



John Deely

# Purely Objective Reality

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# Semiotics, Communication and Cognition 4

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*by*

John Deely

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I dedicate this work

to *Professor Bogdan Bogdanov*  
whose vision brought into existence the New Bulgarian University, Sofia;

to *Professor Maria Popova* and *Professor Kristian Bankov*  
the first Director of the Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies at NBU  
whose generous invitation and hospitality provided the circumstances  
for my writing this book, and her successor as Director who provided  
essential assistance as a translator and sometimes guide  
during my 2005 stay at the university;

and

to *the faculty and students of the NBU Semiotics Center*  
in their enterprise of prospective importance in the “new Europe”,  
that their work may flourish and grow in the global transformation of intellectual culture  
the doctrine of signs portends



## **Foreword to the Volume as a Whole**

This book was wholly conceived and written in Bulgaria. Part II derives from lectures given at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Early Fall School of Semiotics, 5–10 September 2002, sponsored by the New Bulgarian University of Sofia. Then, in the Spring of 2005, I returned directly to Sofia to teach for the semester in the Semiotics Program of the New Bulgarian University. It was there that I formalized and systematized my thinking on the problem of “objectivity”, writing the manuscript here presented as Part I of the present book.





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## **Part I**

# **What Objective Reality Is and How It Is Possible**



## Terminological Prenote

New ways of thinking require new ways of speaking, either old words used in new ways (which runs the risk correspondingly of misunderstanding, since the old words dispose the hearer to think in the old ways), or new words introduced (which runs the risk of alienating, since the new words discomfort the hearer by forcing an encounter with the unfamiliar). Small wonder that culture, including intellectual culture, is resistant to change.

But there is no other way for the understanding to grow than by confronting and assimilating to itself – by objectifying or making known – the previously unfamiliar. So is it the often thankless task of the intellectual, particularly in philosophy, to constantly extend or try to extend the frontiers of the awareness of the semiotic animal toward the shores of the infinite, though without fear of actually reaching those shores.

In the present case, there are three words I found it indispensable to my purpose to use which cry out for some explanation in advance, in the hope of minimizing the frustration of my readers in coming to terms with the problem of objectivity as I think it needs to be framed at the outset of postmodernity. Those three words are cœnoscopy, ideoscopy, and cathexis. I will discuss first the cœnoscopic/ideoscopic distinction, and then the term cathexis.

Bishop Berkeley<sup>1</sup> was the first to point out to the moderns that if the secondary qualities of bodies exist only in the mind and are yet the sole means by which the primary qualities can be known, then the assumption that the latter exist not in the mind alone is without foundation. Poincaré had made exactly the same point earlier in his *Treatise on Signs*<sup>2</sup> when treating of the question whether sensation involves a *species expressa*, but the moderns were not to be deterred from setting out on their Way of Ideas, refusing to believe that it would require the conclusion that *ens reale* is unknowable and intersubjectivity an illusion.

The modern putting of *ens reale* under erasure is precisely what came to be embodied in the modern usage established for the words “subject” and “object”, the direct target of the present work. To reach that target, I have found the above-mentioned new terms indispensable, on the following understanding.

The Enlightenment was that period of modern history when the intellectual class, rightly enthralled with the development of science in the modern sense, entertained the hope and conviction that the new experimental and mathematical

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1. Berkeley 1710: 45.

2. Poincaré 1632: Book III, Question 2. See the discussion below, esp. 47, text and note 9.

methods would eventually rebuild and replace the entire edifice of past human knowledge. Like the moderns who refused to see that the primary qualities could have no other status than the secondary ones, so the Enlightenment thinking refused to see that if the experience that semiotic animals acquire simply by virtue of having the bodies that they do has no independent validity, then neither could the specialized knowledges developed by the inhabitants of human bodies have any validity either.

That is the realization embodied in the distinction between *cœnoscopic* and *ideoscopic* knowledge, a terminology originally proposed by Jeremy Bentham,<sup>3</sup> but which I myself take rather from Charles Peirce, and introduce my own spelling.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Bentham 1816.

4. Peirce c.1902: 1.238–242: “All knowledge whatever comes from observation; but different sciences are observational in such radically different ways that the kind of information derived from the observation of one department of science (say natural history) could not possibly afford the information required of observation by another branch (say mathematics).

“I recognize two branches of science: Theoretical, whose purpose is simply and solely knowledge of God’s truth; and Practical, for the uses of life. In Branch I, I recognize two subbranches, of which, at present, I consider only the first, [the sciences of discovery]. Among the theoretical sciences [of discovery], I distinguish three classes, all resting upon observation, but being observational in very different senses.

“The first is mathematics, which does not undertake to ascertain any matter of fact whatever, but merely posits hypotheses, and traces out their consequences. It is observational, in so far as it makes constructions in the imagination according to abstract precepts, and then observes these imaginary objects, finding in them relations of parts not specified in the precept of construction. This is truly observation, yet certainly in a very peculiar sense; and no other kind of observation would at all answer the purpose of mathematics.

“Class II is philosophy, which deals with positive truth, indeed, yet contents itself with observations such as come within the range of every man’s normal experience, and for the most part in every waking hour of his life. Hence Bentham calls this class, *coenoscopic*. These observations escape the untrained eye precisely because they permeate our whole lives, just as a man who never takes off his blue spectacles soon ceases to see the blue tinge. Evidently, therefore, no microscope or sensitive film would be of the least use in this class. The observation is observation in a peculiar, yet perfectly legitimate, sense. If philosophy glances now and then at the results of special sciences, it is only as a sort of condiment to excite its own proper observation.

“Class III is Bentham’s *ideoscopic*; that is, the special sciences, depending upon special observation, which travel or other exploration, or some assistance to the senses, either instrumental or given by training, together with unusual diligence, has

Analogous to the service which Berkeley performed for the early moderns (but I hope without being equally ignored in the subsequent general development), what I wish to place in the forefront of postmodern consciousness is the realization that were cœnoscopic use of sensory information not valid in its own right, then ideoscopic extensions of our knowledge could have no validity either. For the former knowledge is not only the knowledge that perforce precedes science, for scientists are made, not born: all that is ever born is a human being, a semiotic animal – an animal *capable* of science, but capable precisely because of the kind of animal that it is. The former is also the knowledge that, however much it may be subsequently influenced and reshaped by ideoscopy, can never wholly be displaced; for it includes a core of experiential awareness that cannot be gainsaid without denying to the whole edifice of human understanding the status of something more than a solipsistic bubble, wherein the starry heavens that we believe in can yet never be attained through experience and knowledge<sup>5</sup> – exactly the outcome of modern philosophy along the Way of Ideas. So we need to distinguish between cœnoscopic knowledge as critically accessible to any human animal as semiotic, and ideoscopic knowledge which presupposes cœnoscopy but goes beyond it by mean of specialized researches and the testing of hypotheses often by mathematical means, and yet always returns to cœnoscopy as the sole indispensable support of the difference between the closed unto itself objective world of pure animal perception (Umwelt) and the objective world which includes human understanding (Lebenswelt) as an opening to the infinite through the very action of signs which created the objective world in the first place as transcendent and superordinate to while inclusive partially also of the physical environment, the world of things in their own being independent of being known.

The terms as proposed have a Greek etymological root, “cœnoscopic” meaning “directly viewed”, as in unaided sense perception; “ideoscopic” meaning “specially viewed”, as in observation enhanced by instruments and controlled experimentation.<sup>6</sup> But the spelling I have adopted for the latter term substitutes an “e” for what would in a more etymologically correct derivation be an “i” (so as to connote rather ‘ideas’ than ‘idiots’, frankly).

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put within the power of its students. This class manifestly divides itself into two subclasses, the physical and the psychical sciences”, or, as they are more commonly called, the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the sciences of φύσις and the sciences of νομός.

5. See the discussion of this central illusion of modern philosophy over the course of the following chapters, but especially at p. 88 below.
6. See the discussions in Ashley 2006: *passim*.



And of course these two means of knowing are only relatively, not absolutely, independent.<sup>7</sup> Although ideoscopic knowledge logically presupposes cœnoscopic knowledge and cannot have validity if cœnoscopic has no independent validity, yet neither can cœnoscopic knowledge escape being shaped and influenced by the results obtained by ideoscopy. We can all see as a matter of cœnoscopy that the sun revolves around the earth. Yet we all know as a matter of ideoscopy that it is rather the earth that moves relative to the sun. The core foundation of the perceptions is a relative motion between sun and earth: this cœnoscopy certainly attains. But that the relativity is earth to sun rather than the apparent sun to earth would never be known were it not for ideoscopy. That mistakes are always possible, however (fallibilism being the basic condition of human knowledge, after all), does not invalidate the distinction between the two types of knowledge and the foundational character that cœnoscopy enjoys respecting the ideoscopic development that we know as science in the modern sense.

The present work, then, is primarily a work of cœnoscopy, yet one written with keen awareness of and respect for the great modern achievement of ideoscopy. For just as modern science is a work of ideoscopy first of all, so it is the fate of philosophy to be always first of all a task of cœnoscopy, as Peirce pointed out.

This brings me to the last of my three novel terms, cathexis. This term also has a Greek root, from κἀξηγίς, ‘retention’ or ‘capable of holding’,<sup>8</sup> but is primarily the translation into English of Freud’s German coinage “*Libidobesetzung*”, intended to mean the concentration of mental energy on a particular object (be it a person or idea), especially to an unhealthy degree. The term as I make use of it, however, comes not from Freud but from Parsons and Shils work *Toward a General Theory of Action*, where cathexis is used to designate the emotional or affective component that accompanies every cognition in the world of animals, human or not. Thus I use the term to designate the fundamental distinction of psychological states into *cognitive* and *affective*, a division I take to have the same sense which Aquinas assigns to the division of purely objective being into *negations* and *relations*, that is to say, as constituting a division which is exhaustive and exclusive.

These terms, then (cœnoscopy, ideoscopy, and cathexis, with their derivative adjectival, verbal, and adverbial forms), I will use throughout the present work without further explanation. In case any readers should notice that I

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7. So the actual difference between ancient Greek science and medieval science compared to modern science lies not so much in their epistemology (see Deely 1984) as in the modern invention of observational and measuring tools and in techniques of controlled experimentation. Full discussion in Deely 2008.

8. Jewell and Abate 2001: 271.

nowhere use the term “instinct”, let them be advised that my neglect of the term is my way of contributing to its consignment to the oblivion it so richly deserves.

## **Praeludium Primum, or The Key Dilemma**

Anything, to be an object, must exist in awareness. To be known and to be an object: the two are the same. But what is it, then, that an object is as such? For not everything needs to be known (at least not by any finite intelligence) in order to be at all. To be is sometimes, yet not always, more than to be an object; but to be an object is always a form of being. And every form of being which does not start out as an object yet can become one in the right circumstances. As we will see, the question is one of principle, not merely of fact. For not only are some things unknown to us, we have every reason to expect that we will never know everything that could be known, though what it is that we will never come to know varies from individual to individual and group to group.

So if, as Peirce put it, “in half a dozen ways” the idea of anything completely unknowable “has been proved to be nonsensical” (for the very reason given by Aquinas in his pointing out that awareness of anything is necessarily pregnant with the possibility of coming to know what that something is), yet the idea of what anything known is as such – that is, as object – has so far as I know never been directly clarified, never thematically addressed.

Our most private thoughts or feelings are sometimes made public by facial expressions or bodily movements, can even be put into words for a sympathetic companion; things we have never heard of before intrude into our awareness; things we thought to be real turn out to be fictions; creatures we invent come to be objectively famous and influential.

So some things, but not all things, that become an object have an existence apart from being known. And yet many things that do exist apart from being known come to exist also as known, become objects as well as things. How? Is all this an illusion? If it is not illusion, as I am convinced and as common sense suggests as strongly as it is able to suggest anything, then how can what is and what is not apart from being known come together equally in the being of object, in objective being?

What do science and literature and culture and nature, thought, perception, and sensation have in common, objectively speaking? That is the question to which this book tries to outline an answer. Objects are always public in principle, I will show, for one simple reason: because, whatever else they may be or fail to be as well, they are always and in every case the terminus of a relation according with its ontological status.

## Preamble on Objectivity

The cœnoscopic sciences of Aristotle no doubt paved the way, more than any single ancient development of philosophy (as Rubenstein's tale<sup>9</sup> of *Aristotle's Children* so well corrects the commonly misconceived opinions on the point), for the marvelous penetration of the human mind into the subjective structures that constitute the physical universe which surrounds us and provides, in particular, our earthly environment as supportive of terrestrial lifeforms. Although our senses present to us only individual things, each individual sensed has its own subjectivity and subjective constitution according to which it acts upon our bodies as one material substance upon another to activate those parts or "organs" of our body adapted to awaken to the objective, and not merely physical and subjective, presence of things other than ourselves and our own bodies.

And, although other animals are content to deal with the things as they appear and according to the evaluations made of those appearances on the basis of biological constitution and heritage, the human animal wants to know further *why* things appear as they do; and to this end inquires not merely into the objects as they appear but further into the dimension of subjectivity which is the source of their interaction with and effects upon our bodies in making us feel, hear, see, taste or smell other bodies around us. We not only smell smoke and fear fire, we are able to come to understand *why* wood ignites when a match is set to it while glass or stone do not. It is because of the subjective constitution of wood and glass, respectively, that a kitchen match suffices to ignite the one but only to heat the other.

For the human mind adds to the awareness of objects a consideration of these same objects taken in relation to themselves: and when inquiry takes this route it discovers soon enough that not all *objects* are things, but that all *things* have a subjective constitution or being which cares not what we think or believe in determining the effects one body will have or not have upon another, again, according to the subjective constitution of each.

Of course, a thing cannot be investigated until it has come into awareness, until it is "known", let us say, using the term loosely. Before we could inquire into the rings of Saturn, we had to become aware that Saturn had rings. And before we could realize that Saturn was not the only planet in the solar system with rings (as was believed and taught in the schools throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), we had to discover that some other planets had

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9. Rubenstein 2003.

rings as well. And so on. Science does not advance merely by objectifying the physical environment, but rather by objectifying the subjective structures as such to which we initially gain access by the simple means of our bodily senses, but which we come to know well beyond what those senses can present through those extensions of sensation and perception that we call scientific experiments, theory, and research.

Galileo was only a conveniently dramatic beginning in proof of the thesis of Aquinas that “the desire of the human mind to know, even though it bears initially on things which are individual or ‘singular’ independently of the human mind, yet so bears on those individuals as to be able to discriminate within the subjective constitution of the individual beings those reasons why they are the way that they are regardless of whether we come to know them or not.”<sup>10</sup> It is not because we know hydrogen and oxygen that water is made of a combination of two hydrogen atoms with one of oxygen; and indeed we human animals, along with all the other terrestrial animals, knew water and its importance for our lifeform long before we learned its internal, or subjective, constitution. It is the advance toward a grasp of subjective constitution, toward the bringing of the constitutive structures of material subjectivity into awareness – that is to say, it is by the objectification of subjectivity – that the human mind advances scientifically and realizes its natural desire to understand its surroundings (including its own body within its objective world). We need not worry about completing the task. It is enough that we make human understanding always progress toward a completion that recedes like some distant shore as we asymptotically approach it, the ever-elusive but most real “final interpretant” of the community of inquirers.

So of course the cœnoscopic sciences had to come first, and had to establish a ground from which the ideoscopic or specialized scientific researches could eventually spring. The idea of the latter completely displacing the former (as the Enlightenment thought would occur) is understandable but, after all, laughable – a chimera indeed if ever a chimera there was. Cœnoscopic knowledge, the awareness of our world made possible by the type of bodies that we have as semiotic animals, is the only beginning possible for us, the horizon from which inquiry takes rise and to which it must always return as to a measure, even if in the process the ideoscopic developments that experimentation, mathematization, and systematization make possible often show the folly of and are obliged essentially to correct cœnoscopic views that erred not by reason of being

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10. Aquinas 1266: *Summa theologiae* 1.80.2 ad 2 (103/40–43): “appetitus intellectivus, etsi feratur in res quae sunt extra animam singulares, fertur tamen in eas secundum aliquam rationem universalem”.

cœnoscopic, but by reason of mistaking the limits circumscribing the possibilities of such knowledge unaided by ideoscopic developments. Again, the case of Galileo was a salutary warning of the essential need for cœnoscopia always to push forward into ideoscopia, for that is only to say that our unaided senses are not sufficient to plumb the depths of the subjectivities first opened to us by cœnoscopic observations.

The objectivity of science consists in the grasp it achieves of the subjective constitution of the physical environment, in the objectification of subjectivity, precisely that. Helas! for the Kantians: it is nothing less than a knowledge of the things in themselves, of the things of the environment objectified according to the subjective constitution which makes them be as they are independently of human opinion, belief, and desire, that is the essence of modern physical science. To realize this is to mark without mourning the end of modernity in philosophical culture.

