

Editorial

The Pleasures of Silence

By Thomas M. Kemple

Prelude: Friday, March 12, 2004. Davie Street, Vancouver
 I arrived early at Melriches Café after spending the morning at the University, so I was able to grab a good table with a view of the street. The week before, Gary Genosko had e-mailed me to arrange for us to meet up on his way home to Thunder Bay from Victoria. As I sipped my latte, I recalled that this would be the first time we'd seen each other since February 2000 when he invited me to give a talk to his department at Lakehead ('Weber's Tolstoyan Arts', I called it), and before that we were together in Toronto in July 1993 at the 60th birthday party of John O'Neill, who supervised us both at York's graduate programme in Social and Political Thought. As Gary approached the window of the café, I hesitated a moment before heading out greet him; I wanted to observe his uncertainty over whether he'd found the right place.

At some point in our conversation over lunch he presented me with Stephen Riggins (SR)'s *The Pleasures of Time: Two Men, A Life (PT)* to ask if I'd review it for the SRB. A few months ago I'd browsed through it at the Chapters on Robson and found SR's fragmentary diary-like entries fascinating. The moving story of his 30-plus years with his partner, Paul Bouissac (PB), was reminiscent of the 15-plus years I've spent with my partner (also called Stephen), each a tale of two men teaching literature and sociology at Canadian universities, sharing a life together often with long periods apart and despite geographical separations. Though I could have used the gift certificate Stephen's sister had given us for Christmas, the classification on the back – "Gay Studies/Cultural Studies" – made me think

that I should buy it at Little Sister's, our neighbourhood lesbian and gay bookstore next to Melriches. I seemed destined to get it for free.

I. *Expert sepia tones*

The blurb on the back of *PT* gives a sweeping summary which somehow seems at odds with the modest ambitions of its fragmentary presentation and the anecdotal style of its detailed descriptions:

Spanning over most of the past century, *The Pleasures of Time* is an important work that not only traces the growth of a committed gay relationship, but also charts the intellectual and artistic ferment of the 1970s and 80s. Riggins, who bases his book on diaries he has kept since the early 70s, recreates in expert sepia tones his life with Bouissac – whether it is in the cafes of Paris, his home state of Indiana or the rural country circuses of 1960s southern Ontario.

The phrase 'expert sepia tones' still gives me pause: while SR's vivid prose does have the quality of a fading and discoloured photograph, and its delicate phrasings often do have an almost nostalgic musical air, the 'expertise' on display is more often that of the casual biographer and literary stylist than of the sociologist or semiotician. SR has a remarkable talent for evoking vivid scenes of domestic life, private conversations in cafés, quirky encounters on the street, and bizarre public spectacles while endowing them with broader historical significance and providing them with an almost allegorical meaning. All are culled from an impressively eclectic range of sources: letters from friends, published works (including novels,

theoretical monographs, and analytical essays), memorabilia (including circus and conference programs), magazines and newspapers, photographs (both old and recent), and most importantly, his own diaries and recorded interviews. As he writes in the Preface, "*The Pleasures of Time* is a journal of love, friendship and domesticity, a collection of shards and remnants from two seamless lives," and yet he immediately acknowledges that tensions and conflicts lurk between many of these fragments: "But my Samuel Johnson was probably less cooperative than the original ... Paul resented my gathering personal information because he felt it undermined the trust in our relationship" (9-10). Public exposure through texts and images, despite the devotion of the writer to his subject of study or the presumed generosity of readers, somehow seems to violate the intimacy of these relationships.

PT goes beyond mere reporting in its attempts to capture the very texture and atmosphere of SR's life with PB in the form of a kind of personal scrap-book and photo-album – depicting friends, colleagues, circus performers (from PB's days as a student and organizer of circuses), and themselves over the years. Often these images are provided with some of the musical accompaniment that guided SR's own journey into the academic world in the years after he met PB, especially through his interviews with such avant-guard composers as Brian Ferneyhough, Geoffrey Bush, Francis Routh, and John Cage (the latter appropriately interviewed amidst the random sounds of a hotel swimming pool). Since *PT* is a collage of images, musical notes and texts, it demands an effort of looking, listening and reading that exceeds the merely psycho-physiological acts of seeing, hearing and deciphering to produce the kind of "shimmering" that Roland Barthes (1985: 256) calls *signifying (signifiante)*. Unlike the more solitary outbursts of Barthes's lover's discourse, the often tense collaborative dialogue between SR and PB is sometimes threatened with disruption by the artificial proprieties and conflicting perspectives of the 'inter-view': "It is difficult to step out of the role of lover and formally interview Paul. The interviewer-interviewee relationship seems awkward, distant and judgmental" (97). Only occasionally achieving the fluidity of an amorous monologue or the casual back-and-forth of a friendly chat, the joint-work of questioning, listening and recording in *PT* is frequently punctuated by the silence of an impending referendum, the grumbles of muffled resentment, or the baffled

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speechlessness of incomprehension.

II. *Reflexive states of being*

Although the genre of SR's account has more in common with a personal memoir and informal biography than with an intellectual commentary or theoretical critique, he does put considerable effort into the more abstract philosophical task of explaining how thoughts emerge from experiences and of displaying how incidents give rise to ideas. The unusual events and strange encounters that make the book such a fascinating read are often sutured onto PB's academic and literary output (most of which are listed in the notes on pages 226-227), not just as part of some grand project for placing the work in relation to the life, but even more as a way of exhibiting the experience and effort of insight itself. PB himself eloquently articulates this point in one of his most important theoretical statements:

The little reflexive state of being (*le petit état réflexif*) is born quickly – one may let it come or chase it away – it is rarely caused by alcohol or food – more often by fasting, rain, the vibrations of the train, sometimes by coffee – it forces you to quickly scribble notes on the margins of newspapers or on the backs of envelopes – the only problem is to make it last – to push back the printed text in the margins, to keep it there, and to let come whatever appears in its place – one may wonder if there is a passive little reflexive state – but it is only a superior form of sleeping – only the active little reflexive state constitutes an object that can be described – its greatest enemies are music and conversation – the calls of nature do not interrupt it – a neutral or benevolent presence may be favourable as long as it is silent and odourless.... (Bouissac 1968: 111, in Riggins, 83).

PB's inspiration emphasizes more the swiftness of the fleeting impression and the difficulties of its capture than the permanence of the Great Idea or the patient work needed to give expression to a Big Concept. One can imagine that SR's notes must themselves have been first jotted down and gathered out of his own "little reflexive states of being," suspending the flow of talk and its musical accompaniment just long enough to formulate a phrase or to commit an idea to paper. Reacting to minor quotidian stimulants rather than gorging on grand ideas or intoxicating insights, SR and PB seem to serve as "benevolent presences" for one another – often passing unnoticed and sometimes without passing judgment.

Among SR's own claims to notoriety is his skill and good fortune as an interviewer, and in particular, his 1982 interview with Michel Foucault, the entirety of which is reproduced in *PT* (253-264). SR has good reason to boast that this is one of the most personal interviews Foucault ever gave. As in his discussions with composers, his questions are unusual in focusing resolutely on the biographical sources of Foucault's thought, but without any aim to provoke sensational confessions:

I'm not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. That's the reason also why, when people say, "Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else," my answer is, [Laughter] "Well, do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?" (Foucault, in Riggins, 262).

Foucault goes on to compare this personal intellectual aim with the aesthetic experience, with the task of making oneself into a work of art, and specifically with the way that a painter may himself be transformed by his own painting. It is as if the adventure of thought itself may become an exercise in *metanoia*, in learning how to change one's mind, or as Foucault says elsewhere, to "penser autrement." As in his interviews with PB, SR has a way of provoking Foucault to consider how he might take as much inspiration from an intimate encounter, a personal memory or a private incident, as he would from an historical document, a philosophical text or a political event.

III. *The academic circus*

In fact, much of what makes *PT* so delightful is not the often comical or poignant descriptions of domestic life or the litany of ordinary occurrences, such as the one which follows a visit to a statue personifying 'La France' by an obscure sculptor, featuring a mischievous snake resting its head on a post (which SR describes as an "out-of-place bit of comedy" in an otherwise serious work of art): "Ever since that afternoon at the museum, Paul wants to 'do the Bourdelle snake' when he and I are alone in the apartment elevator – to rest his chin on my shoulder" (171-172). Rather, what gives the book its critical edge and its intellectual claim to relevance is the parade of famous academic giants who float through their lives, and beside whom they at times appear as silly side-kicks, and at others as serious though often unrecognized rivals. In the chapter that gives the book its title, we catch passing glimpses of Sartre sitting in the garden and De Beauvoir in the elevator of the building in which they are living in Paris; Alan Bloom invites himself to join their table at the famous Café de Flore to dismiss angels and communists and appears at a Toronto party to brag about the beautiful male prostitutes he bought in Paris; Marshall McLuhan causes an uproar on a panel organized by PB by declaring that surrealism has no legitimate claim to depict the truth about life, but the fuss is dispelled when PB orders a pianist to start playing while the lights are turned down and a film by Buñuel is projected; and PB manages to commission an official portrait of his colleague Northrop Frye by an inexperienced bohemian artist who depicts the great scholar as a god-like figure floating above a desert landscape. Like the "little reflexive states of being," these more grandiloquent ones also seem to be induced *en passant* and often improvised on the spur of the moment.

