a Good Theory,” reflects much of Chesterman’s study.

Chesterman’s final statement (“Now for the error elimination,” 196) is an ideal that will never be reached, not if the theory of memetics really works. His is an ideal shared by the language learning theorists as well, who have long ago learned to accept the TIANA principle. Right or wrong, there is always an alternative.

Chesterman has acknowledged that in translation there are errors, and that we shall never eliminate them. Parks has reiterated this concept. Eco also accepts that a translator may work at times independently of the author. In all three studies we have reflective enquiries into translation and translation theory. We also have a confirmation that Dawkins’ meme hypothesis does indeed have a manifestation in our concepts of translation. Most importantly, we come to understand that in accepting such a manifestation, we are then able to theorize and strategize on how memetics works, and does not work. May we be far from the day of Mentalese or Perfect Language. (Chesterman 81)

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Architecture and Ambivalence

Jean Baudrillard and Jean Nouvel, *The Singular Objects of Architecture*. Translated by Robert Bononno. Foreword by K. Michael Hays. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

By Simone Brott

The *Singular Objects of Architecture*, the English translation of *Les objets singuliers: Architecture et philosophie*, Editions Calmann-Lévy (2000), reproduces a dialogue that took place between Jean Baudrillard and Jean Nouvel in a conference at La Villette School of Architecture in Paris between 1997 and 1998, entitled *Urban Passages*, which staged six “encounters” between select pairs of theorists and architects. This information is provided in the acknowledgments page along with the only other clue to the making of the book: “When it came time to publish the book, the authors reworked their dialogue, focusing on a recurrent theme of the discussions: singularity. This theme helped drive the discussions towards their

resolution or, we should say, toward their radical and necessary incompleteness.” (xv)

What we are reading, then, is not a publishing project that sets out, in advance, to pursue ‘singular objects’ or to demonstrate the singularity of objects, but the outcome of a discussion which is subsequently given a name the reader is then paradoxically required to pursue – both, in order to secure a position inside the discourse of the book purchased and, further, to ratify such a discourse. The reading experience of *The Singular Objects* begins in this way a pursuit of Baudrillard’s lost object, *singularité*, which appears initially both to assert itself and to retreat in several vague but distinct

parallel moments in the text.

The vague formulation of the singular object owes to another incompleteness of the text – what we are reading is the result of a longer dialogue between Nouvel and Baudrillard, of over fifteen years, which enigmatically resurfaces in the text like a private conversation we have entered at a late stage and can only assume what has taken place hitherto. The singular object emerges, then, as both a nascent formulation or “extreme anticipation” of the text but one which is assumed in advance, nostalgic for what has come to pass.

Notwithstanding the ‘incompleteness’ of *The Singular Objects*, an authoritative directedness

and finality (contrary to the note in the acknowledgments) drives Baudrillard's ongoing critique of the modern object to its radical completion. *The Singular Objects* is a remarkable installment in Baudrillard's longstanding polemic about the modern object. After twenty years of lamenting the loss of the [real] object - the endless circulation of consumer imagery and signs that have replaced actual objects, that have converted the "real" into the hyper(real) - *The Singular Objects of Architecture* is Baudrillard's song to pure objecthood, addressed to the singular object *par excellence*, Architecture. The singular object is Baudrillard/Nouvel's antidote to Hyperreality, its function to withstand the iridescent sheen of simulation.

In its most simple formulation the singular object is an asignifying account of architectural objecthood, the *in itself* of the object beyond any functional, programmatic or semiotic content that might be attributed to it. Baudrillard calls this the literality of the object and Nouvel, the object's hyperspecificity. The singular object, Baudrillard argues, is untranslatable or inexchangeable. That is, no amount of interpretation of the object can ever stand in for the object itself - it is "fully exhausted in itself." (66)

This asignifying account of the singular architectural object undergoes a second moment where it becomes an active producer of meaning beyond the programmatic determinations assigned to it in advance; its function is to "translate a world around it." (4) The literality of the object here ensures that one set of meanings programmed into the building (functional, legal, aesthetic) is substituted for another, (critical, subversive, 'against culture') whose currency is a line of flight away from the closed circle of the instituted object. In this version the singular architectural object is not an outcome of design but a life which produces its own signifying effects prior to any originating design or teleology of the architecture. The example Baudrillard gives is Beaubourg in Paris which he explains was intended by the authorities to mean "Culture" but, through Piano's and Rogers' literal exteriorization of empty function and bleak exhibitionism, speaks the death of Culture. (38)

A certain ambivalence arises in the concept's relationship to meaning, one which conflates the asignifying account of the singular object, the pure literality of the singular object, with one that is a producer of meaning. Yet the singular object can be understood as having a semiotic assignment that stands precisely outside the uninterrupted circuit of exchange in which the ordinary object is consumed in an endless proliferation of signs. Its value is inexchangeable (or invaluable). The singular object resists consumption precisely because it penetrates the very surface of exchange; to use Baudrillard's language, it is a destroyer of culture.