For objectivity itself has quite eluded the understanding of the modern world. It is not so surprising. The things that lie closest to us are often the hardest to realize in their proper being. Even today, after all these millions of years of animal life, thousands of years of human civilization, and hundreds of years of scientific development in the modern world, the difference between physical environment as such and Umwelt as objective world is understood only by a handful of semioticians. And modernity, which gave birth to science, gave birth also to the ‘critical’ philosophy (the ‘epistemology’) which belies the possibility of what science has achieved and denies the very essence of the scientific enterprise as the natural fulfillment of the orientation of the human mind to an understanding – not simply an objective awareness, which is the common heritage of all animals, but an *understanding*, which essentially presupposes objective awareness but extends it by the thematic incorporation of subjectivity, the subjective constitution of the things of the environment (which is what their “essence” consists in), *into* that objective awareness – of what is external to our bodies, namely, the surrounding physical world.

And of course this subjective constitution of material and physical things extends into our own bodies as well: it is the ‘essence’ of all bodies that they have a constitution that makes them what and as they are, and it is the ‘essence’ of human understanding to be able to objectify that subjectivity and make it known – an ability not given to other animals simply because within their Umwelt the objects are considered only in relation to *the animals themselves*, with no opening further to consider the constitution of objects in relation to *the objects themselves*; because this requires a semiotic ability, the ability to consider relations as distinct from (even if not independent of) the objects that are related, as we will see.

Science, then, principally achieves not objective knowledge (there is no other kind; it is hardly a privilege of science “to be objective”), but the objectification and knowledge of subjectivity, the subjectivities of the physical world. “Being objective” is not what distinguishes science. Not at all. “Being objective” is what distinguishes animal life *tout court*. The systematic objectification of subjectivities beyond what the bodily senses of themselves can manifest is what distinguishes physical science.

And what about the social sciences? These sciences, which do not precede modernity, come much closer to “purely” objective knowledge, for they move further and further from physical subjectivity in what they distinctively objectify and study or make known. What the social sciences study depends more upon what is created by social relationships than upon what physical subjectivity as such directly brings about. But their development has been, as it were, largely blind, hindered from the start by a complete failure on all hands to grasp the essential nature and meaning of “objective being”. That is the situation that this present essay aims to remedy, or at least thematically to begin a process of remediation within the community of inquirers.

The moderns have not the foggiest idea of what “objectivity” properly consists in, or what the term “objectivity” ought usefully to mean as an item of common discourse. The “arbitrariness of the sign” so famously touted by semiology, and by those semioticians who do not know how distinguish the part from the whole in matters of semiotics, is so far from the whole story of semiosis as not to be funny when treated as the whole, or at least as the central point. Indeed, a man who uses power in “an arbitrary manner” is not a man likely to come in for wide admiration. “Being arbitrary” is hardly an encomium in matters of human behavior. Why should it be praised as the be-all and end-all of linguistic communication which, after all, is an important part of the behavior of human animals? The arbitrariness of the sign is its weakness, not its strength, unless the arbitrariness is carefully controlled by the use of reason. There is no reason why water needs to be called “water” (unless we wish to make ourselves understood among English speakers at a particular time). But usually those who first assign names do have their reasons for the names they choose. In the subjectivity of the one naming semiosis is at work, and though the private semiosis of the *Innenwelt* can be capricious, it normally is not capricious (and in the end impacts the public *Umwelt* in either case, for good or for ill); and so neither are signs capricious outside the hands of those who practice deconstruction for its own sake rather than for an *ad hoc* purpose, or those who think that semiology is a synonym for semiotics as the doctrine of signs without qualification.

The problem of understanding what is objectivity is not new. Its original form in philosophy appeared in the opposition of  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$  to  $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  – “culture”, where

the will of ‘man’ is mainly at play, to “nature”, where the will of ‘god’ is mainly at play. Plato and Aristotle wrestled with the problem, and despised the sophists who made it a game for gain. Aquinas and Poinsett seminally proposed a semiotic “middle way” in the *signum ex consuetudine*, which could begin in culture but would inevitably penetrate nature as well to the extent that its “arbitrary” beginnings in human will (*signum ad placitum*) achieved social success and acceptance in the behavior of human (or perhaps some other) animals. Not only Descartes but Vico and all the moderns made the problem insoluble with their proposal that human beings properly know only what their own minds actually make: “sematology”, Trabant called Vico’s “new science”;<sup>11</sup> and had Saussure better known the provenance of these terms we would likely be speaking today of “sematology and semiotics” rather than of “semiology and semiotics”, for in both cases the stakes are the same, the part/whole issue is at play, and in exactly the same ways.

So it falls to a postmodern intellectual culture to tackle again the ancient  $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma/\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$  problem, and with the best chance of success. For it is the understanding of what it means “to be objective” that holds the key to the problem. And while modernity as such seems not to have a clue as to what objectivity is, there are clues scattered over the history of semiotics within philosophy that may finally be gathered together to form something of an answer. Just as, to invoke Copley’s Canon, what is most essential to and distinctive of semiotics is to be oriented exclusively neither to  $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  nor to  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$  (and the “arbitrariness of the sign”) but to reside at their intersection as able to move into either or both as the problematic requires, so the problem of objectivity had to await the emergence of semiotics in order to be dealt with in the terms that it requires, which are those neither of science nor of traditional philosophy but, precisely, those of the doctrine of signs as consisting in a being which transcends the oppositions of nature to culture, inner to outer, *ens reale* (being independent of mind) to *ens rationis* (being dependent upon mind). All of this we will see.

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11. Trabant 2003.



# Chapter 1

## The Problem of Objectivity

The word itself summarizes the problem today: “objectivity”. Pray tell, what is it you are talking about?

The authority of *The New Oxford American Dictionary* edited by Elizabeth Jewell and Frank Abate (Oxford University Press, 2001) shows well just how far this problem has gotten out of hand since the halcyon days of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Something is “objective”, this dictionary tells us, when it is “not dependent on the mind for existence;” when it is “actual”. And persons are “objective” when their judgment is “not influenced by personal feelings or opinions”.

To make matters worse, this authoritative work identifies this word “objective” as in binary opposition to “subjective”, by which is meant (we are told) anything “dependent on the mind or an individual’s perception for its existence”; anything “based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinion.”

So we are not surprised to find that an “object”, when it is not “a goal or purpose”, is, for philosophy, “a thing external to the thinking mind or subject”, and, more specifically, as also for modern common sense usage, an object is “a material thing that can be seen and touched”. All this derived, we are told, “from medieval Latin *objectum* ‘thing presented to the mind’, itself a nominative usage derived from the Latin verb “*obicere*, from *ob-* ‘in the way of’ + *jacere* ‘to throw’.”

So what have we learned from this consultation? Pretty much what any late modern speaker of English intuitively (by reason of the habit structure of the language at this historical juncture) already ‘knows’, namely, that there is practically no such thing as “objective thought”; and that “object” and “thing” are pretty much synonyms, being two ways of saying the same.

The thesis of this book is that this established common usage of the terms “object” and “subject”, with their derivatives, is the outcome of three centuries of modern thought wherein philosophy sought to distinguish so-called “epistemology” from “ontology” in order to show that the former alone could establish the foundations for human knowledge from purely within the knowing subject. In taking this turn, modern philosophy dissociated itself from the Latin medieval development which was far from complete in this area of the understanding of human knowledge, but which was definitively moving in an opposite direction from the turn modernity took in and after the work of, first, Ockham, as we will see, and then, more decisively, Descartes.

In the medieval understanding, far from being independent of finite mind, an “object” to be such had to be something present or presented to mind, whether or not it was, in addition to existing within awareness, a thing not dependent upon the mind for existing in its own right. Thus the later Latins, in contrast with the later moderns, had an ‘intuitive’ grasp of the difference between a thing, *aliquid* or *res*, which exists whether or not anyone is aware of it, and an object, *objectum*, which cannot be as object outside of or apart from awareness.

Now this Latin Age or ‘medieval’ understanding of the distinction between object and thing, I say, was far from complete. It was not something established in principle and fully thought through, although things were fast moving in that direction when the whole Latin scholastic and Aristotelian tradition came a-cropper over the case of Galileo, the case where the difference in principle between object and thing could hardly be more crucial or complete. The reverberations and irony of the “Galileo affair” will no doubt continue as long as earthlings continue to inquire into the affairs of nature and culture. But that it involved centrally a matter of relations makes no small part of its importance for intellectual culture, as we will see.

So, as usual in postmodern affairs, there can be no question of a simple “going back to” or “restoration of” an earlier standpoint in the question before us. No. The medieval development of the distinction between objects and things, as I say, was far from complete. At the time of Peirce, Galileo’s contemporary and author of the first systematic *Treatise on Signs* to demonstrate the unified subject matter of semiotic inquiry, it was only beginning to emerge that “object” is a synonym for “significate” (*signatum seu significatum*), such that to say something is an “object” or to say that something is an “object signified” is to say the same thing.

Let me emphasize this point from the outset. Once it becomes clear that “all thought is in signs” (the realization first formulated by Peirce’s teachers, the Conimbricenses<sup>1</sup>), it becomes further clear that all objects are objects signified, or, to suppress the redundancy, all objects are signicates. Not all *things* are signicates, but all *objects* are. In other words, to say “significate” is to say clearly what “object” says obscurely and confusedly, and in the late modern habits of English usage, perhaps, not at all.

Now that is a point which I do not believe has ever been made before. In fact, in modern English, there was early considerable resistance to the entry of the term “significate” into the dictionary as a legitimate item of common usage.

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1. Conimbricenses 1607: Q. 2, Art. 23, p. 27. See also Peirce 1868a: CP 5.253; Peirce 1632: Book II, Question 2, 240/1–253/37, and Question 5, esp. 271/28–35.

In fact, in the authority I am using for the outset of this writing,<sup>2</sup> “significate” is not an entry at all. Yet – so this work shall argue – significate is a synonym of a correct understanding of object, saying clearly what the latter term says but obscurely, if at all. So the resistance to the term “significate” among the modern English makers of dictionaries is an index, as it were, of how far off the way of signs the mainstream of modern philosophy has carried the English-speaking peoples.

Not all things exist as significates, but only known things, things cognized, what has entered into awareness. But all objects exist as significates, whether they are also things or not. Such is the thesis of this work. Another way to put this is to say that semiotics is essential to the full understanding of what an object is. Thus, for the same reason that the Latin Age saw the original florescence of semiotic consciousness, the Latin Age was on the way to a full understanding of the distinction and difference between objects and things. But this development was put under erasure by the intellectual revolution, the “epistemological turn”, that we call modern philosophy. Now, after Peirce, after Sebeok and the twentieth century establishment of semiotics as the quintessentially postmodern development of intellectual culture, we find that the “way of signs” has put us back again onto the actual path along which the medieval distinction between thing and object was unfolding, but at a higher point of development, where we can now see that what the medievals called “objects” are significates, one of the three irreducible terms – sign-vehicle, significate (or, somewhat redundantly, as I have pointed out, ‘object signified’), interpretant (often the biological nature or heritage of the organism cognizing) – in the relation of signification which constitutes the triadic being of every sign as such.

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2. Jewell and Abate’s 2001 *New Oxford American Dictionary*, p. 1,588.

## Chapter 2

# Root of the Semiotic Resolution of the Problem of Objectivity

The root of the problem of objectivity lies in the understanding, or misunderstanding, of the notion of relation, or, perhaps better said, of the being proper to relation – *ens minimum*, Aquinas called it,<sup>1</sup> “minima distinctio realis quae possit esse”, ‘the most tenuous difference possible’ – in the *ens reale* order of το ὄν. Yet, we will see, when we consider the nature of human society, culture, and understanding, as Aquinas found when he considered the being of God as three in person, relation proves rather to be *ens maximum*. With the discovery of how the being proper to relation enters into the being constitutive of signs, we are obliged to say with Ratzinger,<sup>2</sup> if for quite different reasons, that “the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality”.

Substance is the original Greek notion of the subjective. It is not to subjectivity that objectivity is opposed, as what is “real” to what is “dependent upon mind, personal feelings, tastes or opinions”, as the dictionaries suggest we should think. Not at all. There is not here a binary opposition. What objectivity oppositionally presupposes, without reducing to it, above all is *intersubjectivity*. Subjectivity is “opposed”, properly speaking, not to objectivity, but to intersubjectivity. Indeed, in order for there to be intersubjectivity, there has to be subjectivity. But it is intersubjectivity, not subjectivity, that is directly presupposed to there being an object. We will see this, “slow by slow”.

“Subjective”, our authority tells us, is “from Latin *subjectivus*, from *subject-*, ‘brought under.’” But brought under what? For the later Latins, the “subject” before all else is what is “brought under” existence in its own right, what is cut off from the rest of the universe as an individual existent, a “subject of existence”, a substance – that “to which” existence primarily comes,<sup>3</sup> that which exists ‘in

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1. Aquinas c.1245/6: *Super Sent.*, lib. 1 d. 26 q. 2 a. 2 ad 2.

2. Ratzinger 1970: 455.

3. This is how, within the Aristotle’s problematic of substance, Aquinas raises the discussion of being in terms of *esse*, ‘existence’, the first act of being without which the subject remains in nothingness, the one act which all finite action in the shaping and reshaping of matter as formed presupposes but which, viewed as an effect in its own right, appears as the fingerprint of God on the creation, the *actus essendi* which has no proportionate cause as such outside a pure *esse subsistens*. Thus, in the

itself' as a being in its own right, rather than 'in another' as a modification of a being in its own right, as a *characteristic* of an individual.

So a substance is the unit of being, the individual as such, of whatever kind, what exists "in itself", *ens in se*, albeit dependently upon an environment outside and surrounding itself with which it interacts and from which it derives sustenance (in case it be alive). "To be in itself", *esse in se*, is to be a substance.

There we have the original ground for the notion of the subjective, the notion of subjectivity. "The world", said Aristotle,<sup>4</sup> pondering the controversies of his day, "is either one or many; but if many, each of the many must be a one". And that is what Aristotle deemed substance to be: the natural unit, the individual which by nature exists in its own right and not in another as in the subject of existence. *Esse in se*.

Experience does not tell us whether the many that appear are really one or really many, Aristotle conceded. But experience does suggest to us that the many are more likely to be real as many than they are likely really to be but one. Monism, the idea that all of reality is one single underlying whole, is contrary to our experience – not impossible to be true, perhaps, but not what is directly or even indirectly testified to in our sensations and perceptions. What sensation and perception directly testifies to is a reality made up of many different kinds of things. And what reflection testifies to as necessary is that, if indeed there be many, there must also be ones. What these ones are, for Aristotle, was the

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Latin Age, by the time of Aquinas, we will find the problem of being undergoing a shift, *from* substance itself as the ground of all finite reality *to* the question of the source of the very existence of a universe of finite realities in the first place. The 'ultimate one', Aquinas will argue (not without echoes of Neoplatonism, to be sure, but with considerably more than mere echoes, for he will develop the problematic quite distinctively in his own right and otherwise than Plotinus did in removing the One from at least a partial intelligible grasp by human understanding), is more *like substance* in that it is an independent being (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens* – pure existence without any intrinsic shred of limitation) but more *like relation* in that it consists of a communion and community of persons subsisting as relations. One of the things that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity means, then, for philosophy is that, according to Aquinas, in the Godhead substance and relation merge! The *ens minimum* of hardcore reality becomes the *ens maximum et personalissimum* of God in his interior life; and the same unique feature of relation which makes communication and objectivity possible in the order of finite being turns out, according to Aquinas, to characterize the interior life of a God as a communication and procession of persons. Thus relation in its distinctive being as indifferent to its subjective fundament or source proves to be the ground of the possibility of semiosis at any level, and the reality of communication wherever it occurs. See Diagram 3 in Chapter 3, p. 42.

4. Cf. Aristotle c.348/7BC: *Metaphysics*, Book III, 1001a3–b26.

problem of being; for all other being depends upon the being of substance, the category of “being in itself”.<sup>5</sup> There can be a one without a many, but there cannot be many without ones. Therefore, if the experience of the manifold is indeed the experience of reality, within the manifold are ones. These ones are what substance is, the ‘natural units of being’ which have their individual characteristics and modifications.

Aristotle did not think that Democritus was right in his view of the fundamental natural units being atoms too small to perceive, but he did think that Democritus was the only one to present a credible alternative to his own interpretation of substance. Substance, thought Aristotle, need not be simple and indivisible, such as Democritus thought his “atoms” to be. Substances themselves could be complex and made up of heterogeneous parts. The only requirement for a substance is that its many parts be under the organizing influence of a single principle directive of the multiplicity of the parts *as* parts to a whole, and organizing that whole *from within*. Substances in turn, of course, are “part” of the physical surroundings, the environment, and depend upon it, having their niche within it. Yet environment and organism, for example, are not *internally* unified as one whole. The organism has its internal principle of unity, the environment has many such principles. Thus the environment is made up of substances, but the substances as parts of the environment are not parts subjected to a single principle of unity; they are a balance within an interaction among many principles of unity each of which is a substance.

The principle of unity, then, is substantial form, substantial form being that aspect of substance which makes it actually be this or that kind of individual, from the moment it began to be (“generation”) to the moment it ceases to be (“corruption”). Thus substances begin to be and cease to be. Their hallmark is unity from within, however heterogeneous and diverse may be their parts and the other substances with which they interact and interdepend as they develop in time. Substantial form is the ground of subjectivity, that from which subjectivity arises and to which all subjectivity returns.