Though only noted in a few pages in *PT* (220-224), among PB's greatest and lasting contributions to intellectual life is, of course, his quiet and tireless work in promoting

semiotics as a serious intellectual discipline, in particular, by founding the Toronto Semiotic Circle and the *Semiotic Review of Books*, assuming editorship of *Recherche Sémiotique/Semiotic Inquiry*, and serving as the organizer of over thirty conferences and four month-long International Summer Institutes for Semiotics and Structural Studies (ISISSS). Besides Foucault, whose presence in 1982 provided the occasion for SR's interview, the big names that PB was able to lure for the Institute included Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Paul Ricoeur, Mary Douglas, Luce Irigaray, Theresa de Lauretis, Haydn White, Ivan Illich, and PB's own former mentors, A. J. Greimas and Claude Levi-Strauss, along with a host of other great minds all vying for the attention and approbation of the mass of students and spectators in attendance. Those fortunate enough to witness any of these often maddening but always stimulating events (I myself was a devoted auditor at the last one held in 1989) would not have been surprised to learn that its quiet master of ceremonies was himself both a former organizer and an established scholar of the circus:

I often joked that I had to handle elephants and prima donnas. Indeed, we dealt with big egos which required constant attention as do stars and dangerous animals in a circus program. They had to be properly fed – paid. We had sometimes to reduce the chances of contact between two or more elephants because of potential clashes. They had to be handled with kid gloves.

My personal enjoyment in dealing with all the problems and difficulties was that I experienced them in the light of my previous circus experience. I metaphorized the selection of a program as if it were a circus program in which you have to balance various specialties. The whole venture was set up in an environment of risks because its success depended entirely on how many people outside the University of Toronto our program would attract. The institutes were in a sense nomadic since there was no permanent institutional structure. Rather it was like pitching our tents in the no-man's land of the academic disciplinary landscape. There were a lot of practical problems of securing contacts with high-profile professors who would provide a high degree of visibility in the same manner as a circus program must have some highlights that are featured on a poster.

Like a circus, there was no institutional burden to carry except repeating the performance with a different program. ISISSS was always characterized by a certain amount of precariousness and required a lot of snap decisions and improvisations with the imperative that the show must go on (Bouissac interviewed September 19, 1999, in Riggins, 223).

This remarkable revelation speaks not only to PB's extraordinary good humour and unique political skills in managing resources, taming egos and conducting a massive show

of intellectual bravado, but also to his more serious aesthetic sense of the potential for semiotics to examine the transposition of meaning from one interpretive context to another.

IV. *The silence of anecdotal thinking*

Like *PT* itself, this review is doomed to distort, misrepresent or miss most of the many incidents and events, insights and influences that make up the book and that are destined to strike any given reader as especially significant. I shall not touch directly on the principal passion of PB's early career and thus a major preoccupation of the book, namely, the circus, or one of its most surprising and unusual charms – its peculiar contribution to some hybrid field called “Gay Studies/Cultural Studies,” as promised on the back cover. SR himself acknowledges that in the end he has said practically nothing about the early influences on PB's thinking, including popular and literary romanticism, Catholic mysticism, negative theology and Sufism (301). An inadvertent omission or deliberate silence is as bound to raise a protest as is the tendency to try to analyse and express everything:

Paul complains that I try to ‘objectify’ things. I spell out to everyone something he might say one way to one person and another way to someone else. Everything does not have to be said, he protests... Resolutely self-effacing, he is still proud of the fact that scholars are not familiar with the body of his work because it is scattered in such obscure journals. Unfortunately, my summary of his research on the circus imprisons him in the past. He feels like an ancient archeological site (301).

If one of the most pleasurable aspects of *PT* is its composition in diary-like entries and its pithy, anecdotal style, then one of its most innovative features consists of the way these pieces perform and exemplify the relationship between SR and PB and between them and the reader. Since it is impossible to say everything or to spell out anything completely, these relationships are defined as much by what is uttered on the one side as by what remains silent on the other, and thus as much by the significance of the words, images and sounds that articulate these relationships as by the blank spaces, temporal gaps and silences between them (Illich 1969). It is characteristic of SR's keen attunement to this unspoken dimension of the production and consumption of meaning and its variations that it structures the whole of his account: from the homely ‘Interlude’ on his childhood in Indiana, which includes an account of the conspiracy of silence concerning the secret sexual use of courthouse toilets (186-188), to Foucault's sublime response to the first question of the interview, which alludes to the many forms of silence experienced by those growing up in Catholic France before and during the Second World War: “There were some kinds of silence which implied very sharp hostility and others which meant deep friendship, emotional admiration, even love” (Foucault 1983, in Riggins, 254-255). The curious proposition that concludes Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1992: 189) –

“Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen (Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent)” – might therefore serve not just as a philosophical motto for 20th century thought but also as a kind of commonsense rule of thumb for the conduct of everyday life in the modern world.

SR and PB share with me an admiration for a common philosophical hero, whose candid moral and social commentaries and frank self-disclosures provide a model for the pleasurable and painful tasks of reflexive reading and critical writing:

To enjoy life requires some husbandry. I enjoy it twice as much as others, since the measure of our joy depends on the greater or lesser degree of our attachment to it. Above all now, when I see my span so short, I want to give it more ballast; I want to arrest the swiftness of its passing by the swiftness of my capture, compensating for the speed with which it drains away by the intensity of my enjoyment (Montaigne 1991: 1263, in Riggins, 165).

Montaigne's passion for originality is more modest than monumental, since it consists of patiently thinking through his experiences for long periods of time, often in private and in secret, before publishing them for others to inspect and to judge. Like Montaigne's *Essais*, inspired by and dedicated to his beloved Etienne de la Boétie, SR's devoted homage to PB in *PT* also follows a method and style of “thinking anecdotally.” To build a thought around an anecdote involves constructing an often humorous or amusing account of an incident *after the event* (*après coup*, *nachträglich*), usually in some haste or as a kind of improvised post-script or afterword (Gallop 2002: 257). Anecdotal thinking and writing therefore constitute a specialized technique for fastening the specific to the general, the intimate to the impersonal, the humorous to the serious, the present to the past, and the real to the remembered.

All readers of this book will find a point of reflection or place of resonance in the events and situations described, as its “allegorical” structure and construction in pieces encourage the pursuit of daydreams and distracted memories. For me, reading *PT* evoked a particular memory that happened to be located at the site of the text's conception: “Most of my formal interviews took place in my windowless office in St. John's, Newfoundland, when Paul visited during university holidays,” writes SR in the Preface, adding: “I chose a windowless office to avoid looking out on Canada's capital of rain and fog” (10). In June 1997, I was in St. John's for the meetings of the Learned Societies of Canada as the organizer of a session on ‘the future of the sociological classics’. I had planned to talk about the drawings depicting ‘Death as Savior’ by the proto-expressionist Max Klinger that the sociologist Max Weber and his wife Marianne collected in the early years of their marriage. But to my irritation, someone had forgotten to announce the session in the official program, and so with just a few hours before we were to speak, I

barged into this windowless office, demanding that something had to be done. There I found SR, who was listed as the local organizer of the sociology section of the meetings, casually chatting to PB, whom I recognized from our brief introduction at the ISISSS meetings a decade before. With my hysteria subsiding and after combining our efforts, we managed to recruit a few audience members to attend our session, including PB himself, who sat patiently and quietly through to the end before asking each of us to consider submitting our papers to the SRB. Reading *PT* seven years later, I can imagine that the simple title he suggested for my essay – “The Unrepresentable” (Kemple 1997) – might express not only the failure of the artist (Klinger) and intellectual (Weber) to represent death fully, but also the attempts of the sociologist (SR) and semiotician (PB) to represent life in its particularity.

Coda: September 12, 2004, Cardero Street, Vancouver

Today was the 50th birthday of a good friend of mine, whom my partner Stephen happened to know back in their early days in Toronto but who has now moved back to his native city. Stephen had to miss the party since he was away for the weekend in soon-to-be-hurricane-ravaged Tallahassee giving a talk at a colloquium on ‘Queer Masculinities’ with Stephen Orgel. It's still strange to think that we have friends in their 50s who don't seem much older than we are; what's not unusual is that a professional commitment has meant that we can't be together for some event, by now a familiar pattern for us: three or four years together in Toronto and Vancouver, not to mention the occasional conferences and the breaks between terms and for family visits, and as many years apart, with one of us in Peterborough, Montreal, and Calgary, or otherwise out of town for one reason or another.

One of the last entries of Barthes's posthumously published diaries, dated September 12, 1979 and so exactly 25 years ago today, speaks first-hand of the anxiety of aging among many single gay men. It begins with the name-dropping and romantic ennui that now strike me as so typical of famous French intellectuals, at least those of an earlier era:

At the American cocktail party for Richard Sennett (admirable: a whole sociology in the fact that he cannot express himself in another's presence, as if expression were a self-evident higher value), where I find Edgar Morin, Foucault, and Touraine, trapped (we were told it was a cocktail party, it was a date), I was thinking of nothing but my date with Olivier G. (Barthes 1992: 69).

On the last entry of the diary a few pages later Barthes comes to the bitter realization that lovely young Olivier will not reciprocate his love, and that perhaps he'll remain alone forever, self-consciously undesirable and anxiously aging: “How clearly I saw that I would have to give up boys, because none of them felt any desire for me, and I was either too scrupulous or too clumsy to impose my desire on them; that this is an unavoidable fact, averred by all my efforts at flirting, that

I have a melancholy life, that, finally, I'm bored to death by it, and that I must divest my life of this interest, this hope ... More than Olivier was over: the love of *one* boy" (Barthes 1992: 73). Although Barthes's sad resignation is occasionally echoed by some of the older single gay men I know in Vancouver, including my friend whose birthday is today, it also seems peculiarly Parisian and infused with intellectual pathos, though perhaps this is because I know that Barthes died in an accident just a few months after these lines were written. For him, the lover's discourse had become more desperate and melancholy the more he clung to the fleeting image of youth that was both the object of his affections and the atmosphere of his desires.