In a third parallel moment the singular object enters a further signifying practice. It does not merely translate an existing world but anticipates a future reality existing virtually in the singular object. The twin towers of the World Trade Center are clones of each other, Baudrillard speculates, two identical "perforated strips" which anticipated the present age of cloning. He asks Nouvel whether "that mean[s] that architecture is not part of reality but part of the fiction of a society, an anticipatory illusion?" (4) - a statement that immeasurably gains in charge

after the events of September 11th, one year after the publication of *Les Objets Singuliers* - and irreversibly alters the status of the singular object.

In another parallel moment the anticipatory object is assigned a more literal exemplar: the futuristic building typology of which Baudrillard suggests *Biosphere 2* (a project designed to anticipate human colonization on another planet involving eight people who lived under a controlled environment for two years). Here, the singular object anticipates a future reality, not by its formal iconography but by actively predicating another life. Yet Baudrillard also insists that the anticipatory character of the singular object cannot be arranged or planned in advance. Singularity is always something that *becomes*...it is an event - fatal, irreversible, yet unforeseeable. He remarks:

At first we don't know if an object will become singular or not. This I referred to previously in terms of 'becoming or not becoming singular.' Sometimes even circumstances, whether they're historical, sociological, or whatever, trigger an object's singular becoming. (68)

How then are we to make sense of the singularism of the futuristic building typology which anticipates by *design* not by *becoming*? But the futuristic building whose *raison d'être* is pure anticipation merely highlights, through exaggeration, what is already a splitting in the concept, a symptom in the project which oscillates between critique and prescription. While the singular object describes retroactively the object's *becoming-anticipatory*, the question implied in the concept and finally realized in the dialogue itself is whether this quality can be engaged at the level of design.

Notwithstanding the ambivalence towards the prescription of a singular architecture in the concept, it is important to consider the various prescriptions volunteered within the book. The exchange between Nouvel and Baudrillard is, from the outset, premised on an agreement that Nouvel is creating singular objects and *ipso facto* that singularism is something that can be designed, qualified and prescribed. Nouvel begins early on in the text setting out his personal architectural credo: "Architecture should articulate a concept that will define a place we are unfamiliar with...[that] might...convey certain things...we cannot control, things that are fatal...*We need to find a compromise between what we control and what we provoke...*" (6) [italics mine]

Nouvel talks about engaging the architectural encounter through certain perceptual and mental effects in which the architecture exceeds the building as a discrete formal entity, a technique for designing spaces he describes as "the mental extension of sight." One idea Nouvel deploys in this service, such as in his "endless skyscraper," is *dematerialization*, which he describes as a "diversion which reroutes our perception of phenomena from the material to the immaterial." Nouvel believes architecture should appropriate dematerialization in order that it can "create more than what we see." (7) He also makes use of the ideas of illusion and effects of graduating transparency which he describes in a statement about the Cartier Foundation: "if I look at a tree through the three glass planes, I can never determine if I'm looking at the tree through the glass, in front of it, behind it, or the reflection of the tree...these are the means by which the architect creates a virtual space..."

(8) Baudrillard, in turn, appeals to Nouvel's work in its use of dematerialization and effects of disappearance which he argues "effectively counteract that hegemonic visibility...that dominates us, the visibility of the system, where everything must be immediately visible and immediately interpretable." (9)

Yet despite this agreement there are important differences in the way each locates the singular object. Is Nouvel's hyperspecificity of the object as a singular, formal entity a sufficient qualification for Baudrillard whose ambitions for the object are to destroy culture? For Nouvel who is primarily interested in the phenomenology of the object, the virtual is not a transcendent quality of the building but something produced in the mind and body of the user. In Baudrillard, the virtual, anticipatory quality is a Marxian notion. While Nouvel wishes to preserve the hyperspecificity of the object in order to rethink the status of the architectural object, Baudrillard is interested in what the object can *do* - the subversive potential of the object. But this difference of motive is more complicated. Nouvel also slips into a Marxist rhetoric when he talks about singularism as a resistance to the commercialization of architecture and its reduction to property development and speculation. Architecture's singularism, he claims, exists in the realm of the unsaid - beyond the translation of functionality or the result of an economic situation. Both agree the singular object exists beyond architecture's "real" (8) but the question remains whether Baudrillard's "real" is what Nouvel has in mind.