But the individual, albeit always some kind of individual, *is* individual by virtue of distinguishing features, subjective characteristics, let us say, over and above being of this or that kind. The individual, in short, is individuated by various characteristics of its subjectivity, distinguishing features which set it apart

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5. Aristotle c.330bBC: *Metaphysics*, Book VII, 1028b3–8: “And indeed the question which, both now and of old, has always been raised, and always been the subject of doubt, viz. what being is, is just the question, what is substance? For it is this that some assert to be one, others more than one, and that some assert to be limited in number, others unlimited. And so we also must consider chiefly and primarily and almost exclusively what that is which is in this sense.”

as this one rather than that one of a kind. These distinguishing characteristics Aristotle called “accidents”, a rather strange term, at least in looking back, for what we would call rather distinctive features or individual characteristics. These too are part and parcel of the subjectivity of substance. Just as the substance exists in itself, so its distinguishing characteristics exist in the substance. They are, precisely, *subjective* characteristics, characteristics serving, like substantial form itself, to separate the individual from and within the rest of the universe. The environment as a whole is organized from without, as a balance of substances; the substances themselves are unified from within, as the natural units of being. And each natural unit depends upon many other natural units in order to maintain its own existence. So the medieval saying: *sic enim aliquid est ens, quomodo et unum*; a thing is a being in just the manner that it is a one.<sup>6</sup> Or *ens et unum convertuntur*; being and unity go together.

So we have the basic traditional presentation of the scheme of Aristotle’s categories of being:

Being { in itself: substance  
in another: accident

Or, as the Latins would put it: *Esse* { *in se: substantia*  
*in alio: accidens*

*Illustration 1.* Traditional Presentation of Aristotle’s Categories

So far so good. But we have only subjectivity, that is, to be separated from the rest of things. Subjectivity is everything that separates the individual from the rest of the universe, everything that makes the individual be other than whatever it is not, everything that exists in itself or in another as in the subject of existence in itself. Moreover, already I have a minor problem with this absolutely traditional way of presenting Aristotle’s basic categorial scheme, namely, that it would be better to invert the schema, in order to make part of the diagrammatic representation the fact that accident depends upon substance, thus:

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6. Aquinas 1266: *Summa theologiae* 1.76.1c 22/3.

Being {  
in another: accident  
in itself: substance

Or, as the Latins would put it: *Esse* {  
*in alio: accidens*  
*in se: substantia*

Illustration 2. The Traditional Presentation Inverted

This inversion of the diagram, we will see, will prove useful as our discussion develops (something I came to realize from dealing in the classroom with some penetrating questions on the matter insistently put by Benjamin Smith as a doctoral student at my home university in Houston.) Even so, at this point the proposed inversion might seem almost a quibble compared with the real difficulty in the established traditional presentation of Aristotle’s basic categorial scheme. Let us go directly to that difficulty.

Where are relations in this traditional way of summing up the scheme?<sup>7</sup>

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7. Aristotle never finalized his list of categories. The various lists he left are all compatible, and the list of ten was simply the most complete list, the one that became canonical, so to speak, for the Latin Age. In all his accounts, substance is the basis of the whole scheme, followed by the inherent accidents of quantity (the first accident distinguishing a substance as material), quality (the accident immediately consequent upon form), and the categories of interaction, action (initiating an influence on something else) and passion (receiving an influence from another), which are yet subjective – *in esse* – because they are *in* the one acting and *in* the one acted upon, respectively. Relation arises from and as a consequence of the interaction, but it does not reduce to the interaction. The interaction requires proximity and contact, the consequent relation does not. In an intriguing text on relation in Aristotle’s categorial sense (from the *Treatise on Signs*, Second Preamble, Article 1, 84/45–85/12 ff.), Poinset comments that “a relation accrues to a subject without any change that is directly and immediately terminated at the relation, but not without a change that is terminated mediately and indirectly at that relation. Just as risibility results from the same action by which a man is produced, so from the production of a white thing is produced similitude to another existing white thing. But if another white thing did not exist, by virtue of the generation of the first white thing, that similitude and any other relation that would result from the positing of its terminus would remain in a virtual state. Whence distance neither conduces to nor obstructs the resultance of a pure relation, because these relations do not depend upon a local situation; for far or near, a son is in the same way the son of his father” (cf. Illustration 7. “Similarity”, p. 36 below).



Keep in mind the point of Aristotle's categories. The distinction between mind-independent and mind-dependent being was of course known to the ancient Greeks (how could it not be?), but it had not yet been systematically drawn and thematized. The "being" which interested Aristotle, τὸ ὄν, was principally the being of φύσις, "nature", the being which is what it is regardless of what human beings think, feel, believe, or say. It was *this* being which he sought to determine the "senses" or "ways" of in his list of "categories", or ways in which being can be verified in experience as obtaining independently of the experience within which it is verified.<sup>8</sup> The categories, in short, were an attempt to enumerate the fundamental modes or varieties of what the Latins would term *ens reale*, mind-independent being, beginning with substance, the being most independent of its surroundings as providing the subject of existence in every case; and then enumerating, after substance, the irreducible ways in which substance could be modified and individualized.

The accidents, or "beings *in alio*", contrast with substance in point of independence (it is the substance that gives independent existence to the individual as a whole unto itself, the accidents only qualify and modify that independence), but not in point of subjectivity. The substance as subjective does not contrast with the accidents as subjective. Indeed, the accidents, if anything, only deepen and confirm the subjectivity of the substance, stamping its individuality, and enabling it to stay in existence.

Relations, however, in sharp contrast, are not *in* the substances that are related. Relations are *over and above* subjectivity *tout court*. Relations, if they are anywhere in *ens reale*, are *between* individuals, and "between" is not a subjective mode of "in", as "in se" and "in alio" are subjective modes of "in": what is *in between* two subjectivities is *in* neither of the subjectivities. It is *over and above* them, *suprasubjective*, if you like, or, more precisely and restrictively

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After relation in Aristotle's most complete list come 'when', 'posture', 'where' and *habitus* or 'vestititon'. But a little noticed feature of these last four categories in the traditional way of simply opposing substance/accident is that they all depend for their function on the category of relation being understood in its own terms as an intersubjective reality. Thus the most basic categories in the long list of ten reduce in fact not to the substance/accident contrast but rather to the *inesse/adesse* contrast, where 'inesse', subjectivity, divides into substance/inherent accident, and 'adesse' consists in relation and those further characteristics or modifications of subjectivity that depend on relation in order to themselves be, namely, when, posture, where, and vestititon. For the details of this situation I refer the reader to the complete discussion in Deely 2001: 73–78.

8. Aristotle c.360BC: *Categories*.

in Aristotle's limited categorial sense (limited, that is, to the order of *ens reale* within  $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$ ), *intersubjective*.

But of course relations may not be in the order of *ens reale* at all. Relations as "between" subjects may simply result from comparisons made by some mind – our own, say – when two subjects are considered together. This is what the modern philosophers generally would come to think.<sup>9</sup> This is not what Aristotle thought. Aristotle took extraordinary pains to establish that relation is a *distinct* category of *ens reale* under  $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$ , not merely a perspective of thought. The difficulty he had in accomplishing this is clearly marked in his own texts, in the pains he took twice to revise his formulations of relation until he had succeeded to establish its distinctness as a category.<sup>10</sup> The difficulty that he had in doing this is also reflected in the fact that, across the ages, from Theophrastus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to Grote in the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD, by far the greater part of Aristotle's followers have quite missed the point of what is most distinctive about Aristotle's category of relation as a distinct category.

For make no mistake. After Aristotle, no one rejects "relation" as a category of being. But while retaining relation in their list of categories, for many authors, what they *mean* by relation, that is to say, the content which they assign to this category, is not distinctive in being irreducible to the subjective being of the things deemed as "relative" or "related". In other words, while retaining the label and the category, they do not use it to point to the same aspect of  $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$  that Aristotle finally arrived at, but attain only the aspect Aristotle initially attained in the two attempts he himself deemed to fail in establishing what "relation" had to mean if it was properly to be recognized as an aspect or feature of mind-independent being.

This becomes clearest early, perhaps, in the work of William of Ockham (c.1285–1349).

Treating of the matter whether "similarity" as a relation can be considered to exist in the order of *ens reale*, Ockham replies that indeed it can be – but. Instead of considering that this *ens reale* in question obtains as an intersubjective, suprasubjective mode, irreducible to its necessary foundation in subjectivity, he considers rather that relation is constituted simply by the multiplication of subjectivities which are of the same sort. Under the thesis that 'outside' or 'apart from' mind there exist only singulars, only individuals, Ockham has found a way to have his cake and eat it too. For singulars are subjectivities, but partic-

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9. See Weinberg 1965: essay on relation.

10. For the textual details of this difficult matter, the reader may consult the AfterWord (Deely 1985) to the 1985 California edition of the systematic and seminal *Tractatus de Signis* (Poinset 1632), pp. 472–475, esp. notes 112, 113, 114.

ular subjectivities can be multiple, and when they are we have what is *called* relation. The relation itself *is* the multiplication or the multiplicity, however, not something *more*. Here is the faultline which “slow by slow” will divide, first, the modern from the mediaeval mainstream in the analysis of being, and then the moderns from the postmoderns in the matter of semiosis.

Here we are concerned with these beginnings in both directions, so we note from the outset this: that for the quintessentially moderns, and for Ockham as in a taproot, ‘relation’ obtains formally ‘apart from mind’ as a multiple of intrasubjectivity, consisting in and constituted by those aspects of subjectivity which, for Aristotle, Aquinas, Poinset, and later Peirce, *found but do not constitute* relation formally as an actuality (or aspect and mode of actuality) irreducible in its own right. The recognition does not constitute the multiplicity, but it does constitute the relation as something *more than*, something *over and above*, the multiplicity of singulars similarly constituted subjectively, as Ockham exhibits:<sup>11</sup>

For similarity is called a real relation in that (i) one white thing is similar to another white thing by its nature, and (ii) the intellect no more makes it to be the case that one is similar to the other than it makes it to be the case that Socrates is white or that Plato is white . . . When a thing is such as it is indicated to be by a relation or a concrete relative [term] without any activity of the intellect (in the sense that intellectual activity is not at all what makes the thing in question be as it is), then as [A is] similar [to B] there can be said to be a ‘real relation’ in the manner described.

The key phrase thus is “the manner described”. For Aristotle, Aquinas, and Poinset, as we will see, the whiteness of A and the whiteness of B is the **foundation** of the similarity of the two, but what **constitutes** the similarity *as a relation* is the existence of a mode of being that is **over and above the subjectivities** involved, **over and above** the mere factual multiplication of some one sort of subjective structure. The key question at this level (the level of being considered as mind-independent) is intersubjectivity as such. Is relation itself an irreducible mode of being, as Aquinas will assert (“ens minimum”)? Or is it, as Ockham prefers, ‘nothing but’, ‘nothing more than’, the fact of two or more coexisting subjectivities intrinsically similarly constituted – each of which is, say, white? The subjectivities as such are certainly not constituted by the mind. Both are white. But does the “relation” consist in *this whiteness as subjectively coexisting in two or more*, or is it something *over and above* the subjectivity of the fundaments? The answer of Ockham can be diagrammatically represented thus:

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11. Ockham i.1317–19: Book I dist. 30 quaes. 5.

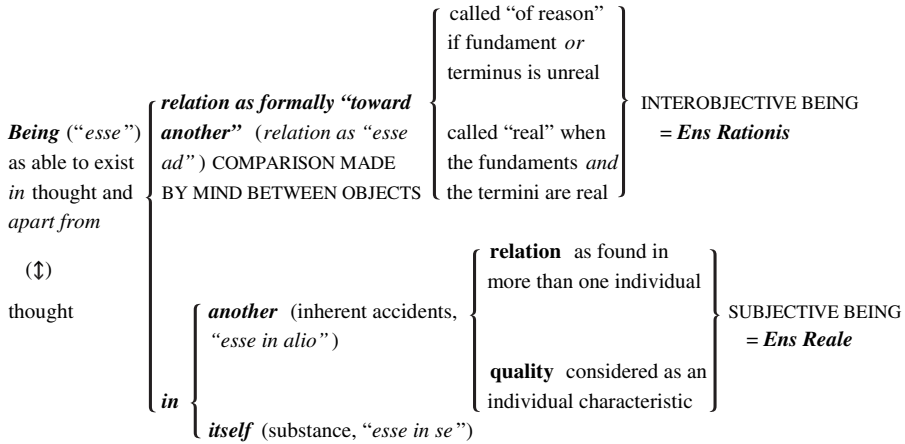


Diagram 1. The Modern View of Relation as Stabilized by OCKHAM (†1349): Inter-subjectivity Excluded from the Notion of Categorial Being as *Ens Reale*; relations as *formally* consisting in a “being toward” occur only as modes within the subjectivity of a knower (see p. 96 below also)

Formally in its own right, by contrast with this Ockhamite view, the medievals and postmoderns agree that relation as a category of being is suprasubjective in principle and (when obtaining in *ens reale*) intersubjective in fact. These singularities – actual relations – are indeed dependent upon but yet *never reducible* to the intrasubjective characteristics (such as size or shape) and qualities (including actions and passions) from which they provenate and between which they ethereally (*tamquam ens minimum*) obtain.

Let us put it this way. Anyone who would say that Aristotle divides being between *substance* as what exists in itself and *accidents* as what exist in another, and let it go at that as a basic presentation of the categories (with relation simply subsumed under “being in another”), has no chance of understanding the point of Aristotle’s affirmation of relation as a distinct category. For relation, while it depends upon what exists in another, does not *itself* exist in another, but *between* two otherwise independent substances as subjects of actual existence. When relation is identified or classified as an “accident of a substance”, and accidents are further identified as “being in another” (*esse in alio*), the main and distinctive point of relation has been missed.

Now this is not difficult. In fact, as history amply testifies in matters of philosophy, it is much easier to *miss* than to *get* the point of the category of relation under the rubric τὸ ὄν. At the pure level of mind-independent being, indeed, it is not easy to see what difference relations as such make to the situation. Even

the great Aquinas – staunchest perhaps of all the interpreters of Aristotle when it comes to affirming the mind-independent character of some relations as such, and therefore the legitimacy and uniqueness of relation as an irreducible category of *ens reale* – had to admit that, so far as concerns finite being, relation is the thinnest and weakest form or mode of being possible outside nothingness – *ens minimum*, as he put it. But *minimum* is not *superfluum*. Without the reality of relations, as we will see, being would not be what it is and objectivity within awareness would not be possible. Relation is the neutral ground not only that provides the prior possibility of any such thing either as ontology or as epistemology, but also in the absence of an understanding of which any such distinction is and must be sterile and misbegotten. The common root of what the moderns poorly distinguish as ontology and epistemology proves to be what is unique in the reality of relation as a mode of being.

And what is that? In precisely what does the alleged uniqueness of relation consist? In that relation alone among all the modes of being does not reduce to subjectivity as the distinguishing characteristic of substance. What distinguishes relation as an accident of substance is not that it is in the substance but that by virtue of relation one substance is toward another, whether in thought or in reality or both.

Now here is where we have to be careful. John is the father of Matthew: there is a relation of parenthood between John and Matthew. John is believed to be the father of Matthew: there is believed to be a relation of parenthood between John and Matthew; but in fact Matthew's mother was unfaithful to John and Matthew was conceived outside their wedlock. In fact Matthew's father is Alvin, but neither Matthew nor Alvin (nor, for that matter, John) are aware of this relation. All three believe that the fictitious relation is a 'real' relation, that is to say, a relation independent of thought and opinion.

But what is this relation, you may ask, beyond John's (or Alvin's) genes in Matthew? The genes are a subjective reality in either case. The relation over and above them is only a consideration made by some finite mind, rightly or wrongly. To say that John is the father is to say no more than that Matthew got his genes from John. To say that John is not the father is to say no more than that Matthew got his genes from a man other than John. In either case, the "relation" has no reality of its own, no "betweenness" as such. The relation is no more than a way of considering or not considering two subjectivities.

Convincing as far as it goes, such reasoning does yet not go far enough. Consider an army on the march, and that same army in disarray. Or consider the furniture in a room, one time piled in a corner, another time arranged to accommodate a gathering. The subjectivities are the same in either case, but the intersubjectivity is not the same. And surely that intersubjectivity is not nothing:

for is there no difference in a room able to accommodate a gathering and a room in which the same furniture is useless for the gathering unless “rearranged”? To rearrange furniture may or may not be much; but the end result, even if engineered by mind, obtains mind-independently among the things arranged.

Already here too note a *singularity*: a fictitious relation is not real but is still really a relation, while a fictitious individual is not really an individual; for a relation need only exist “between”, over and above subjectivities real or imagined, in order to be a relation; but an individual needs to exist in itself in order to be an individual. So there can be fictitious individuals just as there can be fictitious relations. But fictitious individuals are not individuals, while fictitious relations are relations. In fact, as we shall shortly see, fictitious individuals are really relations, purely objective relations at that (although they may be based on actual subjectivities and intersubjectivities otherwise known). Norris Clarke,<sup>12</sup> with quite another point in mind, nonetheless describes exactly the condition of purely objective being: the known “is reduced to nothing more than a pattern of relations with no subjects grounding them, . . . a pattern of events with no agents enacting them. The fundamental polarity within real being between the ‘in-itself’ and the ‘toward others,’ the self-immanence and the self-transcendence of being, collapses into the one pole of pure relatedness to others.”