Today also marks exactly a half year since the day Gary asked me to write this review as we ate at the café up the street, and as usual, life has interrupted its writing and intervening events have shaped my reading of and thinking about the book: Stephen and I celebrated 15 years together in May, along with our first full year living together in our own place and with permanent positions at the same university; the family reunion and 70th birthday party for my

parents that my siblings and I organized in July at the cottage opened up a flood of childhood memories in the form of photographs and testimonials from well-wishers; two of my Masters students finished theses over the summer on film that led me to reconsider how Barthes's notion of 'the obtuse meaning' is displayed in images, music and texts; and a conference trip to Spain in August has helped to reframe my endless Weber project in terms of the general problem of 'sociological allegory'. On their own or simply listed out, these incidents hardly connect up to make a story, much less do they immediately provide occasions for theorizing. But to me they suggest episodes in a fractured narrative of what it means to grow old together with someone, and to have a thought that is as precious to hold as one's own as it is to share with others.

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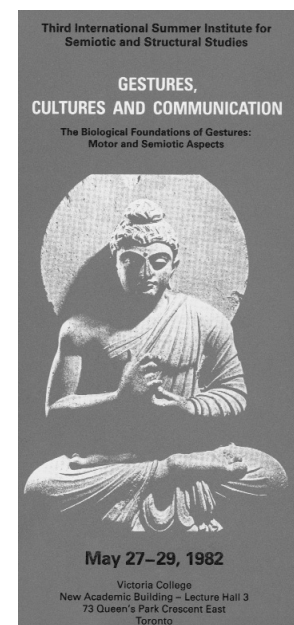
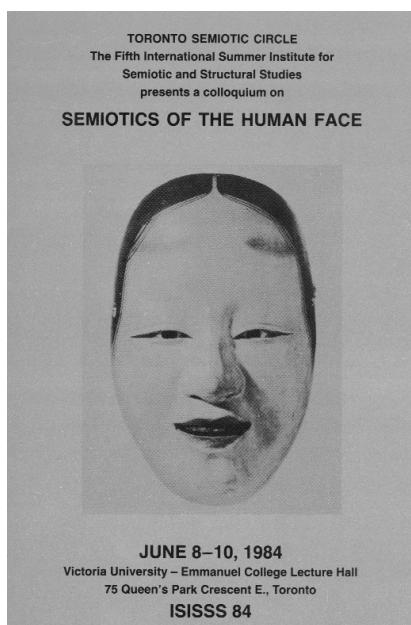
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Adventures in Music Analysis

Leonard B. Meyer, *The Spheres of Music: A Gathering of Essays*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Richard Littlefield, *Frames and Framing: The Margins of Music Analysis*. Acta Semiotica Fennica XII. Helsinki: The International Semiotics Institute, 2001.

By Kofi Agawu

“At this stage of my life,” writes Leonard Meyer in the preface to this new collection, “I want to ‘put it all together’ in a more or less comprehensive vision that joins theory to history, history to culture, culture to aesthetics, aesthetics to methodology, and methodology back to theory.” What an ambitious project! Yet, if anyone of his generation — including distinguished writers like Joseph Kerman, Edward T. Cone, Allen Forte and Milton Babbitt — is in a position to pull off such a synthesis, it is likely to be Meyer. In over four decades of active research and writing, Meyer has produced four books and numerous articles on an impressively diverse range of topics. The eight essays reprinted in *The Spheres of Music* (henceforth *Spheres*)

embody one of two parallel trajectories of thought that define his lifetime project. The other unfolds in four influential volumes. First in line was *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956), which appropriated a handful of core principles from Gestalt psychology in an attempt to convey some of the principal sources of emotion and therefore meaning in music. The suggestiveness of Meyer's theory is reflected in the fact that philosophers and aestheticians interested in musical meaning today often take some of their bearings from him. A second book followed in 1960, co-authored with Grosvenor Cooper; it offered a theory of rhythmic organization based in part on categories of prosody (Cooper and Meyer 1960). Here, as in other analytical writings, Meyer's empiricism is evident, as is

his ability to clarify such basic concepts as beat, accent, stress, meter and grouping. Although more powerful explanatory theories have appeared since 1960 (see, for example, Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983, Hasty 1997 and Krebs 1999), few subsequent theorists of musical rhythm have managed to by-pass entirely the central concerns expressed by Cooper and Meyer in their pioneering book.

Meyer's third book turned from the narrowly technical to a broader engagement with the culture of new music composition in the twentieth century. *Music, the Arts, and Ideas* appeared in 1967 and was widely read for its lively treatment of experimental music, complexity, style and artistic choice,

value and greatness in music, and the future of Western art music. Meyer's interest may have been sparked by his own studies in composition, but here as elsewhere he sought to reach not only fellow musicians but a wider audience of humanists. In 1973, he turned again to note-by-note analysis, offering a theory of melody in the second half of *Explaining Music*. Shapes, patterns and tonal tendencies are considered in well-chosen and far from obscure musical examples, and one finishes the book with a strong feeling for the ontology of hierarchy in tonal music and the nature of conformant relationships. For music theorists, *Explaining Music* may well be Meyer's most interesting book not only because of its engaging close readings but also because of its lucid presentation of the limits of critical discourse in the opening chapter.

Finally in 1989, Meyer published a comprehensive treatise on style, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology*, bringing together ideas adumbrated in earlier publications and laying particular emphasis on romantic music. If *Style and Music* failed to make as big an impact as one might have expected, it was partly because the climate of musicology had begun to shift decisively around 1990, away from evidence-based and even empirical work to an engagement – inspired in part by poststructuralist critical approaches – with previously marginalized topics like gender and difference, the study of non-canonical repertoires, and hermeneutic analysis. But *Style and Music* remains a rich resource, and it may well be that as the dust settles on the musicology and music theory wars of the 1990s, some students will return to Meyer's suggestive perspectives on the enactment and manipulation of conventional structures in romantic music.

Style and Music may be said to have 'put it all together' in 1989, so what does it mean to do so again in *Spheres*? As we will see in a moment, the specific concerns of its eight essays are not radically different from those found in the four books just mentioned, but the essay format enables a different mode of execution: greater detail in some essays, general and speculative perceptions in others, without a pressing need to unify the whole. Moreover, the character of his thinking emerges here forcefully. Meyer's work may be described as semiotic in the broadest sense because it is concerned above all with matters of signification and meaning. Although he never invested in the vocabulary or frames of musical semiotics, his work may be considered semiotic *avant la lettre*; indeed, a number of leading writers have discussed aspects of it in precisely these terms. David Lidov for example interrupted an explication of Jean-Jacques Nattiez's early theories of semiotics in order to draw attention to Meyer's 1956 book as "one way to attack the problems of meaning in music on an explanatory level" (1977:24). Jean-Jacques Nattiez borrowed and refined certain key ideas about the autonomization of parameters, the significance of universals, and the classification of musico-aesthetic conceptions in his *Music and Discourse* (1990). And Naomi Cumming found some resonance in Meyer's theory of expectation in advancing her own theory of subjectivity

and signification in music (Cumming 2000). Earlier, she wrote about the concept of analogy in Meyer's work (Cumming 1991) and about his use of metaphors of space and motion in the analysis of melody (Cumming 1990). Let us hope that someday soon someone will undertake a study that thinks Meyer's entire project through in terms of semiotics.

Because it is implicitly rather than explicitly semiotic, however, and notwithstanding an ever-present concern with matters such as motion, dynamism, convention and expectation, Meyer's work is harder to characterize as system or formula. This may explain in part why it has not had as full an impact on American music theory as it surely deserves. For aside from the wing that deals with the history of music theory, and perhaps a handful of analytical initiatives, the discipline of music theory in North America has become more of a pedagogy than an intellectual practice. Therefore only those methods and approaches that are readily replicable, that can be reduced to formulas and fed to students, seem to have a far-reaching impact. (One thinks of methods associated with Schenker, Forte, Lerdahl and Jackendoff, and recently, neo-Riemannian theory). Indeed, we may have to resign ourselves to the prospect that no music theory that takes history, style or aesthetics seriously is likely to make a big impact on the mass teaching of theory in North America. Meyer's impact has thus been confined to the more advanced levels of the curriculum, even though the matters that lay close to his heart – like the role of tension and release, the fulfilment and thwarting of expectations, and the mediation of convention in stylistic articulation – could stimulate thinking at relatively early stages of music study. He is not the only musical thinker the character of whose ideas resists the mass dissemination and replication associated with mainstream music theory. But as more people become aware of the contingency of our ways of proceeding, we may hope for positive change in the transmission of ideas about music.