Both consider Beaubourg in terms of a political intervention but whereas Baudrillard considers the building to have subverted the aims of the authorities and undermined the prescribed significations of Culture, Nouvel talks about how the Center Pompidou failed, how it is a failed political project. Nouvel argues that Beaubourg was designed with a dynamic, flexible spontaneous event space in mind but that in its use everything has been "reframed, resealed" and the original singularity of the design was eliminated after construction. (40) While Baudrillard's analysis is restricted to the façade of Beaubourg, Nouvel laments the planning processes that compromised the internal space and neutralization of any subversive potential conceived in the original design.

Baudrillard poses the question to Nouvel: "How can you recapture the subversiveness that the space seemed to call forth as it was originally designed?" to which Nouvel responds: "Can the institution accept subversion? Can it plan the unknown, the unforeseeable? Can it, within a space as open as this, provide artists with the conditions for something that is oversized, an interference; can it agree to not set limits?" (40) Baudrillard also stipulates that subversion or provocation is not equivalent to *seduction*, and seduction is not something that can be planned. In the analysis of Beaubourg, it is clear that something has been degraded or lost, but it is not singularity (since singularity is inexchangeable, irreversible). The singular object emerges here as a nostalgia for the lost object which remains both virtual, real and unrealized in the actual building.

We might understand this paradox of designing singularism as not only a nuance in the formulation of the concept, but one exposing its ideological function. The singular object of architecture is, of course, utopian (and therefore

it cannot pretend not to prescribe). Its anticipation of a future world purposely breaks the ordinary exchange of meaning in order to assert something else. While the singular object is only a radical exception - it merely tears at the surface of hyperreality and is not presented as something that could ever entirely destroy it - its fantasy is precisely this total destruction and world beyond hyperreality that it secretly wishes. But the question then raises itself: What is the singular object's relation to hyperreality? [and] What are the real limits of its power? The relation between singularism and simulation is assumed here without being given any treatment in the text.

An answer is provided a year later in Baudrillard's essay on the Manhattan disaster *The Spirit of Terrorism*. (2002) Baudrillard speculates that the event of September 11th forms an image which satisfies exactly the fantasy of the destruction of global capital, irreversibly changing the world's relationship to globalism. This power of singularism to modify the very surface of hyperreality, already a nascent formulation in *The Singular Objects*, is fully expressed in *The Spirit of Terrorism*. Baudrillard says:

And, at the same time as they have radicalized the world situation, the events in New York can also be said to have radicalized the relation of the image to reality. Whereas we were dealing before with an uninterrupted profusion of banal images and a seamless flow of sham events, the terrorist act in New York has resurrected both images and events. (2002: 26-27)

It is this resurrection of the image - we might say its singularization - that begins to complicate Baudrillard's existing discourse on the image. The image produced in the event of September 11th cuts through the surface of hyperreality using the precise technology of hyperreality itself, by producing the simulacrum to end all others. The savagery of such an image converts the media induced simulacrum into something which has become absolutely singular. In *The Singular Objects* we can see glimpses of this.

The discussion of the Guggenheim Bilbao is important here because it is a building Baudrillard regards as not singular, but one where we might say the simulacrum begins to enter a process of singularization. Baudrillard draws a distinction between the Guggenheim and the World Trade Center twin towers. While the WTC towers he says anticipated cloning, the Guggenheim uses software cloning technology itself, it is in the midst of a cloning condition. Baudrillard considers this to have erased its secret. (48-9) It is the opposite of the singular object - it could be translated into infinite permutations of curves and surfaces. It's a prototype. The Guggenheim is exactly the situation Baudrillard considers to be hyperreal - it replaces the actual object with an image that is reproduced in *Time* magazine and in BMW's photo campaign and numerous other contexts. But the Guggenheim Bilbao wavers between the banal consumer image and a place where the fabric is beginning to weaken and we can begin to see a kind of operationality of the image which precedes the overall surface. The Guggenheim is a simulation of such plague like proportions that it begins to represent the culture of hyperreality (and not merely be consumed by it). However this is exactly why Baudrillard would prefer not to call it singular: it lies on the wrong side of ideology - the side of

globalism. It is no longer consumed but becomes itself a black hole into which everything in Bilbao is consumed.