Consider. A substance which is not real is neither a substance nor can it properly be put in the category of substance, because the categories – Aristotle’s categories, remember – are classifications of the ways in which things can exist independently of the finite mind. A relation which is not real cannot be put in the category of relation for the same reason that a substance that is not real cannot, but a relation that is not real is nonetheless still a relation. The categories of subjectivity as such – “being in”, whether “in se” or “in alio” – identify beings which cannot be what they are alleged to be (substances or inherent accidents) unless they are also mind-independent. But the category of intersubjectivity identifies a being which can be what it is alleged to be (relation) even when it is not mind-independent.

Of course, if a relation is falsely identified as mind-independent, it is falsely placed in the category of relation insofar as relation is construed exclusively as a category of mind-independent being. But a relation falsely identified as mind-independent is not falsely identified as a relation. By contrast, a substance falsely identified as mind-independent is *both* falsely placed in the category of substance *and* falsely identified as a substance. A falsely identified substance – a fictitious individual, let us say – has no being apart from the relation or relations through which it is identified, whereas it needs subjective being in order truly to

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12. Clarke 1994): 102–103.

be a substance. A relation needs intersubjective being in order to belong to the category of relation in Aristotle's sense of category, but it does not need subjective being of any kind, not even intersubjective being, in order truly or really to be a relation. A relation between two gargoyles is still a relation, even though there be no gargoyle substances. But in order for gargoyles to be substances, there must be gargoyles possible to exist independently of finite mind.

Perhaps this is clear enough for the moment. (Not that there is not still some untangling to do!) For the moment the point is to understand the sense of relation in Aristotle's categorial scheme. In the categorial scheme, the point of the category of substance is to identify subjects of existence, real individuals in nature. The point of the category of inherent accidents is further to identify what separates or distinguishes those individuals from one another. But the point of the category of relation is to identify how real individuals are not *separated from* but *connected with* other real individuals or substances in the physical environment. Thus, one triangular shape as belonging to individual A distinguishes individual A from individual B, which also has its own triangular shape. But when A and B both exist here and now, the shape of one serves as the *basis* or *foundation* whereby it is *similar to* the other, and conversely. The *similarity* is *in* neither one, but *between* them. What is *in* each of them is their individual shape, an inherent accident of a substance. But that subjective shape, in the case of A, is the foundation for a relation of similarity to B, and conversely. Equally conversely, the shape of B serves as terminus for the relation of similarity founded on the shape of A, while the shape of A serves as terminus for the relation of similarity founded on the shape of B.

The Latin scholastics will clarify this situation by pointing out that every relation in the category of relation involves three elements: a foundation (or basis) in subjectivity, a terminus in another subjectivity, and the relation itself which obtains between the two subjectivities, over and above each of them.<sup>13</sup> The "founding" subjectivity, moreover, may be considered proximately as the inherent accident or subjective characteristic upon which the relation is founded or based, from which it provenates; or remotely as the substance itself upon which that proximately founding accident depends. (They could also have considered

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13. Peirce (1893: 1.553) will further point out that the objective comparison required to identify an example of intersubjective being requires semiosis, because the required comparison cannot occur without the formation of an interpretant, which explains why examples can be falsely identified (as we will see in examining the indifference of relation to its subjective provenance). This point is important for illuminating the illusion of Nominalism that relations can be *reduced* to comparisons; it is also decisive against those who think that the awareness of animals does not require a semiotic interpretation.

the terminating subjectivity proximately and remotely; but as far as I know no one actually did this.<sup>14</sup>) If the terminus of the relation did not have a subjective dimension or reality in the order of mind-independent being, then the relation in question could not be said to belong to the *category* of relation, even though it was indeed a relation. While relations as relations, they realized, could (unlike substances as substances – subjectivities as subjectivities, let us more generally say) be either mind-dependent or mind-independent, *only* mind-independent relations (exactly as with subjectivities generally) could be placed properly with the scheme of Aristotle’s categories, because it was the intention and purpose of the categories to identify only that sort of being.

Aristotle’s achievement in this area is considerable. He has managed to stake out the realm of what the Latins will term *ens reale* in the whole of its scope. This demarcation will provide nothing less than a survey of the realm proper to the central development of science even in the early modern sense, as Peirce will point out.<sup>15</sup> We can summarize the achievement in the following diagram:

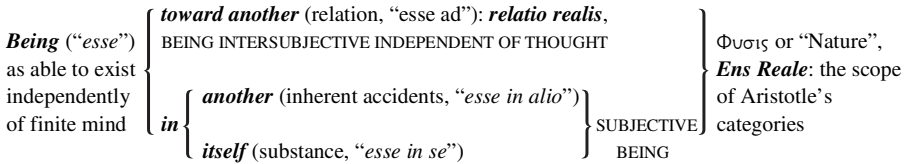
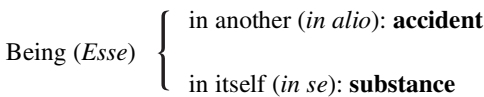


Diagram 2. After Aristotle (†322BC): the Notion of Categorial Being or ‘Ens Reale’

If we put this in terms of the traditional presentation of Aristotle’s scheme presented in Illustration 1 above:



we can now see straightaway how this traditional presentation is defective: it conceals completely the distinctiveness of relation among the accidents. For while relation is like all the other accidents in requiring an *esse in alio* (a modification of subjectivity), it is unlike all the other accidents in not *consisting in* that modification but only *resting upon* or *provenating from* that subjective

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14. Although one might be able to read in this way Poinso 1632: Q. 17, Art. 5, “Whether relation is formally terminated at something absolute or at something relative”. This text is not in the 1985 published edition of his *Tractatus*, but it is included in the 1992 Intelix electronic edition as Σ21 of the materials new with the electronic text.

15. Cf. Peirce c.1898.



modification as from a foundation or basis in subjectivity. The relation itself, so founded, is not something inherent (*inhaerens*) but something respecting (*respiciens*), something over and above the subjectivity upon which it depends for its being and which is moreover (in the strict case of categorial relation, relation as a mode of *ens reale*) *intersubjective* (which is not always the case, as we will see, though suprasubjectivity is always the case).

Recalling our inversion above of the (over)simple traditional diagram of substance vs. accident, in order to manifest the subjective order of dependency of accident upon substance (with the further dependency of substance upon environment as presupposed but falling outside the consideration of intrinsic unification – “*unum per se*” – which is the focal consideration in the question of substance), we can now add a division which overcomes the over-simple traditional picture while still keeping to no more than the essential rudiments of what the division of categories intends to express, namely, the irreducible ways in which, within experience, we encounter being as able to exist apart from the experience without being changed:

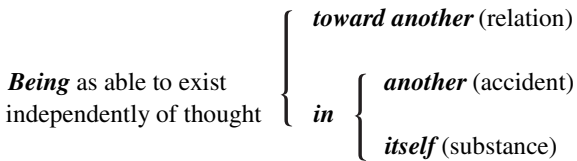


Illustration 3. The Traditional Presentation Remedied

Or, in the economical language of the Latins:

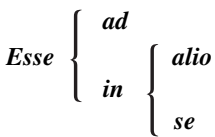


Illustration 4. Latin Version of Remedial Presentation

Which, for our purposes, could easily and accurately be rendered:

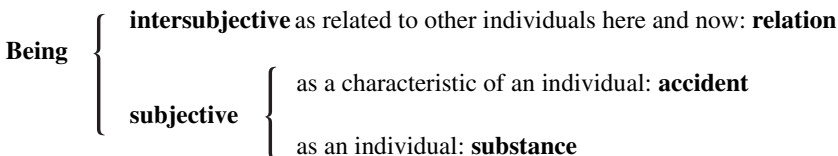


Illustration 5. English Version of Remedied Scheme

Relation is an accident, of course – that is to say, it is not a substance, not a being able to exist as an individual in its own right. But it is not an accident which *belongs as such* to the subjectivity of the substance, and that is the point that is missed not only in the traditional way of presenting the Aristotelian scheme, but also in the understanding of those who have presented the scheme in the traditional way. Traditionally, focal discussion of the scheme of Aristotle’s categories emphasizes only that accidents are modifications of substance and as such are dependent upon substance, a proposition which applies to all accidents equally, yes, but tells us nothing whatever that is distinctive of relation vis-à-vis the other accidents – notably,<sup>16</sup> that the proposition in question, while *true* of all accidents, yet applies only *indirectly* to relation, through the being of the fundament of the relation rather than through the being proper to the relation as such, while it applies *directly* to all the accidents other than relation. Relations depend upon a fundament, and this fundament is a modification of subjectivity, and hence so too is the relation consequent upon the fundament. But the fundament is a modification directly: the subjectivity of the individual is directly modified by the fundament as itself subjective. The consequent relation, by contrast, is not itself subjective but intersubjective, and so modifies the subject not directly but indirectly through its fundament.

Thus the point that Aristotle struggled so hard to establish in his texts, the irreducibility of relation to the subjectivity of *both* substance *and* the inherent accidents, tends to remain hidden in the categories traditionally discussed as a dichotomous division of being into “substance” and “accidents”. It is not the dichotomy of the division that is the problem, but the location of the base of the dichotomy on the contrast between “in se” and “in alio”. This is the cause of the misdirection in the traditional discussions. If we shift the location of the base rather to the contrast between “in” and “toward”, the picture at once opens up, and we see in the foreground the point and ground of Aristotle’s struggle to introduce into the understanding of *ens reale* an aspect of being which is not substance and yet is not materially sensible.

Whatever exists only dependently upon substance is, in that sense, an “accident” in Aristotle’s sense, including relation, yes. But this way of speaking conceals not only the proper positive uniqueness of relation *within* the order of *ens reale*, as we have seen. This way of speaking *also*, and perhaps more crucially, further conceals completely the fact that relation is the only form or mode of *ens reale* that is not in its positive structure realizable actually *only* in the order of *ens reale*. This further point, no doubt as a consequence of the misplaced substance/accident dichotomy in explanation of the categories, no

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16. See Poincot 1632: Second Preamble, Article 2, 89/5–20, esp. 13–17.

one or almost no one in the Latin tradition grasped as anything more than an anomaly.<sup>17</sup> The first to harbour suspicions about the semiotic import of relation's being – its implications for the objectivity of theoretical formulations, for example, or for the socially constructed aspects of reality experienced – was John Poinsoot, and with him the insight dawned too late to be exploited and properly developed, for the Latin Age was already over and the Modern Age dawning, with the interest in *ens reale* not abandoned but given over to experimental means and mathematical formulations within science, while philosophy abandoned the way of signs entirely in favor of a misbegotten idea of ideas as self-representations rather signs (other-representations) that led to the modern distinction between “epistemology” and “ontology” where experience is reduced to an aspect of psychological subjectivity instead of being seen as constituting from the first the correlation of Umwelt with Innenwelt grounded in sensations as manifestative simultaneously of the subjectivity of the physical environment as containing and impacting upon the subjectivity of the animal in giving rise to objective being.

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17. The first trace of it that I know of is found in par. 9 of the 1507 *Commentary* Cajetan makes upon the 1266 *Summa theologiae prima pars*, q. 28, art. 1: 507 of Thomas Aquinas. “A rose formed by thought is not a rose,” he says cryptically, “but a relation formed by the mind is a true relation.” Then, as if on the idea that what is cryptically begun should conclude obscurely, he adds: “Nec distinctio rosae in esse naturae et esse rationis, est distinctio diversarum quidditatum, quarum una sit ens reale, et altera sit ens rationis, ut in relatione contingere diximus: sed est distinctio unius et eiusdem secundum diversos modos essendi, scilicet simpliciter vel secundum quid” – a conclusion which would best make sense in connection with an observation Aquinas made in another text entirely (c.1254–1256: *In Isent.* dist. 19. q. 5. art. 1. ad 7): “etiam quidditatis esse est quoddam rationis” (i.e., the pattern of relations constituting what any given phenomenon – natural or cultural – is, so far as the understanding grasps that structure, is constructed by the understanding on the pattern of relations. Cf. Deely 1994a: 299.).

That the insight in Cajetan's formulation left us more with an awareness of an anomaly in being than with a guiding insight into the structure of being becomes clear from the reception that Cajetan's comment received among the later Latins, reported in detail by Poinsoot (1632: *Tractatus de Signis*, Second Preamble, Article 2, 93/17–96/36), beginning with the concession that “Cajetan's response to this difficulty in his Commentary on the passage in question serves only to increase the difficulty.” Thus Poinsoot stands out from his Latin forebears (*ibid.*) Book I, Questions 1 and 3) by seeing in the positive uniqueness of relation as a mode of being the reason for the possibility of the being of signs as triadic relations and of the peculiar action consequent upon that being, namely, semiosis.

For those still wishing at this late hour to insist on the point that the division of the categories must be presented as first of all a division between substance and accident, then, we might offer the following as our own “sop to Cerberus” presentation of the traditional version:<sup>18</sup>

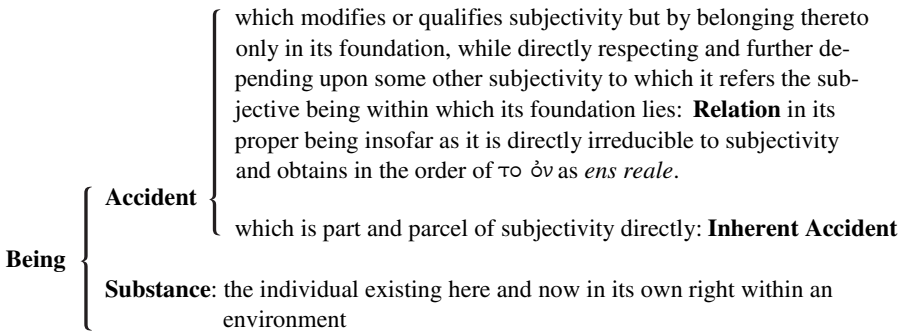


Illustration 6. A ‘Sop to Cerberus’ for Traditionalists

This way of presenting the matter is certainly accurate, and would have its advantages even if it were only a question of understanding the Latin idea of being knowable according to the ways it is capable of existing independently of human thought (*ens reale*), this and no more. But there is more, considerably more, and this “more” in question is crucial to the understanding of human experience as a whole sustenative of objective being, even though to investigate it carries us well beyond the purview and purpose of Aristotle’s categories which have, within human experience as a whole, a much more definite and limited, even if indispensable, focus.

For relation in the order of *ens reale* is only the root of the solution to the problem of objectivity, not the whole solution itself by any means. For objectivity is a branch on the tree of relations, a branch which grows out of but grows beyond

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18. Cerberus is the fierce mythical guard dog at the river Styx who devours mortals seeking to enter or spirits seeking to leave. A sop in Old English was a piece of bread soaked in gravy or sop. Among the ancients, both Greek and Roman, the dead were buried with a coin for Charon to ferry their soul across the Styx and a sop to distract Cerberus from attacking before they could enter Charon’s vessel. The custom later took on the general meaning of giving a bribe or some distraction to quiet a troublesome customer. Peirce uses the expression (1908) to indicate that he often has to discuss the action of signs in terms of persons, even though in fact semiosis involves other animals as well as humans – and indeed, according to Peirce, occurs throughout the whole of nature. See the discussion in Nöth 2001; also Sebeok biography at <<http://www.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc/sebeok.html>>.

the order of being as it is able to exist apart from awareness and also human thought, beyond *ens reale*; and for understanding this branch intersubjectivity is presupposed but not enough. For objects are only *sometimes* but not always subjective as well as objective and intersubjective, and objectivity as such does *not always* even admit of an intersubjective lining and infrastructure, so to speak, let alone a subjective one. To understand objectivity we need to understand well and rightly relation, but not only relation insofar as it is tied to the order of *ens reale* (which is the case with all being categorial in Aristotle's sense). And – mark this point well – all finite being besides or excepting relation is categorial in Aristotle's sense.

That is precisely why modernity in its scientific development was able to build, as Peirce so well noted, upon Aristotle's scheme, even though modernity in its philosophical development reduced objectivity to its subjective ground (even in Kant, who, though he restored relations to concepts, yet did so in such a manner as to preclude their termini from containing the very subjectivity of the other upon which Aristotle's idea of categorial relation – the reality, that is to say, of the intersubjective as such, as part of *ens reale* – depended as its terminus and anchor as well as its fundament and source). Objectivity, we will see, is not as much an aspect of subjectivity as it is as aspect of suprasubjectivity, and this is precisely why, in principle, objectivity is always open to intersubjective realization, and often achieves such realization in political life as well as within the “community of inquirers” required for the development of science, progress in the arts or philosophy, of even the study of literature.

So it appears already that the essence of substance with its inherent accidents (together with their essences) is *subjectivity*, while the essence of relation as an accident is *suprasubjectivity*; although the essence of relation as falling under a category in Aristotle's sense is rather suprasubjectivity *actually realized in a particular fashion or way*, namely, as *intersubjectivity*. As categories of subjectivity, Aristotle's categories include all that can subjectively be. But as including only intersubjectivity among relations, Aristotle's categories do not include all that can be suprasubjectively. How this is important will eventually appear.