The most impressive of the analytical essays in *Spheres* is devoted to 42 bars from Mozart's late G-Minor Symphony. Entitled "Grammatical Simplicity and Relational Richness: The Trio of Mozart's G-Minor Symphony," this essay was first published in the interdisciplinary (mainly literary) journal *Critical Inquiry* in 1976, not in a music journal. I doubt that many readers of *Critical Inquiry* had the background or vocabulary – or patience – to follow Meyer's overly didactic and highly disciplined note-by-note discussion, so it would not be ungenerous to say that the essay probably fulfilled a largely symbolic function at the time. And yet, as a prime example of the kind of analysis that Raymond Monelle has recently dubbed "scorism" (Monelle 2000:3), Meyer's essay deserves a more considered critique not from literary scholars – whose wishes may not extend beyond knowing whether such a close reading is possible in the first place, or what Mozart's Trio 'means' – but from musical scholars who are able to take for granted its possibility and can then proceed to separate the mundane from the insightful.

Meyer draws on his usual sources of meaning – cadential action or closing tendencies, the dynamics of beginning, accentual differentiation, levels and varying intensities of expectation – to read the Trio as both structure and, to a lesser extent, style. But the line between score description (employing the terminology of music theory) and musical description (employing concepts and terms that value Mozart's music less as pattern and more as utterance) is frequently transgressed, thus hiding some of Meyer's achievement. The apparent rigour of the analysis is deceptive, however, because an in-depth engagement with style, which is necessarily a comparative exercise, is somewhat muted in this chapter. Mozart analysis has come a long way since 1976 (see Agawu 1996), so it is possible for today's analyst to extend Meyer's insights by incorporating a hermeneutic stance via the fruitful notion of *topoi* (Allanbrook 1992), or to reimagine the composer's formal strategies by drawing on recent rehabilitations of *Formenlehre* (Caplin 1998, Hepokoski and Darcy 1997). The positivistic residue of Meyer's analysis may not be its most valuable legacy, but the performance itself is noteworthy. Analysis, after all, is a mode of performance.

Meyer admits that he presents "many hypotheses" in *Spheres*, the implication being that not all of them are followed throughly. Two essays, "Process and Morphology in the Music of Mozart" and "Exploiting Limits: Creation, Archetypes, and Style Change" may serve as illustration. The main hypothesis in the former is surely plausible: Mozart, following J. S. Bach, often establishes a pattern, breaks it, and then resumes it later. The moment of resumption is typically temporally 'correct', that is to say that, had the pattern not been broken, it would have reached the exact point at which it is now being resumed. It is as if the pattern's shadow persisted through the break, as if the pattern was active on a kind of subliminal level, absent but present at the same time, waiting to be returned from the background to the foreground. Meyer supports his hypothesis with sixteen examples of varying length, all of them more or less convincing. For a potentially far-reaching proposition such as this, however, a larger sampling of the literature would have been desirable. This is not a problem with Meyer's chapter as such, but with the very medium in which analytical results are conveyed. In an aural or oral mode, it is possible to play fifty or more musical examples for skeptics, but no journal will print such a large number of score excerpts to serve as 'mere' illustration. And so the materiality of music, which ought to be given priority in any representation of music, is deemed unwieldy and is thus barred from making a full appearance.

In "Exploiting Limits: Creation, Archetypes, and Style Change," Meyer isolates a specific musical archetype, represented here in two-voice counterpoint and extending over a normative sixteen-bar period. It is found in compositions by Mozart, Beethoven and Berlioz, and so may serve as a mechanism for distinguishing their individual manners. The framing of the insight is very plausible, for although their

works are stylistically differentiated, the three composers worked within a few decades of each other and within a relatively stable tonal idiom. Mozart and Beethoven are, of course, associated with the mainstream of the Austro-Germanic tradition, and so their use of a similar archetype in the 1770s and 1820s is not surprising. Berlioz, on the other hand, is something of an outsider, lying at an angle to this tradition. Meyer shows that whereas Mozart normatively actualizes the archetype, Beethoven and Berlioz disguise it in ways that betray newer stylistic influences, most notably a burgeoning romanticism in the case of Berlioz. Archetypal patterning is a rich and suggestive area of research, and it is a pity that it has not been populated with eager graduate students. Meyer elaborates on archetypes in another chapter from this book, “Melodic Processes and the Perception of Music” (co-written with Burton S. Rosner), and also in his *magnum opus*, *Style and Music*, while his student Robert Gjerdingen has traced the persistence of another archetype in 18th-century music (Gjerdingen 1988). But there is room for further study of a phenomenon that has the potential to link repertoires across historical, stylistic and geo-cultural divides.

In a lively and erudite opening chapter, “Concerning the Sciences, the Arts – AND the Humanities,” Meyer sets out to distinguish the nature of research activity in the sciences from the arts and humanities. The fact and nature of scientific discovery, the possibility of simultaneous discovery, the cumulative nature of scientific knowledge, the falsifiability of certain claims – all these are contrasted with the nature of creativity as the chief element in artistic expression. This is really an attempt in 1974 to explain the nature of the humanities to others, and it is to Meyer’s credit that he remains one of the few music scholars who can write authoritatively about broad currents in intellectual history, including the history of science. Many of the specific points made in this essay – about the nature of understanding and explanation in works of art, or the distinction between criticism and analysis – have been taken up in subsequent writing by musicologists, music theorists and philosophers, so Meyer’s chapter is helpful chiefly as an indication of his thinking around 1974, and of what was possible then. But today’s student venturing into this territory would have a sizeable bibliographical supplement to contend with.

For those who have never encountered Leonard Meyer’s work, *Spheres* could well serve as an introduction to the work of a distinguished humanist. Those who had read some of it in the past may find it rewarding to reread these essays, for not only do they serve as a record of Meyer’s later intellectual development, but they show that a good number of the issues that he wrestled with remain with us – diversity versus the possibility of universals, explaining modes of knowing, basing analytical theories on specific repertoires, and never underestimating the power of tonal dynamism. Graduate students casting about for dissertation topics may find valuable leads in Meyer. And if the turn from the narrowly quantitative to the broadly

qualitative within the broader culture of music analysis continues, the significance of Meyer’s work will be enhanced in future.

Richard Littlefield belongs to a different generation of writers on music. An emerging scholar, his book, too, is a collection of essays, but they stem from a more recent past (1991-1999) than Meyer’s. The effort to contain heterogeneity and impose a unity on the collections is an obvious challenge to both authors, but Littlefield’s efforts seem to me to be rather strenuous.

Whereas the semiotic element is merely implicit in Meyer’s work, it is both explicit and at the same time more diffuse in *Frames and Framing: The Margins of Music Analysis*. Littlefield has read extensively in many areas of literary theory, and is especially taken with deconstruction, which he adopts as a kind of conceptual pose. But the book as a whole is more conventionally structuralist insofar as it invests in explication rather than in pursuing radical critique. In other words, he offers a sober account of principles and their potential for music analysis, and only the beginnings of a comprehensive demonstration of such potential. While the intellectual ambition is far from modest (it is nothing less than an “exploration of the margins of music analysis”), the author has allowed himself only 132 pages divided into five substantial chapters in which to accomplish this task. If, in the end, the book comes across as a program for further study, a series of detailed outlines, rather than a fully worked out demonstration of the potential of previously marginalized approaches (including deconstruction), this may be explained by its framing.

In the opening chapter, “Preliminaries,” Littlefield describes the current state of institutional music theory (early 1990s) as dominated by Schenkerian and set theoretical approaches. (He does not mention the history of music theory, which served to bring historical and theoretical perspectives together). Literary approaches and the new musicology then came and radically unsettled the status quo. A special place is reserved for “deconstructive music analysis,” which had hitherto played only a marginal role in the field. Many of the programmatic claims for deconstruction are solemnly rehearsed – “reading against the metaphysics of presence, the undermining of the unitary subject, the following of arche-writing (*différance*, *la trace*) in and through texts” – and the chapter closes with an explanation of various “strategies and procedures” that will be invoked in subsequent analyses. These include binary oppositions and supplemental logic; logocentricism; points of condensation; self-difference; self-description; forecasting; and the marginal. One finishes this opening chapter unsure of the central question to which this book provides an answer, but grateful for the 1980s-style explication of ostensibly shiny new tools.

Chapter 2, “Ideological Frames I: Rewriting Schenker: Narrative-History-Ideology,” originally co-written with music theorist David Neumeyer, is in some ways the most interesting and substantial in the book. When it was first published in 1992, it elicited comment from the community of

music theorists mainly because of the seemingly radical claim that “the so-called intrinsic value of a work of art has little to do, if anything, with its internal relationships, and everything to do with the expertise of the professional interpreter.” Some ten years on, one might have expected to find the argument extended and the repertoire expanded within a more rigorous comparative framework. But the demonstration piece remains Czerny’s little piano piece for beginners, Op. 599 No. 1.

Included in this chapter is a helpful summary of narratological approaches to music, but the attempt to establish the supposed limitations of formalism in connection with Schenker’s analysis of the seventh piece (“*Träumerei*”) from Schumann’s *Kinderszenen* seems to make heavy weather of his “poetic asides.” Schenker’s failure to pursue certain hermeneutic leads may be a limitation in certain eyes, but surely not a fatal one. Is it not enough, in the course of analysis, to hint at certain compositional features, or indeed speculate on associative meanings, without pausing to develop those insights fully, especially if one is engaged in an involved tracing of a hidden *Urfinie*? Littlefield’s desire “to semanticize Schenker’s work” sounds promising, but it seems unlikely that any such effort will appeal to music theorists if it does not invest fundamentally in the melodies, rhythms and harmonies that Schumann wrote.

While the comparative element is not altogether absent from this chapter, it is confined in two specific ways. The first involves a tracing of convergences between Schenker’s thought and that of Greimas, convergences previously noted by others (including Eero Tarasti, Littlefield’s mentor at Helsinki [Tarasti 1994:6]). We are reminded that notions of depth, for example, which are central to Schenker’s thinking, have historical as well as geo-cultural scope (Watkins 2004) – a heart-warming gesture for those who need the assurance of corroboration.