Baudrillard has already had a long following in Architecture. The discussion surrounding *Simulations* (1983) and the theory of hyperreality coincided with a growing interest in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of Virtuality in the nineties along with the increasing use of new media and digital techniques in architectural production. ANY magazine edited by Cynthia Davidson (Architecture New York) published an issue on the Virtual House, a design competition, including a series of design entries as well as philosophical essays by Deleuze, Eric Alliez, Paul Virilio and others. The tone of this architectural discussion is of course radically different from Baudrillard's polemical critique of consumer culture. For architecture it is an anaesthetized version of hyperreality, albeit a productive one, used to think about architectural space and form.

While this discussion of virtuality and simulation in architecture was productive and interesting there is a way in which it facilitated the elision of the object, through increasingly abstract formulations of virtual space. The theory of hyperreality in its overvaluation of the image makes it very easy to side step the unavoidably material and object-based practice that constitutes architecture. *The Singular Objects* forces the question: What is the status of the *object* in a world which has become hyperreal - but in which objects remain? More than this, it provides architecture an answer in the form of a challenge. The singular object invests architecture with the critical power to resist the capitalist hegemony of hyperreality.

But with this political invitation is a danger that attends the singular object. One might ask whether this concept induces a nostalgic return to the modernist architectural object? Does the singular object not valorise the object and ultimately submit itself to Capital? The objects Baudrillard chooses, the World Trade Center twin towers and Beaubourg, are both modernist projects. His analysis of the World Trade Center pre 9-11 sharpens the point: the destruction of the towers reduced them to the banal representation of corporate modernism, the antithesis of singularism, symbolic of old America and Capital itself. Further, were not the avant-garde modernist architects such as Mies and Le Corbusier producing singular objects which anticipated something that had not yet begun? And, was it not precisely this architecture that was replicated in the most banal way to produce the corporate modernism of post-war American architecture?

But Baudrillard's appeal to the object should be understood not as a reactionary call to salvage the lost object of modernity - or, worse, a return to the auratic object described by Benjamin - but an attempt to theorize the event of an exceptional object whose production takes place precisely within the consumer wilderness of hyperreality. The singular object exists always and exactly as a state of exception within hyperreality and, as an exception, singularism does not describe an object in its totality so much as a moment in its life and the culture it intercepts. Perhaps to Baudrillard's statement, we don't know whether a building will become singular or not, should be appended, we also don't know when it will become *unsingular*. Thus, in the Manhattan disaster of 2001 the singularism

of the World Trade Center is neutralized and the towers converted back into an image, while the image of destruction becomes the singular event to end all others.

Notwithstanding the temporal fluidity of the singular object, the utopian rhetoric of *The Singular Objects* places architecture in a precarious position, which it experiences as déjà vu. It frames architecture in a liberatory discourse, which as K. Michael Hays says in the Foreword has been taboo within architectural discussion for over twenty years. While architecture and urbanism are often thought of as instruments of power and institutionalism, in the contemporary discussion there seems no way in which architecture is permitted to be discussed as political resistance. Such a move would be a regression to an earlier stage of contemporary architectural theory viz. the Autonomy argument of the seventies and the project of Critical Architecture, one that was ultimately rejected and declared to have failed by the Marxist philosopher Manfredo Tafuri a moment which marks architecture's deeply ambivalent political status.

This political ambivalence has always been the guilty lining of architecture and Baudrillard indulges this ambivalence. Architecture is both the singular object lying counter to culture and its primary symbol. Baudrillard's examples are held up as productive models, which have created holes in hyperreality, and are also examples of that culture which he derides. But the singular objects are able to capture something of that culture just before being consumed by it; they have become so over-consumed or complicit as to become the event of that very culture. It is this radical ambivalence perhaps that Baudrillard finds "both exciting and disenchanted" about architecture. But in *The Singular Objects* this ambivalence is brought once more to the surface, leaning this time to the side of love: the singular object of architecture regains a role which is both positive and politically productive.

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Beaubourg