For the moment, let us note this. *Subjectivity* is the fundamental meaning of τὸ ὄν as what exists independently of human thought, belief, feeling or desire, but includes also intersubjectivity. In modern philosophy a “subject” is not what exists independently of finite mind. To the contrary, it means especially the finite mind,<sup>19</sup> “the conscious mind; the ego, esp. as opposed to anything external to mind”; the *res cogitans*. You begin to see why the moderns have proven so far incapable of understanding objectivity, of using the word “objective” in a way

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19. Jewell and Abate 2001: p. 1693.

that is not shot through with paralogisms. The physical world as such, including our embodied selves and psychological conditions and states, is what constitutes the actual universe of subjectivity. In this universe there are intersubjectivities as well, but they are ethereal and constantly changing, as we have seen, unable to be accessed except indirectly, through and by the subjectivities that support and sustain those intersubjective relations insofar as they are sustained – such as the intersubjective reality of the room as arranged. The intersubjectivities as such cannot be seen or touched or heard, but only understood, sometimes felt cathectically. Everything that can be seen with the eye or touched with the hand or heard by the ear involves, in Aristotle’s terms, a subjective reality, a physical thing, a “material substance” or combination of such substances.

Subjectivity and intersubjectivity together, then, constitute what we may call, for want of a better term, “hardcore reality”, the kind of reality that obtains whether any human being knows it or not, likes it or not, believes it or not. Hardcore reality *can become* an object of human knowledge or belief, indeed; but that circumstance of becoming is not what makes it *hardcore*. That circumstance is only what makes it *objective*. And there is no guarantee that what is “objective” in the sense of known or believed in is necessarily “real” in the hardcore sense at all. What difference did it make to the sun that all the wise and wisest men of ancient, medieval, and early modern times not only *believed* but “knew” – and had the word of God on it – that the sun revolved around the earth? None whatever.

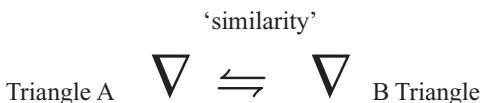
The revolution of the sun about the earth, in physical fact, we now know was not only never the case, but the laws of mass and gravity have turned out to be such that it never could have been the case, was physically impossible to be the case all along – that is to say, over all those centuries of human wisdom, construed divine revelation, and confident belief to the contrary. The revolution in question, nonetheless, though not a hardcore reality, was nonetheless a reality. It got Galileo condemned and imprisoned, then placed under house arrest for life. No small thing! The revolution of the sun around the earth prevented Galileo in his last years from even going to town for medical care, such was its sufficient reality. It was a purely objective reality, while the revolution of the earth about the sun, a heretical belief now accepted everywhere, at least as widely as was accepted the opposite view in Galileo’s day, involves both subjective and intersubjective realities objectified, and so is not a purely objective reality, but rather an objective reality with substance, an objective reality within which subjectivity itself and something of intersubjectivity is elevated to the level of object, objective being (subjectivity and intersubjectivity as such objectified). The question is what does this mean, and how is it possible that what exists subjectively should *also* exist objectively, publicly, and in fact? The question is what is objective existence,

and how is it possible for what exists objectively to be relatively indifferent to what is real in the sense of what pertains to Aristotle's categories – namely, subjectivities and the intersubjectivities provenating from and dependent upon those subjectivities, hardcore realities, not socially constructed ones?

These are the questions before us. But we must not get too far ahead of ourselves. If we are fully to grasp what is at stake here along the way of signs, we must proceed so far as possible step by step, even “slow by slow”, if necessary; for we have to accomplish nothing less than to overcome the inertia of mainstream philosophy which has embedded itself in “common usage” and set the whole of modern intellectual culture along a ‘way of ideas’ which reversed the proper meaning of subjectivity and restricted it to human psychology, making objectivity as involving intersubjectivity and suprasubjectivity incomprehensible, chimerical.

So, while we are still at the stage of Aristotle's demarcation of reality as hardcore (the whole point of his particular notion and scheme of categories), we must take further note of yet another crucial detail – crucial for semiotics and the account of objectivity, that is – which has been omitted from every discussion of Aristotle's category of relation with which I am acquainted, the detail which goes to the root of the semiotic resolution of the problem of objectivity, as will appear.

It is easy enough to see that for triangle A really to be similar to triangle B, both triangles must exist.



*Illustration 7.* Similarity ‘between’ Two Things

If either A or B is destroyed, the relation between them is destroyed. Yet consider the subjective characteristic of B whereby it is “similar” to A, namely, its triangular shape. This shape is part of the subjectivity of B: it needs neither A nor the shape of A in order to be what it is; it needs only the existence of B. When A exists, however, B's shape does something it does not do when A does not exist, to wit, it *terminates* a relation of similarity to A founded on A's shape, and it *founds* a relation of similarity to A founded on B's shape. *Thus, for the foundation and the terminus of a relation, even when the relation is a categorial relation, and even though the foundation and the terminus alike have a subjective dimension or being which is independent of the being of the relation as intersubjective, precisely as foundation and terminus, it is not the subjective being of the inherent accidents that is decisive but the being of the*

*relation itself*. Otherwise the being of the triangular shape as from one side foundation and from the other side as terminus could not cease when the relation ceases.

In short, the *being of terminus* of a relation and the *being of foundation* of a relation *are alike creatures of the relation itself* in its suprasubjective character, even when the relation itself is an intersubjective reality (a categorial relation) and as such dependent upon the inherent, subjective reality of *both* fundament and terminus as modifications of substance.

I set that point off as a paragraph of its own in the hope that it will receive from the reader the full consideration and bearing in mind that it requires for the whole of this discussion. When I first realized this point, obscurely, in 1975, I frankly did not know what to make of it. I was so astonished as to pass over it mainly by silence. In the intervening years, the point at first haunted me, then gradually began to assume its true import, which I finally realized to be central for the understanding of objectivity within semiosis.

The being of every relation as relation is to be something suprasubjective, and the being of the terminus of the relation as well as of the foundation of the relation participate in and depend upon this suprasubjective being of relation not in order to be as subjective characteristics or “accidents” but in order to be subjective accidents which *also* here and now found or terminate a relation. Thus a relation of similarity may be founded and dependent upon shape, or upon quantity, etc., but the relation itself adds a modality to the shape or the quantity as well. The terminus as shape may have a subjective being apart from the relation, but the terminus as terminus is a creature of the relation itself and partakes of the being of relation, albeit as terminating that being, as *finitizing* the relation, we might say, by giving it its terminus; and so also for the foundation as founding.

How this is the root of any resolution to the problem of objectivity is now the task of our remaining chapters.



## Chapter 3

### Objectivity as a Branch on the Tree of Relations

While our knowledge and experience begin in sensation and sensations are always of bodies (“material substances”, in Aristotle’s sense), yet not everything we know and experience is of a bodily nature. Indeed, much of what we know and experience does not reduce to nature at all, but exists only in society and culture. So we encounter again the ancient problem of  $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$ , the famous “two spheres” also of Vico and modern philosophy, where, from within the latter (according to the moderns, the philosophers, not the scientists, for the most part), we vainly try to gain access through understanding to the former as well.

From the beginning it was not so. The early humans, we may be sure, had a great deal of  $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and only a small part of  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$ . But that small part would grow, and our first ancestors would no doubt be astonished to find an epoch, after Descartes, in which  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$  had not merely overtaken  $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in size and importance for everyday life, but veritably swallowed up and eclipsed  $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in the noxious modern idea of the “thing-in-itself”, the subjectively existing *entia realia* of the environment and physical universe at large, as *unknowable* beyond its “thatness”.

That “being must be said in many ways” was the central insight of Aristotle. Being is not *one*, but *many*. True, Aristotle concentrated on the ones comprising the many, as we have seen; but of the many he never lost sight, in particular of those tenuous, ever-changing relations that unite this one to that one and the other one over the course of unending generations and corruptions (as Aristotle termed the initiations and terminations of substances within nature).

The Arab philosophers, in that brief interval of Islam’s glory as a civilization before its religious leadership swallowed up the right to think in the face of that being “which must be said in many ways” and condemned philosophy in favor of a thought exclusively servile to what was accepted by them as the words received through the “revelation of Allah” (not so different from, though more sweepingly pernicious than, the judges of Galileo who had the very word of God to warrant their view), seem to have been the first thematically to grasp the uniqueness of relation vis-à-vis the remainder of being within the categories, to wit, in being able actually to exist in what is proper to it also *outside* the categorial realm, outside the order of  $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$  as *ens reale*. Avicenna (980–1037) it was who, through his Latin translators, introduced to the Latin Age the notion of a relation existing as such but wholly dependent upon human thought, a be-

ing not subjective at all but “non formatur nisi in intellectu”, a being formally recognized for what it is and constituted in what it is only by human understanding, what the Latins came to call *ens rationis*, and to which Aquinas assigned the experiential name *non ens*, “non-being”, objectively experienced as part of the public environment yet lacking in principle any subjectivity proper to itself. It was the most important step after Augustine, perhaps, in the initial work of clearing and opening up the Way of Signs.

Nominalism (and conceptualism, which differs from nominalism not a whit) would soon enough seize upon Avicenna’s insight in order to claim that relations exist *only* in and as a consequence of thought. But in the so-called ‘high middle ages’, these thinkers could not overcome the authentic interpretation of Aristotle as affirming relation in the order of being as independent of thought. Still, even in the high middle ages, even in the work of the great Aquinas, the semiotic import of relations as indifferent to the distinction between the orders of mind-dependent and mind-independent being remained elusive. At the same time, great advances were made by Aquinas in the direction in fact, if not in express and conscious intention, of a more mature semiotic consciousness.

Aquinas distinguished, among the “many ways” in which being must be said, several points not explicit in Aristotle, and *ens rationis* was only one of them. An even more fundamental one of the many ways in which being must be said was “being as first known”, *ens primum cognitum*, another idea Aquinas got from Avicenna (980–1037) even more than from Averroes (1126–1198), but one which he set in the full context of his own philosophical doctrine of “formal objects”, or ways to distinguish one power or ability from another in the activity of organisms. Thus, we know that the sense of seeing differs from the sense of hearing by reason of the fact that there is one thing which each and only each attains, and by reason of which each attains whatever else it attains in an overlapping objectivity (the “common” or shared sensible characteristics of things, such as shape, position, etc. which become objective through several channels of sense and not just one). Seeing has for its formal object differentiated light (or ‘color’), and, by reason of seeing color, sees besides movements and distances and many other things; but without the differentiation of light (as in total darkness), the eye sees nothing. Hearing has for its formal object sound waves within a certain range (different according to organisms endowed with hearing, of course), and, by reason of hearing sound, hears besides movements and proximities and symphonies, and the like; but without sound (as in total stillness), the ear hears nothing.

Applying this doctrine to human understanding in its difference from the powers of sense perception, “*phantasiari*” generically considered,<sup>1</sup> Aquinas asked (a question lost on Hume,<sup>2</sup> as on the moderns generally before and after Darwin) by what means or on what basis do we consider that the human understanding, *intellectus* or *ratio*, is a power distinct from and superordinate to the powers (memory, imagination, and evaluation, to wit) enabling *phantasiari*, which is the ability to cognize objects otherwise than as they are given in sensation or encountered in the physical environment – and even without subjective counterpart in the surroundings here and now (as when a dog misses its master, or a human person waits the arrival of a lover)? His answer to the question (an anticipation, we may say in hindsight, of the distinction between Umwelt as such and Umwelt as Lebenswelt) merits consideration even today. Among the many ways in which being must be said, Aquinas noted, the first way does not yet recognize, but has the potential of recognizing (and it is this potential that distinguishes *intellectus* as a *potentia* or ‘power’ from the whole of *phantasiari*), the difference between that which is in the environment objectively but also quite apart from sense perception (*ens reale*), and that which is in the environment objectively but not otherwise (*ens rationis*), yet without which the animal could not find its way either to locate prey or to return safely from venturing forth!

Thus *ens primum cognitum* adds to the objects of animal interest the further relation of these objects not only to the animal as desirable, undesirable, or indifferent, but to themselves as having or not having a being independent of the perceiving, the *phantasiari*. And the interactions of sense experience soon force on the human animal a recognition of this difference, wherein, for the first time, the possibility arises of the distinction between *objects*, which have a being in perception but not necessarily also independently of the perception, and *things*, which are what they are whether perceived or not. Animals know objects, but only in relation to their interests and needs; human animals know within objects also things as having a being indifferent to their needs as animals human or not. Thus, when *phantasiari* forms a mind-dependent being within and on the basis of its experience in sensation of mind-independent being, that object can either represent itself as subjectively existing or as intersubjectively

1. On “*phantasiari*” as the generic term for perception, see the 1985 critical edition of Poinset 1632: note 2, pp. 240–241, based on Poinset 1635: q. 8, art. 2 (Reiser ed., III. 252b20–253a41): “*phantasiari et sentire distinguuntur tamquam duo genera cognoscendi, et definitur unum, ut condistinguitur ab altero. Et sicut sentire in communi dici debet, quod est motus factus a sensibili secundum se, ita phantasiari in communi definitur, quod est motus factus non a sensibili, sed a sensu, id est ab obiecto iam cognito.*”
2. See Deely 2001: 343–45, 347–48 text and note 218, and 535–536.

existing. But only human animals can recognize the difference between these two modes of self-representation, and so only human animals can *know that there are* as well as *form and make use of* mind-dependent beings, *entia rationis*. Mind-dependent beings modeled on the experience of subjectivity Aquinas called “negations”, because they ‘are not’ what the pattern after which they are modeled is, namely, existing subjectively. Mind-dependent beings modeled on the experience of intersubjectivity Aquinas called “relations”, because they ‘are’ what the pattern after which they are modeled is, namely, a ‘being between’ subjectivities indifferently real or fictive. We will return to the discussion of this point in more detail later on, but it might help here to summarize in advance that further discussion in the form of a diagram (page opposite).

We can say, then, that, among the Latins, after Boethius and Avicenna at least, the distinction within being between what exists independently of human thought, or *ens reale*, and what exists only dependently upon human thought, or *ens rationis*, was to become a familiar and settled point of doctrine, even if not one thought through in principle in its import for the understanding of objectivity in its distinctive and proper being, let alone in its dependence from the first on the action of signs. In general, the medievals were content to restrict thematic consideration of *ens rationis* to the subject matter of logic as providing the means to draw out necessary implications of and relations between things *as they are thought to be*, that is to say, *as they exist objectively*, and even this mainly for the purpose of showing how and when the way things are “thought to be” is at variance with “the way things are”. The notion of objectivity considered for its own sake, that is to say, how it is possible for *things* to be thought in the first place, let alone how they can be thought to be other than they are (the problem of thing and object, as Maritain would eventually put it<sup>3</sup>), was not at the center of their interest or attention. They were concerned only to get right “the way things are”, and things are what they are independently of human thought, belief, and feeling, as we have said, objectivities at variance with this be damned.

Everyone knew that the way we think things are can be and often is at variance with the way things are. But why this can be so as a matter of principle, as it were, seems little to have occurred to them in their overwhelming confidence that we can indeed know “the way things are”, that we can indeed “get it right” sometimes. Their very notion of truth betrayed this confidence, and they got it from Aristotle: the truth arises when the way things are thought to be corresponds with the way things are. Heidegger’s question as posed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup> seems not to have occurred to the medievals: Yes, truth may consist

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3. In his early work, *Les Dégres du savoir* (Maritain 1932; see esp. the 1959 ed.).

4. Heidegger 1943.

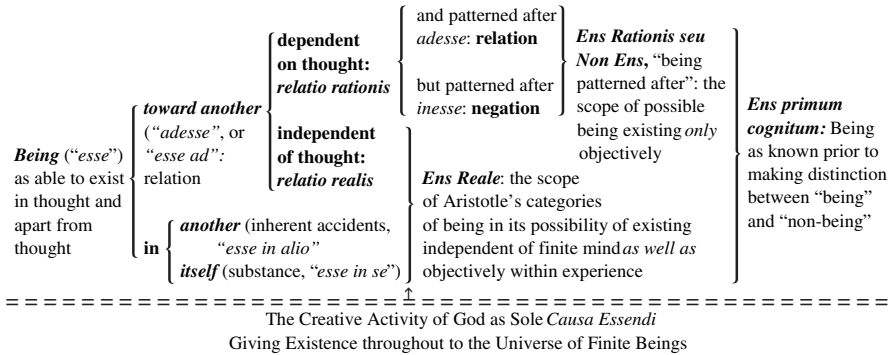


Diagram 3. Relation after AQUINAS (†1274): How Categorial Being Provides through Relation the Basis for There Being Mind-Dependent Being

in a correspondence between thought and things; but what is the basis for the prior possibility of correspondence? For precisely as existing in thought, things are, after all, aspects of the subjectivity of the knower. Existing in themselves, things, at least, if not all objects, are precisely not within the knower, are not part of the knower’s subjectivity at all, are precisely subjectivities in their own right and belong to the surrounding environment upon which the knower depends both in being and in knowing.

A further anomaly. The Latins paid almost no attention to the fact that relations as *entia rationis* are hardly unique to the human animal, but are rather part of the cognitive life of *all* animals that move around in their environment: for in order to survive an animal has to be able to locate food and not lose track of where it can safely rest (its “home”, if you like); and the relations that turn a region of physical space and time into a familiar place are not simply relations in the categorial sense, relations that precede and remain independent of the awareness of the animals finding their way in that space-time region in order to eat and to survive to eat another day. We human animals have devised our co-ordinate system of North, South, East and West; the other animals have no such explicit system, but when North is where rest and safety lie they know the direction as well and often better than their human brethren.