A second comparative element is evident in the different well-formed analyses of the Czerny piece using Schenker’s method. Littlefield (and Neumeyer) seem to me to be distracted by what Milton Babbitt once called “normative irrelevancies” (Babbitt 2003:148), giving more attention to well-formedness than to preference. It is a pity that Littlefield was not able to incorporate Carl Schachter’s discussion of a related issue in an article significantly titled “Either/Or.” Schachter suggests that in certain situations, one of the competing (Schenkerian) analyses would be “truer to [the work] as a unique and individual work of art” (Schachter 1990:169). This suggests a different kind of emphasis than attributing differentiation to ideology.

Littlefield laments the sanitization of Schenker’s work by American theorists, who tend to bracket off his political and elitist views from the practical activity of music analysis. Again the force of this accusation would have been stronger if he had systematically demonstrated the varied and profound connections between political worldview and analytic method. The idea

that connections across domains link an artist's life to his or her thought continues to fascinate some people, even though concrete demonstration is hard to come by. Perhaps the issue is better framed as an invitation to ponder and presumably be edified by certain juxtapositions. In that case those who wish to remain at the technological level of Schenkerian analysis can be left alone to pursue their ostensible blindness, while those who insist on joining ethics to politics and method can also do their thing.

"Framing the Aesthetic Object: The Silence of the Frames" is the title of Littlefield's third chapter. The transfer here is mainly from the realm of visual perception, where frames of pictures, for example, perform multiple roles. Following Derrida, Littlefield characterizes this role as paradoxical rather than simply multiple, and dependent on the viewer's perspective. He concludes that "the frame is the thing." There is nothing surprising about the ontology of frames: situated outside the picture, they also mark the boundary between picture and the outside. They are ultimately necessary as well as dispensable. But what is vivid in the visual realm may not have comparable force in the oral or aural domain. While one can easily gauge the effect of removing a particular frame from a picture, it is not immediately clear what it would mean to remove the frame of a piece of music. And as for internal frames, such as the bar of silence in an interlude from the aria "La donna e mobile" that Littlefield cites in illustration, the moment is so saturated with the suspended tendencies of tonal meaning that it is hard to hear it as silent in any musically meaningful way. Again the issues raised about musical frames in this chapter are not uninteresting in and of themselves, but the scope of the discussion leaves many questions unanswered.

In chapter 4, Littlefield offers a reader-response critique of the fifth song from Schoenberg's cycle *The Book of the Hanging Gardens*. This densely motivic and atonal language has proved a challenge to many an analyst, and one hopes for fresh insight from this author. Littlefield's reading traces certain intervallic paths through the song (first stage), explores "conflicts of aesthetics and of genre" (second stage), and incorporates ideas from "reception history and modes of production" (third stage). Similar efforts at modeling a reading/listening are found in Jameson, Nattiez, Cone and others, and although they perform an important metacritical function, they have rarely been useful as prescriptions for actual reading/listening. As elsewhere, Littlefield's emphasis here is on possibility; he does not pursue any one analytical proceeding in depth. While this approach has the advantage of displaying a variety of analytical issues – "vocal meter" in tension with notated meter (David Lewin's insight), for example, or linear projection of certain intervals, or iconic reflection of word meanings in the song's texture and form – it has the disadvantage of never seeming to get off the ground. Moreover, one of the specific oppositions invoked by Littlefield in his second stage of reading, that between modernism and romanticism, seems to me to be somewhat fragile, and requires much

more extensive treatment than it receives here.

The last of Littlefield's chapters abandons the world of Classical music for a popular, urban, word-based contemporary African-American genre, Gangsta rap. Accusing mainstream music analysts of ignoring "not just rap, but most popular musics," Littlefield leads the reader methodically through the aesthetics of the genre. As always, the framing of the analysis is sensitively done, if occasionally fancifully. He draws on "historically black discursive practices," in particular the notion of Signifying studied by Henry-Louis Gates, to explain "the conventions of textual systems in gangsta-rap videos." Remarks on the semiotic systems of music videos in general are followed by a detailed study of the 1995 music video, *Natural Born Killaz*, featuring Death Row rap artists Dr. Dre and Ice Cube. Littlefield is alert to the subversive element in their use of language and their wilful rewriting of contemporary history by freely transposing images between events.

Readers interested in gauging the relevance of literary theory to music analysis will benefit from Richard Littlefield's ideas. The book seems surprisingly dated, however. During the 1980s, this kind of speculation was something of a pastime among those music theorists who could not resist the impressive-sounding ideas emanating from literary-theoretical circles. Twenty years on, however, one expects to have moved beyond programmatic assertion to active praxis. Littlefield's project seems sometimes trapped at this programmatic level. True to its title, however, the book is a useful guide to the mechanisms that guide (musical) thought.

Perhaps there is a more fundamental factor to consider. Early on in the book, Littlefield wrote that "when one engages with any text, one also engages with the critical baggage that accompanies and transforms it," and therefore that "the context becomes part of the text." This is a sensible position, no doubt, but it is undermined by the view of analysis as a mode of performance, as enactment that necessarily limits the amount of 'extra text' in order to maximize the pleasure of hands-on engagement.

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Cultural Junk Shop

Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom: On the Kitsch Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

By Kristina C. Marcellus

Celeste Olalquiaga's *The Artificial Kingdom: On The Kitsch Experience* draws heavily on the work of Walter Benjamin, particularly his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," (1968) as well as on conscious and unconscious modes of memory, toward her goal of explaining how kitsch comes to be. The book begins with a reflection on her 'pet' hermit crab, Rodney, who happens to be encased in a glass globe. Rodney figures into the book at many other points as well, as further reflections on his condition and others' interactions with him serve as epigraphs to its different sections. Broadly, *The Artificial Kingdom* deals with three major areas that have contributed to the creation of kitsch as Olalquiaga understands it: glass; aura; and death. These themes run throughout the book, informing and connecting the examples and contexts upon which Olalquiaga draws to make her point that kitsch is essentially a modern creation, one that has arisen only because the conditions of modernity have combined to create an environment in which kitsch is the only remainder of a past fundamentally different from the present.

The Artificial Kingdom is richly illustrated with drawings and photographs included to emphasize the importance of objects at various points in history, particularly during the Victorian Era. Everything from the Crystal Palace and the Parisian arcades to the interiors of Victorian homes and collections of glass globes, mermaids, and 'natural' specimens is chronicled, in addition to the various fads that swept across England during this period, such as fern collecting and aquaria. The illustrations are best viewed as punctuation for the more literal descriptions provided by Olalquiaga, and they are carefully incorporated into the text to strengthen the point at hand, while at the same time serving to connect the various points at which the main themes of glass, aura, and death surface.

Benjamin's idea of aura, and the way Olalquiaga explains how kitsch arises from its shattering, are intimately tied to glass and its uses. The Crystal Palace, as an example of nineteenth century thinking about display, is the Victorian interpretation of the Parisian arcades, one that marks a change in ideology – a "gigantic structure of iron and glass dedicated to a new way of looking, that of the potential consumer" (31). Olalquiaga's point is well taken that the commercial expansion of the uses of glass during the nineteenth century helped to create a distance between observer and observed that "change[d] the status of the object, which loses its commonness to become a thing worthy of such attention" (31). The increasingly popular use of glass for display windows slowly changed the emphasis of an object from function to fashion. That is, the appearance of the thing gradually became at least as important as its function. Victorian

ornament in particular was no longer a decorative element of the object but became its central feature, and once the object's function had been thrown to the wind, the proliferation that followed created an environment for the copy to displace the original. Once this proliferation of objects had begun, the collection of a number of similar things supplanted the collection of unique things. Prior to this time, unique and/or exotic objects had been the main components of collections whereas with the widespread dissemination of copies and multiples, the emphasis changed to reflect not only the larger number of objects but the attention paid by collectors to the common features of the items in their collections as well. Although these things may also have been kept in glass boxes or under glass plates, the purpose of the glass was different: no longer used to separate the object from the collector, glass became a way of freezing the object so that it could be connected with and contemplated at any time. The use of glass subtly changed from allowing the object a life separate from the collector to ensuring that the object, as property, would become immortal and be always available for interaction and reflection.¹

Two examples of these principles in the use of glass stand out: Victorian aquariums and *millefiori* or dream spheres. Both demonstrate that glass changed the ways in which people viewed objects. Although aquariums housed live objects and dream spheres dead ones, the sense of preservation created by the use of glass is present, as is the increasing commodification of the objects behind the glass.

One of the most dramatic effects of glass, therefore, was to enable the kind of deracination typical of nascent consumer culture: ferns or anemones were extricated from their natural habitat, relocated into an artificial one, and subordinated to the implicit scopophilia of display. This separation of things from their original – or, in some cases, attributed – context and functions made them into commodities increasingly susceptible to the projection of cultural desires and anxieties. (52)

It is this commodification of the object that is facilitated by, as well as facilitating, the rising frequency of the use of glass. Olalquiaga makes it clear that glass, increasingly present and widespread in its use, can be viewed as the material that represents the shattered fragments of aura, this process itself being key to the creation of kitsch.

Benjamin's notion of aura, and particularly the fragments that remain once it has been shattered, inform much of Olalquiaga's position on the formation of kitsch: "Kitsch is [the] scattered fragments of the aura, traces of dream images turned loose from their matrix, multiplied by the incessant beat of industrialization, covering the

emptiness left by both the aura's demise and modernity's failure to deliver its promise of a radiant future" (84). For Benjamin, the technique of reproduction itself is what detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition and causes the object's aura to be destroyed. Mechanization, mass reproduction, and the death/disappearance of the original are important factors in the ascent of kitsch. The aura, that halo of exclusivity and originality, is shattered as the original begins to be mass-produced. Olalquiaga extends her understanding of aura to include not only works of art (as in the original Benjaminian reading) but also those objects that are prized and collected as works of art might be and once were. Authenticity, intimately connected to the idea of aura, became irrelevant as the form of collections changed from the display of rare or unique specimens in an ornamental way to many versions of the same or similar items arranged systematically to show common features. Mechanical reproduction broke the bond that had existed until the nineteenth century between uniqueness and authenticity. A new definition of uniqueness thus arose, one where experience and interaction replaced authenticity. In other words, uniqueness, in Olalquiaga's view, is not intrinsic to an object but is rather something that is established by the historical interaction between subject and experience. In this way, then, uniqueness can be said to occur when objects are personalized in the privacy of a person's specific universe. Personal meaning and context are key to establishing uniqueness, and thus recapturing part of an object's or collection's aura. Interestingly, Olalquiaga puts a great deal of emphasis on the (re)creation of the uniqueness of an object only in the context of a collection, a point that is further explained by Jean Baudrillard (1996) where he notes that "what is possessed is always an object *abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject*. [...] Such objects together make up the system through which the subject strives to construct a world, a private totality" (86). The relationship between the object in a collection and the subject-collector is thus one that is both intimate and, for the collector, vital to the creation of a personal universe, regardless of the use value of the objects that comprise the collection.

The aura is fundamentally connected to tradition and is an incidental aspect of an object, derived from its use value (whose innocence and transparency Marx underlined) or its direct relationship to its mode of production (usually made by hand or during the early stages of industrialization). The process of industrialization helped to transform the dominant view of history and time, Olalquiaga points out, and objects such as dream spheres help to illuminate this change. In short, modernization is said to have put an end to the pre-industrial idea that experience is a unified and coherent whole in favour of the very modern idea of

linear progression where cause and effect follow one another in a mechanical way. Benjamin is again enlisted, this time for his distinction between reminiscence and remembrance, on which Olalquiaga dwells for some time, particularly as these concepts are applied to souvenirs.

What is most interesting about Olalquiaga's discussion of aura is the sense of loss with which it is infused. Throughout *The Artificial Kingdom*, aura is connected more with loss and change than with anything else. It is the loss of aura as a whole entity upon which Olalquiaga claims that kitsch is founded; loss of the original in favour of serial and mechanical reproduction are also important. The point at which loss and rebirth intersect mark the birth of kitsch.

Death looms throughout *The Artificial Kingdom* after having first been introduced in the figure of Rodney, dream sphere hermit crab and kitsch object extraordinaire. Early in the book, during her discussion of the souvenir, Olalquiaga states that "kitsch is dead from the moment it is born" (67). This is true in many different senses, and is most succinctly summarized in the final chapter, "Mythical Memory," in which Olalquiaga returns to Benjamin's two different ways of perceiving events in modern time. Conscious and unconscious modes are both connected to memory and are also tied to reminiscence and remembrance, respectively. Because memory is formed after the event or object in question has ceased to be part of the present, death figures here. Olalquiaga also includes a chapter on "The Dying Salon," in which she briefly but explicitly covers death and bereavement as it applies to interior design, Victorian mourning practices and mementos that arose from the "great age of mourning," such as hairwork. In this chapter, Olalquiaga connects mourning, the preservation of natural specimens, and the increasing importance of private space and contemplation. Time, she writes, is present in the Victorian interior in "the form of death: dried flowers, stuffed animals, the claustrophobic clutter of a place where there is no space for movement nor windows for air or light" (288). This relationship between time and death is highly relevant in the discussion of the formation of kitsch, not only because of the ties to memory but since kitsch appears to be at its most potent after an imprecise and indefinable span of time. Kitsch at once represents something partially arisen from some past era, something made relevant in the present through the processes of remembrance and reminiscence, and also something that only 'lives' when it is prized in an individual's personal world.²

Two of the most interesting aspects of *The Artificial Kingdom* are the richness and variety of the illustrations, photographs, and artistic embellishments of the pages, and the theme of water that infuses the book. It is Rodney, one-time sea creature now trapped in his glass globe, that appears on the otherwise plain cover, introducing at once both of these aspects. Many of the examples and accompanying figures are of other sea life such as an anatomical drawing of an anemone, photographs of a series of cast English shore crab shells and of mating seahorses, as well as more mythic undersea phenomena like the sunken Titanic and

reproductions of original illustrations from Jules Verne's *20 000 Leagues Under The Sea*. The discussion of this book alone comprises an entire chapter and it is illustrative of the tendency toward water and its accompanying forces and inhabitants enlisted by Olalquiaga to illustrate kitsch. Another chapter, "The Missing Link," chronicles the fascination with mermaids (in the context of discussing copies and fakes) and, indeed, much of the first section of *The Artificial Kingdom* deals with the Victorian aquarium fad as it relates to the increasing use of glass and the collection of natural specimens. Olalquiaga relies heavily on Benjamin's point that the aura of natural objects is a unique phenomenon of distance, no matter how close it may be.

The Artificial Kingdom is a fascinating exploration of material culture from a historical point of view. Olalquiaga's use of many of Benjamin's ideas is both engaging and relevant in that it provides a way of examining the formation of kitsch that allows the object to retain something of its original existence as either (or both) natural specimen and/or art object. Her choice of examples, so extensively drawn from aquatic life both real and fictional, are fascinating, as is her use of fiction to situate and clarify the scene of the objects. Above all, *The Artificial Kingdom* is a book about collections, how they have changed, and the factors to which these changes can be attributed. It is very useful to note the difference between Olalquiaga's definition of kitsch and the one that seems most popular in contemporary lingo. Where *The Artificial Kingdom* deals with kitsch in an almost metaphysical way, current vernacular paints kitsch as more about being cheap, tacky and outdated. Nor is the contemporary meaning of kitsch nearly as concerned with the personal significance of the kitsch object. The flavour of collections is maintained, but kitsch in the popular sense seems to be more aligned with the creation or maintenance of a personal style, and this gives to it a dimension of self-consciousness that some deny to sentimental tat (see Windsor 1994: 53ff). In addition, popular senses of the word are differentially applied – my collection of 1950s brand-name spice containers has been labelled kitsch but while still in my grandmother's possession, Olalquiaga's meaning of kitsch was far more appropriately applied. My grandmother may interact with the spice containers as objects she remembers. I do not remember them, not even as part of her household. They are, instead, examples of mid-twentieth century corporate packaging, existing only in mass production. Olalquiaga maintains that kitsch results from the engagement of a subject with experience and that in each kitsch object individuals see something of themselves; indeed, writers on collectors often note the development of specialised knowledge, a proto-academic impulse (Gelber 1999: 79). How, then, can the currently popular meaning of kitsch with its lack of aura at any stage and connotations of industrialized, mass-produced origins be reconciled with Olalquiaga's understanding of the term? Perhaps this is a new dimension of kitsch, the collection of objects that initially possess little personal significance, purchased or acquired more for their stylistic, thematic, or previous use value, than for the remembrances or

reminiscences they evoke. Or, perhaps, this newer meaning of kitsch is the final step in a progression away from what Benjamin called 'cult value'. Olalquiaga's use of kitsch describes the shattering of the auras of objects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For Benjamin, however, the final blow to the glass box of the aura came with the advent of film (sound film in particular), a moment that did not reach its height until well into the twentieth century. Thus, if contemporary kitsch is the object fully removed from all traces of cult value, originating in mass production, and without any traces of the aura that stems from authenticity or uniqueness, it must have progressed beyond the point of an original object copied and mass-produced, that is, beyond the period of kitsch with which *The Artificial Kingdom* concerns itself.

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Notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, in his *System of Objects* (1996), further elucidates the properties of glass to which Olalquiaga points: "Above all, though, glass is the most effective conceivable material expression of the fundamental ambiguity of 'atmosphere': the fact that it is at once proximity and distance, intimacy and the refusal of intimacy, communication and non-communication. Whether as packaging, window or partition, glass is the basis of a transparency without transition: we see, but cannot touch. [...] Not to mention glass's cardinal virtue, which is of a moral order: its purity, reliability and objectivity, along with all those connotations of hygiene and prophylaxis which make it truly the material of the future – a future, after all, that is to be one of disavowal of the body, and of the primary and organic functions, in the name of a radiant and functional objectivity" (41-42).
2. Baudrillard (1996) points to the Freudian notion of collecting when he notes that "the object is *the thing with which we construct our mourning*: the object represents our own death, but that death is transcended (symbolically) by virtue of the fact that we possess the object" (97). This reveals another dimension of the relationship between kitsch and death – not only can the object serve as a *memento mori* for a dead loved one, it can be thought of, in the context of a collection, as a death 'souvenir' in advance of the collector's own death and an attempt to halt or capture the change that is embodied in the creation of kitsch objects and/or collections.

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SRB Insight: Does Saussure Still Matter?