It is a semiotic point of the first importance that things fully become signs (vehicles of signification) within the experience of animals,<sup>5</sup> a whole to which the human being is but a part; and this experience whereby the action of signs transforms environment into an objective world or *Umwelt* not only presupposes awareness on the side of the animals as subjective entities, it also supposes a

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5. See Bankov’s remark cited in the next chapter, note 9, p. 64.

whole network or web of relationships linking animal and environment not merely in the order of *ens reale* (even though as incorporating something of that order, such as the aspects of the physical surroundings which can become food and yet other aspects which must be avoided as menacing dangers to the subjective survival of the animal aware of these surroundings), but both together as parts within a larger whole which is not simply “there”, like rocks on the moon, but is there as *a world meaningful to the animal*, a surroundings structured objectively in terms of what is to be sought (+), what is to be avoided (-), and what seems safe to ignore (0) – a world of objects, in short, not wholly reducible to things existing apart from awareness.

In short, the objective world – wherein the human animal as logician consciously draws out the consequences of “the way things are thought to be” by explicitly forming mind-dependent relations among *thought* things (things thought to be, mayhap mistakenly, let alone as thought to be this or that) in order to determine in particular cases which relations “thought to be” are in fact categorial as well as objective – is only a subset of a prior, more fundamental, “objective world” within which all the animals in an unconscious or quasi-conscious way form cognition-dependent relations, relations without which things could not be located as food, avoided as dangers, or recognized (rightly or wrongly, for mistakes are always possible in the realm of what is objective) as harmless. This basic idea of the Umwelt or “objective world” did not receive a clear and thematic formulation before the work of Jakob von Uexküll in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was not perceived as central to semiotic prior to the seminal work of Thomas A. Sebeok in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nonetheless, the crucial point that relations are the only positive form of *ens reale* that can come to exist also in the order of *ens rationis* and that such relations, *relationes rationis* or mind-dependent relations, are essential for structuring experience over and above whatever experience includes of *entia realia* or environmentally existing subjectivities and intersubjectivities, was something explicitly recognized as foundational to the doctrine of signs in Poinot’s landmark *Tractatus de Signis* of 1632.<sup>6</sup> In that work, also for the first time, the being of sign relations as triadic was systematically established as the ontological thread unifying semiotic inquiries in whatever sphere by providing its common subject

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6. See Poinot 1632: First Preamble, Article 3; and Book I, Question 6. But whereas his teachers were still inclined to identify signs with representamens as founding triadic relations differently in the case of natural signs and conventional signs, Poinot decisively showed that it was rather the very triadic relations themselves in their indifference to being natural or conventional within objectivity that constituted the sign strictly speaking. See the entry SIGN in the Index to Deely 2001: 993–994.

matter – the triadic character of signs being the very point that Peirce himself seems to have gotten from a reading of Poinsett's teachers, the Conimbricenses.<sup>7</sup>

Human understanding (*ratio* or *intellectus*, in the parlance of the Latins) is not at all unique in that it forms relations that are not found in nature, in that it adds to things nascently objectified in sensation further relations which organize those sensations and transform the environment sensorially revealed into a veritable world of objects perceived and organized according to the interaction categories of plus, minus, and zero, as we have seen (categories themselves determined by the biological heritage of each animal, including the human animal, according to its species-specific evolution). No. Human awareness and understanding is unique only in that it is able to recognize relations so formed *as* so formed and, more generally, to recognize relations as such in their irreducibility to and distinctness from subjective being, from the individual substances or material individuals that make up the physical environment in its particulars.

For just this reason, Poinsett will point out, the formations of relations *based solely on other relations* occurs exclusively in the order of *ens rationis*. In the order of *ens reale*, there are only relations founded on the accidents or aspects of the subjectivity of things existing substantially. But in mind-dependent being, there is no limit in principle to the forming of relations based on relations based on yet other relations, which is why semiosis as anthroposemiosis opens to infinity, and why language (linguistic communication) as a species-specifically human form of communication distinct from its outward modalities as spoken, gestured, or written, has its being in an invisible interface between social interaction and cultural construction inaccessible to all animals without language, regardless of all their other means and modalities of communicating. Thus, semiosis is infinite for the same reason that linguistic communication is possible:<sup>8</sup> because once an animal capable of distinguishing relations as such from related things enters the process of evolution, semiotics – the awareness that there are signs distinct from the sensory or psychological particularities that we call “signs” loosely speaking and that all animals employ in the process of living – as the development of that awareness is only a question of time. That is why the human animal is best understood in the postmodern context as, precisely, the “semiotic animal”, the only such animal on the face of the earth (assuming that extraterrestrial semiotic animals either do not exist or at least are not now visiting the planet earth!).

All the animals make use of signs, Maritain noted, but only the human animals become aware that there are signs, especially in the being proper to them, as we shall see, which cannot be directly sensed or perceived at all save indi-

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7. See Beuchot and Deely 1995.

8. See Deely 1980, and 1982: Part II.

rectly in objects related (and incorporating, normally, aspects of subjectivity and intersubjectivity from the order of *ens reale*).

To be sure, then, the original designation, *ens rationis*, was something of an anthropomorphism, an excessive identification as “distinctively human” of a phenomenon that is, rather, much more general and, indeed, distinctive of animal life in general, perhaps *tout court*. For “mind-dependent beings” are everywhere in animal life: it is not as independent of the animal that a given aspect of its surroundings is suitable for eating (indeed, it is often the case that a physical substance deadly or sickening to one animal is nourishing to another), safe to inhabit, or safe to ignore. It is precisely *in relation to the animal* that this organization of the surroundings as +, −, and 0 occurs, and occurs on the basis of awareness. Cajetan had already well recognized that divisions among objects as objects are not necessarily or even normally the same as divisions among things as things, yet he remained far from having come to terms with the fact that the difference in these two orders of division or organization is a consequence of semiosis, the action of signs that underlies the very existence of objects and the recognition (by human animals) of things in their distinctive or mind-independent being accessed from within the world of objectivity.

But, even while recognizing the limitations of the term *ens rationis*, this recognition already puts us in a position to say that what exists as an *ens rationis*, at least in this basic case where the *ens rationis* is a *relatio rationis*, as when an organism relates to itself the in itself indifferent physical surrounding as being “familiar” or “unfamiliar”, and takes action accordingly, gives us our first glimpse of purely objective being – *objective*, because it exists in awareness as cognized or known; *purely objective*, because apart from that awareness in which it is given it has no being at all, no subjectivity constituting it as independent of the awareness. An *ens rationis*, in contrast to an *ens reale*, is not a being existing subjectively (or intersubjectively) that comes *also* to exist as cognized or known. No. An *ens rationis* is being that *only* exists as cognized or known, whether as such or as rendering interpreted some object of experience as this or that. And to exist as known is the essence of objective being, regardless of what further status the object has subjectively or intersubjectively (that is to say, regardless of whether it *also* exists in the order of *ens reale* as subjectively and not just relatively terminating the relation of manifestation).

Mind-dependent beings, however, objects of awareness which are without subjective counterpart or substructure, are not commonly thought to consist merely in relations. Dracula, Cerberus, and the Minotaur are examples that come readily to mind, as does Santa Claus and leprechauns, and a host of other fictions, not to mention Hamlet. These are not relations of reason but rather, as it were, ‘substances of reason’, fictional *individuals*, mind-dependent, indeed,



but not mind-dependent *relations*, surely. Not only literature but the history of science and philosophy is filled with the remains of creatures once thought to have been real (*ens reale*), creatures which have occasionally swayed the course of history without ever enjoying the subjective being they would have had to have had to be real actors in the physical environment as such.

The most decisive clarification of this persuasive point, a clarification which robs it of its power to mislead by revealing its subtle sophistry, came from the pen of John Poinsett, basing himself on an insight obscurely but decisively made by Thomas Aquinas on the basis of his understanding, in turn, of how and why Aristotle's basic categorial scheme divides the whole of *ens reale* between subjective and intersubjective being, with the latter existentially dependent upon the former even though formally irreducible to it. This is why all relations in the order of *ens reale*, all relations categorial in Aristotle's sense, are intersubjective: they can only be founded upon and terminated at actual aspects of subjectivity existing here and now. By contrast, mind-dependent relations may or may not be terminated at actual aspects of subjectivity, and can be founded upon intersubjectivity as well as upon subjectivity. As indifferent to the distinction between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, relation in its proper being (its positive structure or 'essence' as 'being-toward') as lending to foundations their character *as* foundations (regardless of whether the given foundation *also* exists as an aspect of subjectivity), and to termini their character *as* termini (regardless of whether the given terminus *also* exists as an aspect of subjectivity), opens the way for awareness to transcend the physical presence of its objects, even as sensation, tied to the categorial order of relations, cannot operate save in the physical presence of its proper stimuli here and now.

Cognition, said Aquinas, repeating and agreeing with Aristotle, begins in sensation, and sensation as a semiotic phenomenon (precisively considered being understood) of its nature is tied root and branch to the order of *ens reale*. A material substance alive and possessed of organs of external sense depends upon the causal action upon it by surrounding bodies to specify just what those sense powers will begin to objectify of the surroundings, so that the very definition and understanding of sensation is based on the necessity of causal interaction here and now of existing subjectivities to give rise to the objective intersubjectivity which constitutes sensation not as an aspect of the subjectivity of the sensing organism but as a relation which, *provenating* from and consequent upon the subjectivity of the sensing organism as actively specified by this stimulus rather than that, *terminates* at the source of the stimulation as an originally and efficaciously acting subjective entity now *also* or *further* existing (and this is crucial) *in its very subjectivity as partially and aspectually objectified or known*, that is to say, become now not merely the terminus of a categorial relation but also (pre-

cisely as terminus) an objective nucleus around which the cognizing organism will spin a further web of relations in order to interpret the environmental aspect of which sensation has made it aware<sup>9</sup> in the context now no longer of sensation alone (which, as we have remarked, is selective only but not interpretive) but rather of sense *perception* wherein alone objects are given fully constituted in terms of attraction, repulsion, and ignoral or indifference. In the terse formula of Aquinas, “sensation is the action of the sensible upon the sense”, *sensatio est actio sensibilis in sensu*.

Now sensations, as we have noted, are not atomic (“this blue here and now”, or “this shape here and now”) but semiotic (“this blue shape here and now moving or stationary in relation to surrounding shapes and colors”, etc., all apprehended or cognized simultaneously as the direct termini of triadic relations). Yet the relations constitutive of sensations are entirely and irreducibly categorical, not mind-dependent.<sup>10</sup>

We confront here a curious conflation of the epistemological and ontological orders which simply repugns the modern separation of them into two orders not merely contrasting but opposed. The relations constitutive of sensation make

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9. Poincot 1632: Book III, Question 2, “Whether There Can Be an Intuitive Cognition, either in the Understanding or in Exterior Sense, of a Thing Physically Absent”: 311/23 ff.: “sensus externi non formant idolum [i.e., species expressas], ut in ipso perficiatur cognitio tamquam in termino intrinseco quia res, quae sentiuntur, extra ipsum sensum sunt in actu ultimo sensibiles, sicut color per lucem fit ultimate visibilis, unde non indiget aliqua specie expressa, ut in illa reddatur obiectum in actu ultimo sensibili formatum. . . . In hoc ergo principio tamquam in radice fundatur impossibilitas cognoscendi rem absentem per sensum externum, ne careat obiecto terminante, supposito, quod intus non format speciem, in qua cognitio terminetur. Quodsi existat in aliquo sui ut in imagine vel effectu, non immediate videbitur, sed ut contentum in imagine, ipsa vero imago est, quae videtur.” – “The reason for the fact that external sense does not form its own final specification is that the things which are sensed are sensible in final act independently of the power of sense, just as color becomes ultimately visible by means of light [as differentiated by the surface off which it is reflected], whence sense does not need any expressed specifier in order that in that specifier the object might be rendered formed as sensible in final act. . . . On this principle, therefore, as in a root, is founded the impossibility of knowing an absent thing through external sense, lest sense should be without a terminating object, supposing that an external sense does not form within itself the specification in which [its own] cognition is terminated. But if the object exists in something produced by the organism itself as in an image or effect, it will not be seen immediately, but as contained in the image, while the image itself is that which is seen.”

10. Similarly, ideas in their subjective reality as psychological states are not *entia rationis* but *entia realia*, making the Latins’ point that *entia rationis* are *never* subjective realities but always *suprasubjective* and, in fact, *purely* objective as such.

the environment nascently cognized or known, and in that sense may be said to be epistemological relations. But the manner in which they are brought about is entirely the result here and now of interactions between actually existing subjects, and in that sense must be said to be ontological relations in the strongest sense possible for that term in the order of relative being, to wit, intersubjective relations or relations in the order of *ens reale*. They are relations in which the surrounding environment begins to be formed into an Umwelt or objective world, but it is not by *being* known that these relations exist (which would have to be the case to qualify them as elements of *ens rationis*) but rather by *making* known. In other words, the relations constitutive of sensory awareness at this initial level are neither epistemological nor ontological in the sense modernity attempted to give these terms; they are nascently both in a sense for which the modern distinction of epistemology from ontology leaves no room. And what relations of sensation make us aware of is the physical environment, not wholly but only partially and aspectually (and depending upon our bodily type and constitution), but nonetheless as manifesting both subjectivity and intersubjectivity as *ens reale* given as such in experience.

Now *ens rationis* arises when an animal organism forms an objective being on the pattern of its experience of *ens reale* although the objective being does not, as formed, actually itself belong to the order of *ens reale*. The examples that Aquinas gives are not exactly colorful (he was much further from being a zoösemiotician than was his principal teacher, Albertus Magnus, who actually studied the variety in nature instead of just talking about it, as was more usual among the Latin scholastics – to their eventual downfall), but serve at least to make the point that here concerns us for understanding objectivity. Something is “to the left of” the pillar: the pillar has no right or left side “in itself”, but only in relation to the animal perceiving. Thus “being to the left of” is an *ens rationis*. An animal is “blind”. Blindness is not the presence of a quality or power but rather the absence of an ability formed on the pattern of our experience of the seeing abilities that some organisms have.

The first example, “being to the left of”, is an *ens rationis* formed on the pattern of our experience of relation as intersubjective being. The second example, “being blind”, is an *ens rationis* formed on the pattern of our experience of subjective beings able to see. The point of the two examples, then, is that they exhaust the ways in which *entia rationis* can be formed: for if *ens rationis* is a being which is objective (known) but not real (not existing as such independently of the awareness in which it is apprehended) formed after the pattern of what we have experienced as real (existing as such, that is to say, in the order of categorial being, τὸ ὄν as *ens reale*), then every *ens rationis* without exception

will have to be formed *either* on the basis of our experience of subjectivity *or* on the basis of our experience of intersubjectivity.

Of course *entia rationis* can be formed by commingling the two, just as subjectivity and intersubjectivity are commingled in the physical environment and in our experience of that environment, and in the case of all animals other than human animals are in fact formed in just that commingled way (which is what precludes the other animals from discovering the difference between signs strictly speaking and sign-vehicles (or ‘signs’ loosely so called, even in everyday speech). But it remains that such “mixed” *entia rationis* can be prescissed and analytically reduced – at least by the semiotic animal – to their aspects based on one or the other – subjective being objectified through experience, or intersubjective being objectified through experience.

If the *ens rationis* consists in a being patterned after subjective being, then it can be fittingly called “a negation”, for, like the negative of a photograph (in the days of predigital photography, at least), it is *not* what its pattern is. Subjective being is what is able to exist either as an individual (substance) or characteristic of an individual (accident). A negation is not a subjective being at all but rather an objective one that is neither able to exist in itself nor as an actual aspect of something that does exist in itself. It consists in *not being* what its pattern *is*. On the other hand, and by contrast, if the *ens rationis* consists in a being patterned after intersubjective being, then both that which is formed objectively only and that intersubjective pattern after which it is formed have the same positive structure of relation as something over and above foundation and terminus related, something irreducible to subjectivity.

In sum, when a negation is formed in and by cognition, then the *ens rationis* does not share the positive essence of its pattern, which is to be a mode of subjectivity; but when a relation is formed in and by cognition, then the *ens rationis* does share the positive essence of its pattern, which is to be a respect or a “being toward”. Thus, cutting through a vast tangle of distinctions whereby the medievals sought to classify the myriad mind-dependent beings with which their own and past history had surrounded them,<sup>11</sup> Aquinas concludes that negation

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11. Compare the discussion in Aquinas with the much later complications of the discussion in Suárez 1597, a discussion which served mainly to further the split of modernity in philosophy as a Way of Ideas from the hard-won efforts of the Latins that culminated in Peirce as the later contemporary of Suárez who had finally secured the threshold to the Way of Signs, taken up again at the end of modern times first by Peirce, then by Sebeok, and by the whole host of semioticians today who, realizing it or not, have established and secured the frontier for developing a post-modern intellectual culture wherein the “realism” of ancient Greek and medieval Latin thought is rendered *aufgehoben*, re-established within a problematic – that of

and relation as just explained exhaustively and exclusively divide the order of *ens rationis* in the full extent of its contrast with the order of *ens reale*.

Now from this point (that negation and relation exhaustively and exclusively divide the possible formations or ways of forming purely objective or mind-dependent beings, *entia rationis*) a further logical consequence can be drawn which is of the first importance for semiotics, and indeed the key to understanding how there can be a social construction of reality over and above, or “on top of” (even while incorporating), our experience of hardcore reality as *ens reale*. Both negation and relation as *ens rationis* consist positively in a “being patterned after”. But to be patterned after is to consist in a relation between pattern and patterned. So we are led to conclude, and I think the conclusion is inescapable, that the whole possibility of there being *ens rationis* at all is determined by the fact that relation in its positive essence or distinctive ontological structure is the only mode of being that is not confined and restricted to existing as such in the order of *ens reale*. There are relations independent of thought and experience, yes, but it is not in that independence that their being consists *as relations*. As relations, their being consists in being irreducible to subjectivity. Whether that irreducibility actually involves intersubjectivity (the case of relation as categorical) or not depends, then, not on the relation itself but on the circumstances under which the relation exists. One and the same cognized relation under one set of circumstances can be intersubjective as well as objective, and under a changed set of circumstances become purely objective. A dinosaur bone in a living dinosaur sustained a real relation to the dinosaur’s body. But when the dinosaur is no more and the bone is found and correctly classified for what it was, the thinking of the scientist has managed to reconstitute in the purely objective order the very same suprasubjective relation which at a former time was intersubjective between the bone and the other parts of the living dinosaur.

The dinosaur existing in thought is here and now a negation – an object without subjective infrastructure or lining here and now. The bone as “of” a dinosaur existing in thought is here and now sustaining a relation – an object without intersubjective infrastructure or lining here and now. But, formerly, under other conditions, the dinosaur had subjective, substantial reality, and its bone sustained categorial relations between the dinosaur’s body and the surrounding environment.

To understand this point requires us to see how objective being *as such* cannot exist *at all* except in and through relations, and as a consequence of

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the sign – which escapes in principle the crude opposition of idealism to realism that defined modernity in its principal philosophical writers and bedeviled the original proposals of semiology respecting the general doctrine of signs.

the irreducibly suprasubjective character of being that relations as such have. This is one of those points decisive for semiotic but which is not found – or at least I have not found it – explicitly stated in previous literature. At most, it is remotely implicit in certain texts of Aquinas, and more proximately in the *Tractatus de Signis* of John Poincaré. But it needs to be brought out of the shadows and thematically developed, which is the project of the present work upon which, hopefully, others will build.

A diagram should help here. The subjectivity of substance is the ultimate ground of being in the finite order, but substance as real individual requires subjective modifications in order to exist, and these modifications in turn give rise to real relations, among which, however, are relations which in and through cognition give rise to objects that exceed or transcend the confines of hardcore reality, *ens reale*, thus:

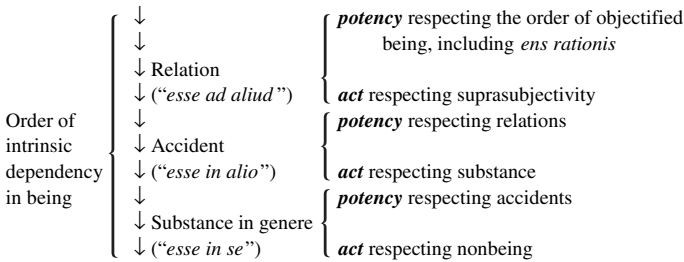


Illustration 8. Intrinsic Dependency of Relation upon Subjectivity as Fundament

Recalling again Heidegger’s question on the basis of the prior possibility of correspondence between the objective and subjective orders,<sup>12</sup> we now have an answer. There can be a correspondence between thought and things precisely because thought, consisting essentially in signs, consists essentially in relations, and relations are indifferent to the distinction and difference between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*. Every relation as a relation lends its own being to that upon which it is founded and that upon which it terminates: but mind-dependent relations do this without regard to whether they have a categorial component or not, whereas mind-independent relations in order to be such necessarily regard in their foundations and termini aspects of subjectivity actually existing. But every object is an object by reason of existing at and as the terminus of a cognitive relation, regardless of whether it *also* or *further* exists subjectively or intersubjectively as well. So every object, in principle (though, in the case of sensation as prescissively considered in its difference from sense-perception, not in fact, and so not necessarily in any case), can exist as apprehended even

12. Page 41 end above, at superscript 4.

when the subjectivity on which it once *also* depended even in its objective being *no longer* exists or is present physically. Since every relation as such is suprasubjective in its mode of being, whatever exists as the terminus of a relation, even if it happens to have a subjective existence as well which would persist in the absence of the particular relation terminating at it, exists as public in principle, for the simple reason that any two things can be related to a common third by a relation over and above all three.

An object of thought may be original with thinker A. Thinker A has his thought which is precisely *his* thought, not someone else's. As *his* thought we are dealing with a quality, a subjective modification of a cognitive organism, just like the color of his skin or the shape of his nose. But thought is a peculiar quality of subjectivity – we will see more of this in later discussion – in not being able to exist *except* by giving rise to a relation terminating at or in an awareness of something other than the knower, be it other subjectively or intersubjectively as well as objectively, or objectively alone. Let us suppose the thought is of an invention no one has made but which is really possible. At that moment the object exists actually only for the individual thinker, and only as an object at that. But as an object it exists at the terminus, not the foundation (it is the thought or idea that exists at the foundation), of a relation as suprasubjective. Hence it remains in principle “outside” or “beyond” the inventor's subjectivity as such, even though he has not realized it in *ens reale* nor even communicated it in discourse to another.

Supposing he now tells his friend of the object he is thinking to make, and explains it fully, an explanation which his friend fully grasps. Now the object still has no subjective existence, but it yet exists as terminating two distinct relations, the one founded on the idea in the inventor's mind, the other founded on the idea induced in the friend's mind by means of a linguistic communication. The object is now intersubjective, even though it still wants for subjective being. Now the inventor actually produces the object in question. Its possibility turned out to be real, not illusory, and now the object which formerly existed only as object exists subjectively as well. It now has physical and subjective being, as well as intersubjective and objective being. It can now continue to exist as an item in the environment (a ‘thing’) even if the inventor and his friend die and everyone else forgets about the object entirely. At that moment of complete forgottenness, it ceases to be an object, after all, but continues to exist as a thing, an *ens reale*, which could under other, future circumstances again become an object of awareness and discourse. This particular *ens reale*, moreover, owes its origin to a social construction as well as to nature.

Let us conclude with a summary of the discussion thus far in the form of a diagram (page following).

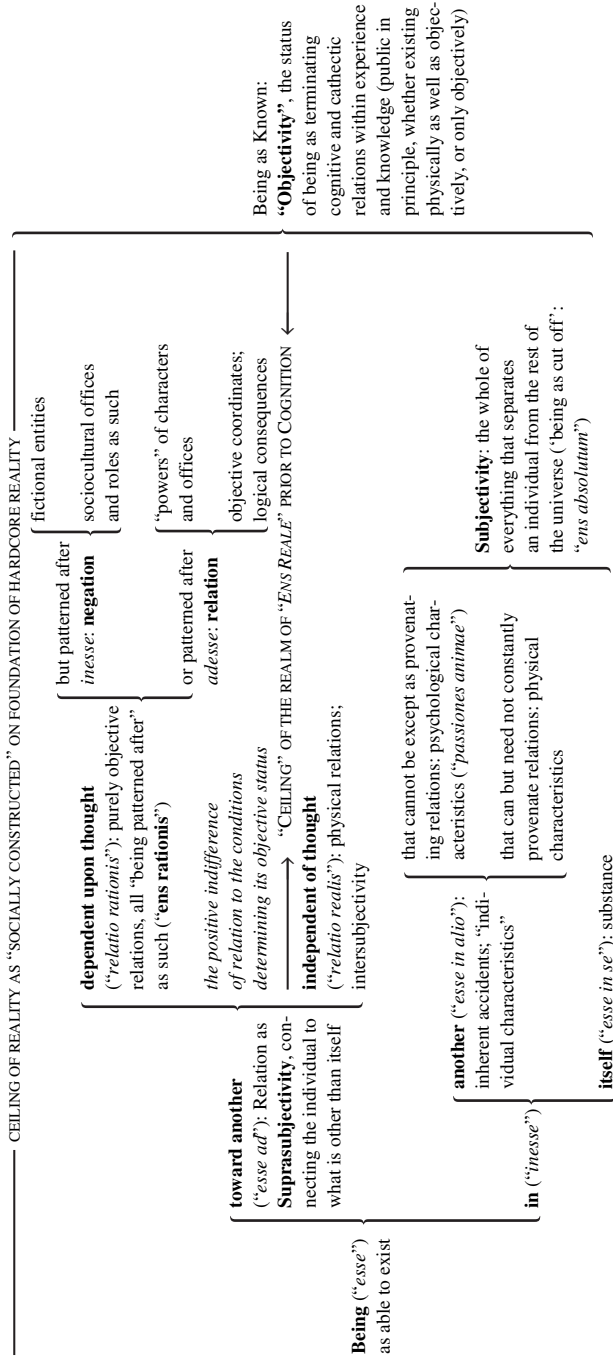


Diagram 4. After POINSON (†1644): Demonstration of Objectivity as Consequent upon Uniqueness of Relation as Mode of Ens Reale



## Chapter 4

# The First Appearance of Objectivity in Its Difference from Things

By the time Thomas Aquinas appeared on the scene and joined in the discussion of relation, Boethius had long since anticipated Grote's confusion over Aristotle's discussion of relation and rendered it moot with his distinction between that which is relative according to its essential being, a pure relation ontologically considered (*relativum secundum esse*), and that which is relative according to what is necessary if the finite mind is to understand its existence here and now, even though *that which* is understood is something other than a pure relation (*relativum secundum dici*). This is a distinction, as Poinset expressly says,<sup>1</sup> between what *is* (the former) and what *is not* (the latter) a relation, but a distinction drawn for the purpose of making unmistakable the fact that the 'things' which are relations are essential to and only aspectually separate from the 'things' in the strong sense (subjectivities, beginning with substance) which are not but cannot but give rise to and support or terminate relations. That is to say, without relations, intersubjectivities in the mind-independent sense, there could not be finite beings; for no finite being can either come to be or continue to be without being a nexus or center at once supporting some and terminating other relationships which do not reduce either to its own subjective being or to the subjective being of the bodies and substances which surround it as comprising its physical environment.

Not only that. Just as no substance can avoid being enmeshed in relations to other subjectivities surrounding it, yet many of these relations which arise from or terminate at its subjective being, linking it to other subjectivities, come and go as circumstances change; for relation as such, keep in mind, has nothing about its positive structure which requires that it exist in the order of *ens reale* or of *ens rationis*, mind-independent or mind-dependent being, exclusively. To be sure,

1. Poinset 1632: *Tractatus de Signis*, Second Preamble, Article 2, 89/21 ff.: "... principale significatum relationis secundum dici non est relatio, sed aliquid aliud, ad quod sequitur relatio. Quando autem principale significatum alicuius est relatio ipsa et non aliquid absolutum, tunc est relatio secundum esse". — "... the principal significate of an expression expressing a relation according to the way a subject must be expressed in discourse is not a relation, but something else, upon which a relation follows. But when the principal significate of any expression is the relation itself, and not anything absolute, then there is a relation according to the way the thing signified has being".

there are some relations which can *only* exist in the order of mind-dependent being, purely objectively, such as logical or grammatical or constitutional relations. But that is not because of what they are as *relations*, but because of what they are as *logical* entities, to wit, relations founded on and terminating at *thought* things (objects), even though they are able to bring to light discrepancies, for example, between what is *thought to be* and what is *experienced to be* in the order of sense-perception, for example, or social interaction.

Considered strictly in their positive being as relations, prescinding then from this or that special type of relation, all relations, even those which are categorial or intersubjective in the physical sense (mind-independent, regardless of whether they are also known to exist and so objective as well), are indifferent to being realized in the order of being as *ens reale* or in the order of cognition, objective being as *ens rationis*, or some commingling and mixture of the two. It is the circumstances surrounding the relation, not the relation itself, which determine to which order or whether to both orders any given relation belongs. Thus, one and the same relation can exist purely intersubjectively, both intersubjectively and objectively, or only objectively, according to circumstances.

But, and this is the point of the Latin distinction between the relative *secundum esse*, the pure relation as such, and the relative *secundum dici*, the subjective thing which cannot be except while supporting or terminating changing relations: *the distinction shows the overlap in objective being between the otherwise distinct orders of ens reale and ens rationis which makes the perceptibility of being (ens ut phantasiatum) and the intelligibility of being (ens ut verum) alike possible in the first place.* In ontological relation, the possibility is established for *ens reale* and *ens rationis* to overlap objectively, as we shall further see, and as may be illustrated in the following diagram:

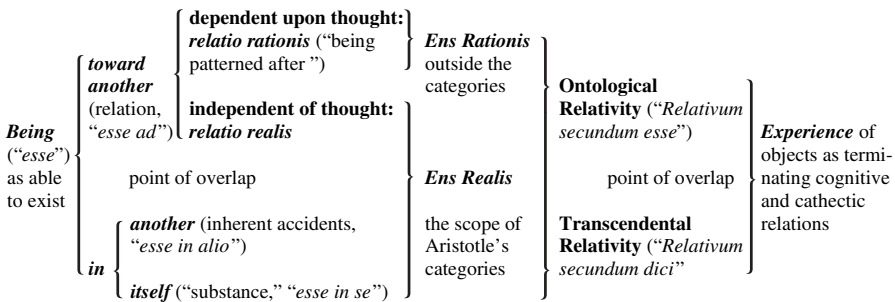


Diagram 5. Aristotle's notion of τὸ ὄν ("ens") as transmitted through Boethius to the Latin Age

When a given individual has once been involved in a relation, that involvement is a part of its history, with the consequence that any full understanding of the subjectivity in question will necessarily have to bring into the account that one-time involvement in that particular relation, however fleeting the involvement may have been. Since, of course, understanding takes place in the objective order, while things as such occur in the subjective and intersubjective order (the order of *ens reale*), to understand things requires that what existed as such subjectively, say, come to exist *also* objectively, and that, within that objective existence of the thing, the intersubjective relations with which the subjective thing was once involved be ontologically reconstituted even if they can no longer obtain in the categorial sense: otherwise, to the extent that such reconstitution does not occur, the objective existence fails to coincide with the thing in its duration as *ens reale*.

So the distinction between relation *secundum esse*, or considered ontologically according to its pure being as relation (suprasubjective always, not necessarily intersubjective, however, unless circumstances permit), and relation *secundum dici*, or considered as necessary for discourse about things to result in an understanding in part at least conformed to their being as it is or was (or will be!) in the order of *ens reale*, is straightforward and actually not that difficult to grasp,<sup>2</sup> and quite more important than the history of philosophy so far would give us to realize (for in that history the distinction has never yet been a part of mainstream understanding, as the development of semiotics requires that it become). The distinction is meant to emphasize and if necessary to inform us that neither subjective nor objective being can exist in fact apart from involvements with relations as suprasubjective. My guess is that failure of this distinction to enter mainstream consideration so far is the same reason why

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2. When Krempel (1952: 354) alleged that “it is impossible to arrive at a satisfactory rendering of these terms”, he would have been wise to speak for himself rather than for the situation of the expressions themselves at issue. The fact that Krempel could not understand this particular and particularly fundamental distinction – and his book reveals a very great deal more that he was not able to understand about relation besides this point – does not entail that the terms themselves embody a hopeless confusion. In fact, had Krempel taken off his ideological spectacles to read Poinot, he might have produced a very different and much better book than he succeeded in producing. But his work does stand as a landmark to the neglect of relation as an irreducible mode of being in traditional philosophy and to the impossibility of understanding the implications of this idea in the modern context of advocating “realism” over against “idealism” as the main problematic within which philosophizing is to take place, a context further paralyzed by the ‘epistemology/ontology’ distinction (not to mention the modern subject/object distinction we are presently concerned to deconstruct).

modern philosophy provided a hostile context for the development of semiotic ideas, namely, its vilipending of the idea of relation as important to the constitution of the so-called “external world”. Be that as it may, the distinction is of central importance for semiotics.

What this distinction articulates is the truth that relations in the order of *ens reale* are both unique in not being as such tied to that order (in contrast to the rationales of subjectivity belonging to substance and the inherent accidents) and also necessary accoutrements of subjective being apart from which subjectivity itself could not be brought into awareness or understood according to something of the being that it has exercised prior to and/or independently of human thought here and now and across the millenia. The former point is encapsulated semiotically in the Latin expression *relatio secundum esse*, which I have translated as *ontological relation*, meaning ‘relation considered according to its proper and positive being as relation indifferent to the distinction between mind-independent and mind-dependent’, *relations as required for being*. The latter point is encapsulated semiotically in the Latin formula *relatio secundum dici*, ‘relation considered as it fulfills the requirements of discourse for developing a true if limited understanding of being existing subjectively and intersubjectively independently of the mind as well as for being existing only objectively and dependently upon our awareness of it’, or perhaps *relations as required for discourse*. Both points are made expressly, and in just these terms, by Poinset himself in that earliest systematic semiotic, the *Tractatus de Signis* of 1632, in the Second Preamble and *passim*.