By Paul Bouissac

The discovery, in 1996, of some manuscripts penned by Ferdinand de Saussure, which had been stored in the “orangerie” of the family estate in Geneva, brought again to the fore the linguistic and semiotic legacy of the Swiss philologist who had been obsessed all his life by the true nature of languages and, more generally, signs. The publication of these manuscripts in 2002, under the editorship of Simon Bouquet and Rudolph Engler, was preceded, in June 2001, by an international conference in Archamp and Geneva, whose aim was both to take stock of Saussurean scholarship and to assess the history and current state of Saussurism in the world. The newly discovered manuscripts are due to appear in English, translated by Carol Sanders, who is also the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure* (2004). This renewal of interest should not make one forget that, since his death in 1913, there has been a continuous stream of inquiries, both philological and interpretative, bearing on Saussure’s texts and thought. The highlights of this research included, during the last few decades, the monumental critical edition of the sources of the *Course in General Linguistics* by Rudolph Engler (1968-1989), the separate editing of the notes taken by the students who followed Saussure’s courses on general linguistics between 1907 and 1911 (Komatsu and Harris 1993; Komatsu and Wolf 1996, 1997), and the publication of the Harvard manuscripts by Herman Parret (1993). In addition, numerous historiographic and exegetic exercises have been devoted to reinterpreting, year after year, Saussure’s contribution to linguistics and semiology (e.g. Koerner 1973; Harris 1987, 2001; Thibault 1997; Choi 2002). The *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure*, published by the University of Geneva, remain the main outlet for Saussurean scholarship and keep track of all other relevant publications.

In view of such an abundance of editorial and hermeneutic activities close to a century after Saussure’s premature death, it seems difficult not to raise the following question: is all this scholarship of strictly historical interest or does Saussure’s thought still matter to the advancement of linguistics and semiotics? But, before answering this question, a brief recapitulation of Saussure’s emergence as a fountainhead of semiology is in order.

It is indeed important to recall that, during his lifetime, Saussure was known mainly as a specialist of Indo-European comparative and historical linguistics. His fame among other linguists was due to a 1879 publication on the early system of Indo-European vowels, in addition to his teaching in this philological domain at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris, until he was appointed to the University of Geneva in 1891, where he taught Sanskrit and Indo-European Comparative Linguistics. It is only toward the end of his life that, between 1907 and 1911, he was entrusted the task of teaching a course in general linguistics. The

three courses he gave on this subject matter attracted only a handful of students, and the way in which the lectures were delivered has been interestingly characterized thirty years later by Albert Sechehaye in the following manner: “Having been asked to teach courses in general linguistics, which, incidentally, had been allotted a very short time, the master, whose thought on this topic was still in progress, hardly could do more than convey to his students the problems with which he was struggling and the few certainties he had reached so far concerning some essential points. Three times, each time from a different angle, he expounded his views, thus making his listeners reflect upon these issues anew. He was thinking aloud to stimulate their own thinking” (quoted in French in Godel 1969: 139 – my translation).

It is all too often forgotten that the book to which Saussure’s name became indissolubly attached, the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), is a posthumous publication that was neither composed nor even approved by him. Even when the conditions of its production are perfunctorily acknowledged, it is assumed that its contents faithfully reflect Saussure’s ideas. Hence the abundant quotations found in the literature that are introduced by: “For Saussure...” or “Saussure says that ...” To make things still worse, most references found in today’s critical discourse are second-hand paraphrases by scholars who are hardly aware of the scholarship mentioned above. Using Saussure as a straw man is a popular topos in post-structuralist cultural theory and beyond. In fact, as more manuscripts and correspondence come to light, it is increasingly obvious that the *Course* is largely a fabrication (Harris 2003). Using students’ notes, personal recollections and fragmentary manuscripts to reconstruct a systematic treatise on the nature of language was all the more dubious an enterprise as Saussure himself had always refused to give such a form to his speculations. He refused on the ground that the only thing he was sure of was that none of the ideas that formed the linguistics of his time had any value, and that he had not come yet to any conclusions that would allow him to formulate a consistent theory of language within a comprehensive semiology.

Nevertheless, Saussure’s name has been endlessly invoked through most of the previous century in the structuralist and post-structuralist literature. It must be emphasized, however, that it is essentially on the basis of two short paragraphs from the *Course* that he was posthumously elevated first to the status of founder of semiology, then co-founder of semiotics when C.S. Peirce’s contrastingly prolix speculations entered the fray. Whoever has perused the sources of the *Course*, can only be struck by the gap that exists between the dogma that was derived from this formally written text, following a conventional, rational plan, and the often erratic and emotional autographic notes, full of bold assertions as well as self-doubting reflexions, that the book purports to selectively

systematize and normalize in a didactic manner. From the beginning until today, whatever manuscripts have been found have been assessed and organized by their editors through the filter of the *Course* which remains the reference with respect to which their contents are classified and interpreted. Precious little effort is made to restore them to their chronological order within the context of the linguistic and philosophical debates of their time. The curse of the *Course* keeps casting its shadow on one of the most daring minds of the century. The fact that his original thoughts are accessible only in the form of fragments, tentative notes, contradictory statements, should not detract us from granting them our utmost attention. A century after they were jotted down on paper, their counterintuitive insights retain their provocative force and challenge the established doxa that now reigns in linguistics and semiotics. It may be the case, however, that Saussure’s epistemological vision is at last coming of age.

It was after re-reading the *Course* that the Russian linguist Nikolaj Trubetzkoy wrote to Roman Jakobson in 1932: “For inspiration I have reread de Saussure, but on a second reading he impresses me much less. There is comparatively little in the book that is of value; most of it is old rubbish. And what is valuable is awfully abstract, without details” (Trubetskoy 2001:255). In view of some of the remarks found in his notes there is no doubt that Saussure himself would have agreed, had he been given an opportunity to look at the work of his well-intending editors. The intellectual picture that emerges from his manuscripts is indeed strikingly different from the posthumous text that fed the epistemological myth of Saussurism.

A recurring theme in the *Course* and in Saussure’s own notes is the notion of *langue*. This notion has challenged all translators of the text into English, and probably into other languages as well. Exegetes and commentators have also inconclusively debated on the status of this term, whether it refers to some mental entity, perhaps a sort of Platonic idea, or merely designates a methodological concept, an abstraction that is a part of a heuristic strategy. The issue has been, and remains, the articulation of the twin notions of *langue* and *parole*, the latter being no less difficult to translate into English than the former. Some have opted for an ontological distinction on the model of the philosophical tradition that opposes essence and existence or “accidents”; others have reduced the difference to the pragmatic necessity of evaluating instances of “linguaging” with respect to the opposite poles of a continuum going from the normative, idealized representation of a language to the open-ended actual utterances that are usually observed in verbal interactions. That Saussure himself was not entirely satisfied with these correlate notions of *langue* and *parole* seems obvious from his numerous attempts to specify the distinction. In fact, in spite of almost a century of

controversies, neither Hjelmslev's conceptual sleight of hand that consisted of rewriting the terminological pair as "system" and "process," nor the Derridean debunking of its alleged metaphysical assumptions, have totally defused the issue. As various linguistic paradigms are still jockeying for the final word regarding the nature and origin of language (e.g. Trabant and Ward 2001, Christiansen and Kirby 2003), Saussure's uneasy, often ambiguous circumlocutions and occasional images continue to engage the researchers who get to the manuscript sources.

Saussure struggled inconclusively with the issue of what kind of object is language, that is, the object of general linguistics which he was supposed to teach, and the notion of *langue* was for him a sort of notion by default, in the sense that there appeared to be no other way to account, albeit imperfectly, for a range of observable language phenomena. Examining his successive attempts at clarifying his own thought leads one to the evidence that the various characters and aspects of language he could identify seemed to him contradictory. The manuscripts discovered in 1996 do not appear to sensibly modify this outlook. Excerpts from a draft entitled "De l'essence double du langage" [On the dual essence of language] rehash, if not compound, the ambiguities and uncertainties which Saussure confronted: "Il est profondément faux de s'imaginer qu'on puisse faire une synthèse radieuse de la langue, en partant d'un principe déterminé qui se développe et s'incorpore avec []" [it is definitely a mistake to fancy that it is possible to derive an unproblematic synthesis of langue from a determinate principle which would develop and become embodied in [it]; or: "Quand un système de signes devient le bien d'une collectivité [...] Nous ne savons plus quelles forces et quelles lois vont être mêlées à la vie de ce système de signes". [Once a sign system has taken root in a social group [...] we do not understand which forces and which laws become involved in the life of this system.] (Bouquet & Engler 2001: 15-16).

Langue was the label Saussure attached to the elusive object of general linguistics and which could not be captured by the detailed study of the innumerable languages that could be experienced in the contemporary world and through history. But since, for him, languages constituted merely a subset, albeit an important one, of a more encompassing class of sign systems, the notion of *langue* needed to be given a semiological rather than purely linguistic definition. His agenda was to capture this elusive object and his efforts towards this goal remain relevant today since nobody has yet proposed a convincing answer to Saussure's pertinent question. As long as it is believed that Saussure had reached a conclusion regarding this problem, it is possible to try and give an explanation of his "theory," but if, as it is contended here, Saussure merely attempted again and again to get a grip on the intractable difficulty of conceptualizing language as an object of scientific knowledge that would transcend the indefinite variety of observable languages and nevertheless account for each one of them, understanding the problem is what we should try to achieve without limiting our

inquiry to the historical circumstances within which Saussure was immersed during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The great debate of the time was whether languages were kinds of organisms which changed along the same patterns as other organisms' life cycles or whether they were social institutions based on conventions supported by human mental abilities. In one of his rare references to other linguists reported in the *Course*, Saussure designates W.D. Whitney as a valuable exponent of the latter approach. At the same time, he directs derogatory remarks to some insane theorists, without naming them, who support the organicist view. This allusion obviously echoes Whitney's harsh criticisms of August Schleicher's crude Darwinism (1863). However, the reference to Whitney is accompanied by some reservations, and, further, his endorsement of the movement which then defined itself by opposition to the organic hypothesis is not expressed in a wholehearted manner. Again and again Saussure returns to the stubborn evidence that led him to grapple with a paradox: *langue* as a set of differential terms is founded on arbitrary conventions that totally escape the conscious intentions of the individuals who use its resources for expressing their thoughts and communicating among themselves. Paradoxically, it is a contract without contractants. Because none of the empirical investigations of the multifarious aspects of language communication appear to be sufficient to found a scientific knowledge of this phenomenon, something he calls *langue* must be assumed to exist by default. But, actually, *langue* is the unknown in the equation.

A common misreading has construed *langue* as a static, achronic or synchronic system, depending on the temporal order to which it is opposed. But, for Saussure, time is of the essence for understanding the notion of *langue*. For instance, following the sequence of Saussure's own notes in the column in which Engler lists them in his critical edition of the *Course*, one cannot avoid coming to the conclusion that this notion, which has often been foregrounded by commentators as an achronic mentalist or cognitive "reality," is far from being the whole picture. It is a set of constraints that can be expressed as an algorithm or a coherent body of algorithms at a given moment but that is conceived by Saussure as an object for which time is of the essence. Repeatedly, his notes allude to this undeniable characteristic which must be accepted in spite of the equally undeniable evidence of its contrary: "On peut parler à la fois de l'immutabilité et de la mutabilité du signe" (Engler 1989:165) [the sign can be said to be both immutable and mutable]. This remark appears in the context of attempts at circumscribing the elusive object of general linguistics, and more generally semiology: "Tout ce qui comprend des formes doit entrer dans la sémiologie" (154) [whatever involves forms must come under the purview of semiology]; but contrary to the contemplative rationality of geometry, *langue* is an irrational force which imposes itself on humans ("La langue est quelque chose que l'on subit" (159) [langue is something which imposes itself upon us]; its very foundations are irrational and it is driven by blind forces

("fondée sur l'irraison même"[162], "des forces aveugles"[171]).

Indeed, alterations occur in the system itself and these alterations are not functional in the sense that they would be the effects of conscious changes consensually made to a social contract in order to improve its efficiency. Instead, they are neither free nor rational. "Quand intervient le Temps combiné avec le fait de la psychologie sociale, c'est alors que nous sentons que la langue n'est pas libre [...] parce que principe de continuité ou de solidarité indéfinie avec les âges précédents. La continuité enferme le fait d'altération qui est un déplacement de valeurs" (173-174). [When Time combines with the reality of social psychology, we come to realize that langue is not free [...] because of the principle of continuity and solidarity with previous states. Continuity includes alterations in the form of shifting values.]

This way of thinking is remarkably Darwinian and more specifically adumbrates contemporary speculations on evolutionary semiotics and memetics which construe semiotic systems, including language(s), as semi-autonomous algorithms endowed with an evolutionary dynamic of their own akin to parasitic modes of adaptation, survival and reproduction (e.g., Deacon 1997, Worden 2000, van Driem 2000). Saussure's puzzling image of *langue* as somewhat like "a duck hatched by a hen," whose essential character is to "always escape to some extent individual or social will" and which "exists perfectly only in the mass of brains" (Engler 1989: 40-41, 51, 57), evokes some kind of yet unclassified organism (see also Engler 1989: 169). He specifies his approach to which he seems to be led almost reluctantly through compounding the range of evidence he has reached as a compelling, albeit counter-intuitive conclusion: "Notre définition de la langue suppose que nous en écartons tout ce qui est étranger à son organisme, à son système", "l'organisme intérieur de la langue", "On s'est fait scrupule d'employer le terme d'organisme, parce que la langue dépend des êtres vivants. On peut employer le mot, en se rappelant qu'il ne s'agit pas d'un être indépendant" (Engler 1989:59) [Our definition of langue implies that we discard whatever is foreign to its organism, its system, the inner organism of langue. The word organism is used here reluctantly because langue depends on living organisms. Let us use it any way, keeping in mind that this organism is not independent]. It is interesting to note that this characterisation meets the definition of a parasitic organism, a recurrent theme in contemporary memetic theories of language. Furthermore, Saussure's paradoxical insights do not apply only to the object of linguistics but to semiology as a whole: "La continuité du signe dans le temps, liée à l'altération dans le temps, est un principe de la sémiologie générale" (171) [the continuity of the sign in time, linked to its alteration, is a principle of general semiology]. But this continuity depends on transmission "selon des lois qui n'ont rien à faire avec les lois de création" (170) [according to laws which are totally different from the laws of creation]. Saussure repeatedly emphasizes that the social nature of semiological systems is "internal" rather than "external" to these systems (173).

Continuity and change belong to their very essence and unambiguously, albeit not explicitly, locating them within an evolutionary process whose description fits, *avant la lettre*, the neo-Darwinian models. This vision is emphatically underlined in the first Geneva lectures of 1891 in which even pauses in the evolution of “langue” – what some contemporary evolutionist controversially term “punctuations” – are denied (Engler 1990: 3-14).

Such remarks, and many other of the same vein, have not been foregrounded by the epigones and commentators, or they have been interpreted as mere metaphors. Similarly, Saussure’s assertions regarding the place he envisioned for semiology as a part of general psychology has been glossed over. However, the latter is no less striking and many written remarks by Saussure anticipate the tenets of modern cognitive neurosciences. His occasional criticisms of Broca’s approach bears upon the restrictive localisations of linguistic functions. “Il y a une faculté plus générale, celle qui commande aux signes” (Engler 1989: 36) [there exists a more general faculty, one which governs signs]. This faculty is conceived as a brain function which makes language possible without being its origin since the law of continuity shows that any *langue* must be transmitted. A definite vision, well ahead of Saussure’s time, emerges from his concise, at times cryptic, assertions: “L’essentiel de la langue est étranger au caractère phonique du signe linguistique” (22) [the essence of langue is alien to the phonic character of linguistic signs]; “La langue n’est pas moins que la parole un objet de nature concrète” (44) [langue is as much as parole a concrete object] and “Tout est psychologique dans la langue” (21) [the whole of langue is psychological]. But shifting the problem to psychology is also a way to project its solution into an unknown future because Saussure’s conception of psychology is a critical one. It is, like semiology, or signology as he preferred at times to call the science of signs, something to come which is bound to be different from the discipline known by this name at the turn of the century. The condition for the emergence of a psychology that would encompass semiology is that psychology take the temporal dimension into account and overcome its tendency to speculate on intemporal signs and ideas “[...] sortir absolument de ses spéculations sur le signe momentané et l’idée momentanée” (Engler 1990:47)]. This approach, perhaps, echoes more closely than it is suspected James Mark Baldwin’s (1861- 1934) evolutionary psychology and epistemology. The American psychologist, contemporary of Saussure, whose impact on Piaget and Vygotsky is generally acknowledged, was widely read and discussed in Europe and in France in particular where he lived from 1908 until his death (Wozniak 1998). Baldwin’s use of Darwinism in the rethinking of the traditional disciplines of his time may have been indeed much less objectionable than Schleicher’s literal and narrow Spencerian applications of evolutionism to the history of languages that Whitney and Saussure considered to be “laughable.”

Are Saussure’s tentative ideas now coming of age? Can they provide a useful reference point for today’s researchers, a sort of reflexive temporal depth, a heuristic

framework beyond the earlier fossilisation of some restrictive interpretations? Bringing all the problems he raised and all the insights he jotted down in a single, not exclusive purview remains one of the most stimulating and challenging tasks of today. After all, the emergence of the epistemological resource which Saussure called semiology is not necessarily to be found under the official label of semiotics and its cohorts of scholastic debaters. For instance, George Spencer Brown’s logic of distinctions expounded in *Law of Forms* (1969) and the use of his calculus of indications by Francisco Varela in *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (1979) pursue one of the tenets of Saussure’s conviction that “tout signe repose purement sur un co-status négatif” [any sign is purely based upon a negative co-status] or that “l’expression simple sera algébrique ou ne sera pas” [the simple expression will be algebraic or will not be at all] (Engler 1990: 28-29). Such is the goal of today’s algorithmic and computational semiotics.

One may wonder whether, once the complete manuscripts left by Saussure will have been published in their chronological order irrespective of the prism of the *Course in General Linguistics* through which previously available autographs were perceived until recently, a novel, perhaps surprising conceptual landscape will emerge. This new contextualisation, both internal and external, may indeed show that Saussure had anticipated theoretical directions which he could not fully explore in his own time, given the state of scientific knowledge at the turn of the twentieth century, and the linguistic doxa which then prevailed. This will put to the test the various versions of Saussurism that have been constructed, and criticized, so far on the basis of limited information, and stimulate anew the semiotic, or semiological, project which Saussure envisioned as an open-ended process when he wrote “Où s’arrêtera la sémiologie? C’est difficile à dire.” (Engler 1989: 46) [How far will semiology go? It is difficult to predict]. Saussure’s questions remain valid and his elusive agenda still provides a challenge for today’s spirit of scientific inquiry.

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