For example, Napoleon differs from Hamlet not only by nationality, but also by once having been what Hamlet never was, namely, a subjective existent. Napoleon is like Hamlet in that both also exist as known, exist objectively. There was a time (between 1769 and 1821) when we might have met Napoleon, as the saying goes, “in person” or “in the flesh”. That is to say, there was a time when Napoleon existed subjectively and intersubjectively as well as objectively, whereas now he exists only as Hamlet has always existed, that is to say, purely objectively. Nonetheless, if it is the real Napoleon that we wish to understand, then it is the island of Corsica that we have to consider more than the Isle of Capri. And if it is the real Napoleon that we wish to understand, then we need to take account of the battle he waged at Arcola in Europe, not the Arcola in Texas just outside of Houston where I had my Roadtrek motorhome worked on.

Of course, much can be known of the real Napoleon even if the battle of Arcola is not brought into account. Furthermore, no matter how much we do bring into our account, our understanding of Napoleon – the objectification of his subjective existence – will never be complete, for, though we cannot say exactly how and where (otherwise our understanding *could* be complete),

we do know for sure that there were many aspects of Napoleon's existence in *ens reale* which will never or never fully come to light as *objectified as well as subjective and/or intersubjective*. Indeed, that is the difference between our understanding of the world and the understanding that God is reputed to have among theologians: nothing of the order of *ens reale* escapes the awareness of God, nor does anything of the order of *ens rationis* ever get confused with something of the order of *ens reale*: Finite existence for God is like what Aquinas describes the human *primum cognitum* to be: a seamless whole of *ens reale* and *ens rationis* together making up τὸ ὄν in its entirety – though where awareness of *ens primum cognitum* is a seamless whole by way of confusion, the awareness of God is a seamless whole rather of Cartesian clarity and distinctness.

So with Socrates and Plato: for me they will never be more than objects, though objects that I know once were subjects as well “before my time”; but for Aristotle, Plato at least was a subjectivity with whom he entered into interaction and sustained intersubjective relations, as did Plato with Socrates. So with my readers: if they read this quickly enough, I, the author present to them objectively through this work, may become present to them subjectively as well in sense-perception; but if they read it too late, or wait too long after reading it, their “personal” meeting with me in the intersubjective and subjective order of *ens reale* will suffer the fate of my appointment to meet Charles Hartshorne in Austin upon returning in 2000 from Finland (it was precluded by Hartshorne's death; so Hartshorne remained for me purely an object, though I well know that once he was subject as well and that I could have known him as such within perception had I made the visit before going to Finland instead of waiting till after).

So the order of *ens reale* for any one of us never becomes more than partially objectified or known, even though in principle the whole of it is knowable (the meaning of the medieval saying that “being and truth are convertible”, *ens et verum convertuntur*, or of Hegel's insight<sup>3</sup> that “the real is rational and the rational is real”). But the question is how does *anything* of the order of *ens reale* come to be objectified or known, and how is it possible for things (such as Hamlet) known never to have been *ens reale* equally to exist as objectified or known – equally, that is to say, with such things as Napoleon which were not cut out of whole cloth but existed in the order of *ens reale* no less than (indeed more than, if our thesis about the de facto limitation of human knowledge is accepted; or equally with, if the theologians' thesis about the divine knowledge is correct) in the order of objectivity? And the answer according to me is because

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3. Hegel 1821: 24: “Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig.”

of the peculiar nature of relation – indifferent to the distinction between *ens reale* and *ens rationis* – as lending its own being as relation to its terminus which, in the case of cognitive relations categorial or not, is exactly what an object of awareness consists in: the terminating, or rather being as terminus, of a cognitive relation (and, as we shall also see, all cognitive relations, and not only cognitive relations but cathectic relations as well, are semiotic relations<sup>4</sup>).

Let us see if and how the proposed answer holds up.

I am not my father or my sister or the universities at which I have taught or the atmospheric pressure required for my body to survive; yet all of these things and many more will you have to bring into account if you are to understand what and who I am. A given subjectivity here and now may no longer give rise to a categorial relation that it once provenated and sustained. But to understand that subjectivity the intelligence will have to reconstitute in a mind-dependent way what previously obtained mind-independently, for it remains true that I was the son of my father even after my father has died, or, for that matter, even after I have died. Thus everything finite, beginning with substance itself, depends upon what it itself is not in order to be and eventually to be understood (which, of course, may not happen), even though the relations among those things upon which the given substance depends or with which it interacts are constantly changing and, in the categorial sense of relation, “coming and going”. I am related to my father in Aristotle’s sense only as long as both my father and I live; but whether both or neither of us are alive now, it remains that I was an effect respecting which my father was a cause. The *relation* of cause to effect or effect to cause is not the causal interaction itself, but a *consequence* of that interaction which obtains even after the interaction itself has ceased. And that *relation* as such is the same, whether it exists in fact (mind-independently here and now) or only in thought and memory (mind-dependently here and now).

My father is not a relation, he is (or was) a substance. And I too am a substance, not a relation. But relations are necessary for me either to be or to be understood, and which and whether of all these relations necessary to my being are here and now mind-dependent or mind-independent depends not upon the relations themselves but upon circumstances surrounding the relations. The causal interaction of sex between my parents which was necessary for me to come into being (“generatio”) and which gave rise to my relation as offspring

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4. There is a difference, to be sure, between what is *semiosic*, the action of signs, and *semiotic*, the explicit knowledge that we develop of that action as such. So perhaps we should say only that all cognitive and cathectic relations are *semiosic*, and as such capable of *becoming* semiotic only in the awareness of the semiotic animal. But this is not a point of refinement that I want to pause here fully to get to the bottom of; let me but note it in passing, and leave it to other and further discussions elsewhere.

ceased long ago, but the consequent relation continued in the categorial sense as long as my parents lived; and now in my memory that same relation, though no longer categorial, continues to exist and is recreated by each mind that thinks my being in that respect. The relation between me and my surroundings according to which I must remain within a determinate range of pressure (“pounds per square inch”) in order to stay alive is a categorial relation which may vary but does not “come and go” (for when it goes, I go!), as brief romances may, but is a relation constant within its range. And so for many other categorial relations, only some of which become part of my awareness, and the greater number of which by far flicker into and out of existence like small flames of existence, supported by or terminating at the various aspects of my subjectivity, in so doing promoting or diminishing my substantial being in *its* existence as subjective, as part of the physical environment in its aggregate unity (to say nothing of my Umwelt or objective world as a human animal shared, unlike my Innenwelt, with other animals), particularly as pertaining to planet earth and that region of planet earth in which I currently reside.

I say that of *some* of these categorial relations I become aware. What does that mean? Quite simply, it means that, besides obtaining in the order of *ens reale*, one and the same relation comes to exist *objectively* as well as intersubjectively in fact. Relations may be intersubjective only among things, but relations as suprasubjective obtain among objects as well as among things and – we might as well here say again – give rise to objects as distinct from things in the first place.

For what is the difference between objects and things in the first place? Using Copley’s Canon, according to which we must not bring into the account matters which could be just as well or better discussed in other contexts, we will cut to the chase and say that an object always and necessarily requires a relation to a knower in order to be, whereas a thing does not ordinarily require such a relation at all. It may require other relations, but it does not require *that* relation. A thing in order to be what it is need not be known; but an object which is not known is not an object. That is what always and everywhere differentiates between object as object and thing as thing, regardless of whether the object also be a thing or some thing also be an object: to be an object presupposes a relation to a knower, where “knower” is to be construed in the weakest possible sense of a cognitive organism cognizing.

It might seem at first that we are not saying here very much. Take a thing, add to it a cognitive relation, and *Voilà!* An object. An object is a known thing. Big deal.

This is the way I have found graduate students at the Center for Thomistic Studies of the University of St Thomas in Houston inclined to construe the matter. They, of course, are “realists”. They have yet to learn how empty is this

claim when it comes to the problem of “being objective”, and it usually takes a semester or more to begin to start to commence to get through to them that “realism” is a problem, not a solution, a problem created by modern philosophy in what it mistakenly took to be a ‘turn to the subject’, because it mistook ‘subject’ for a thinking thing and ideas for self-representations rather than signs. A tangled mess. Let us hope we can sort it out, for if semiotics cannot sort it out then it is not *postmodernity* that we have reached but only *ultramodernity*, such as we find in structuralism and ‘poststructuralism’ alike and in the whole first florescence of thinking under the rubric “semiology” and “deconstruction”, where *ens rationis* reigns supreme and the arbitrariness of language is treated as the central (if not the only) feature of discourse while the “things in themselves”, of which science all along has been revealing and busily continues to reveal in what they consist, are rejected as “unknowable” by the philosophers of modernity in their unrelenting war (and one not without its victories, as the authority of our dictionary attests) on “common sense” and misguided insistence on the quasi-error of regarding the physical universe as something purely imagined, something “external to our mind”, whereas it is external only in the measure (which is different for each individual) to which it remains unknown. So wood as a substance is external to all of us, but it is *more* external to me than it is to my carpenter friend Sonny McDonald.

The problem with being an object is that, all too often, the object itself need not be a thing at all. To be a thing is to be a substance or a modification of substance, maybe a collection of substances with their modifications and the intersubjective relations to which these modifications inevitably give rise. To be a thing is to exist above all subjectively, in intersubjective relations, yes, but these relations as intersubjective wholly depend upon what exists subjectively (the substances with their inherent accidents), even though they do not reduce to what so exists, as we have seen. So even in the case where object and thing coincide necessarily (and there is only one such case, we will see), the addition of cognitive relation to thing is not something extrinsic, extraneous, and adventitious to the being of that thing as object; the addition of relation in such a case is *constitutive* of the thing as object. Absent the relation there is not an object at all. There is only a thing, a *prospective* object maybe but not an object, something that *might*, someday, under some circumstances, come to be known, come to enter into awareness. No awareness, no object. At least no full actuality of objectivity.

To say that an object necessarily but a thing only contingently involves a relation to a knower, then, requires considerable further specification. An object always involves a relation to a knower on the side of the terminus of the relation. So we can even say that an object as object is necessarily the terminus of a cognitive relation, and we will not be far wrong in doing so, if we keep in mind



that the terminus of every relation, as such, is a creature of the relation.<sup>5</sup> For now we are in something of a position to understand why an object need not be a thing: for a thing to be a thing has to exist subjectively, but an object to be an object has only to exist terminatively respecting a cognitive relation (or also, as I will argue, an affective relation).

Plants do not have *Umwelts*.<sup>6</sup> This is another way of saying that full objectivity makes its first appearance simultaneous with animal life, in the phenomenon of sensation. But in sensation objects do not yet appear as distinct from things. In sensation we have only the initial or first spark of objectivity, not yet the conflagration that can illumine even the far corners of space and time, and beyond, if there be any truth to our knowledge of God, as Aquinas and others thought. In sensation object and thing are not yet distinct in fact, even though the beginning of their distinction in principle already obtains there.

The reason is that in sensation the relations, even though awakening and involving cognition, are yet also categorial relations in Aristotle's sense: the organs of so-called external sense really depend upon their proper objects in order to become active as senses, and the relations that arise from this activation meet all the requirements for intersubjective being, namely, a physically existing foundation connected with a physically existing terminus on the basis of an initial causal interaction co-temporal with the sensation itself prescissively considered. The sensation is "in" the cognitive organism, indeed, as a quality and modification of its subjectivity. But it is there also as *founding*, as giving rise to, a relation over and above the subjective being of the organism cognizing which unites that organism to the environmental source of the stimulus not merely as cause respecting effect but rather as *effect respecting an environmental source of stimulation cognized, objectified, or known*. This is what sensation does as sensation: it partially objectifies the physical surroundings, the environment – partially, I say, for it awakens the organism to its surroundings not entirely but only in proportion as those surroundings are adapted to the parts of the organism's body that we call its organs of sense.

The outward or bodily senses, thus, are selective, but they do not interpret. They respond to the wavelengths of energy to which they are adapted, ignoring

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5. Remember the observation with which we concluded Chapter 2, p. 36–37, namely, that the terminus of a relation as terminus depends on the being of the relation, and the other way around only when/if the relation is categorial, in which case the terminus, besides its being as terminating, further has a subjective being which will continue even if the terminating ceases (by reason of change or cessation in the fundament, also a subjective mode of being outside of as well as within the relationship).
  6. This cryptosemiotic conclusion of von Uexküll has been expressly confirmed within the semiotic development proper: see Krampen 1981; Deely 1982a.

all others – that is to say, they remain blithely incognizant of all those aspects and energies of the environment which fall outside the range of the sense organs of the organism of that particular type. And, of course, what is that range will depend entirely upon the type of body inhabited by the animal, its biological heritage: for an alligator is not a swan, a cicada is not a butterfly, and so on. Interpretation will come, and with it the first appearance of aspects of objectivity independent of things; but not in sensation prescissively considered.

Take particular note that sensations are not atomic: they do not occur in isolation, but in networks, networks wherein one reticle or node of the net depends upon the other for entering awareness. I see not merely that differentiation of light that we call colors, but in doing so I see also shapes and positions and movements. It is the same for any sense possessed by any animal: the sense makes the animal aware simultaneously of a variety of environmental aspects which, even though they are temporally simultaneous in the awareness of the animal, yet are not logically simultaneous but appear with a dependency of the one upon the other. An eye awakens to differentiations of light: that is the eye's "proper object", as the scholastics used to say. Together with that proper object and thanks to it (that is to say, dependently upon it), the eye sees also shapes and movements and positions. These relations of shapes and movements and positions to the differentiation of light alone essential to seeing are categorial relations in Aristotle's sense. Even though they exist in and through awareness, it is not the awareness that makes them be by being aware of them; it is the physical interaction of environment with powers of sense that makes the awareness be what and as it is, which involves then a naturally determined set or net of relationships which are intersubjective, not subjective, even though these relations exist dependently upon the subjectivity of the cognizing organism as modified by the environmental stimuli acting according to *their* subjective constitution.

It is not usual (or at least such has not been the habit of modern thought) to think of these relations between proper and common sensibles – between what each sense power uniquely objectifies and those environmental aspects that are inevitably objectified along with the 'proper sensible' (the unique aspect of the objectification) and normally by more than one sense power (such as position or movement detected both by sight and sound, shape detected by both sight and touch, etc., whence the designation "common" in contrast to "proper" sensibles as regards the termini attained in sensation according to a logical dependency within a temporal simultaneity) – as sign relations, but that is what they are. The

one who first pointed this out to me was Poinot in his *Treatise on Signs*.<sup>7</sup> At first skeptical, then persuaded by the analysis, I was astounded by the implications of the realization, for whereas by Poinot's time it had already been shown that concepts (images of perception no less than ideas of understanding) are vehicles of signification, this added analysis of sensation in semiotic terms meant that the whole of animal awareness – and a-fortiori the awareness of human animals – was sustained throughout by sign relations, from its origins in sensation to its farthest imaginings in the *phantasiari* of perceptions to its farthest-flung speculations of the understanding, in the case of human beings as semiotic animals.

Now sign relations in perception and understanding may involve and in sensation as we have just seen do involve categorial relations, but as sign relations they do not reduce to categorial relations even when they necessarily involve them. Categorial relations as such are normally dyadic, no matter how many terms they involve. An organism may beget sixteen offspring: each offspring is terminus of one single relation of parenthood, and this relation, notwithstanding its multiplicity of termini, is fundamentally dyadic. But sign relations, even when they absorb and involve categorial relations, are irreducibly triadic.<sup>8</sup> Burning causes smoke. But only when this “causing” enters into the experience of an animal does the smoke become fully a *sign* of something burning.<sup>9</sup> The cause-effect relation is dyadic, thus, the sign relation is triadic, requiring an interpretant to or for whom the smoke stands to the fire as sign-vehicle to object signified, to significate (let us say, in defiance of the modern authorities who resist this term which alone lays bare the full and true nature of being an object, of objectivity).

The first appearance of objects in their distinction from things, then, occurs when sensation is assimilated to perception. Precisely here, in sense perception prescissively distinguished as superordinately incorporating the relations of sensation, does interpretation begin, and it begins by the *adding* to the categorial relations of sensation cognition-dependent relations which do not arise from the action of the environment upon the organism as capable of sensing but rather

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7. Poinot 1632: *Tractatus de Signis*, Book I, Question 6, especially in the “Resolution of Counterarguments”.

8. Sign relations differ from the relations identified in the categories of Aristotle by being irreducibly triadic, but this does not take away from their suprasubjective character as relations, and hence their indifference to the distinction between the orders of *ens reale* and *ens rationis*.

9. This point has been well-expressed by Bankov 2004: 175: “The sign bases its existence on the fact that there is a certain meaning (interpretant) to be connected with an aspect of reality. If there is nothing to relate to, there is no sign. The interpretant derives from the experience with the object, and it is identified only through the sign”.

from the needs of the organism to relate what is sensed to its own purposes for being alive. Thus, what is sensed does not become food by being sensed, but by being eaten; and for this what is sensed must be evaluated by the organism as something to be sought. It is not what the object *is* in its subjective being that makes it be food (though it could not become food without that subjective being). It is what the organism makes of the object in its perceived being and does as a consequence of that evaluation that makes the object be food. Nor could it be food were it *merely* or *purely* an object: No. To be food, the object perceived has to be subjectively as well as objectively, and that subjectivity as such has to be what is perceived and acted upon for the food actually to nourish the organism.

Needless to add, mistakes are possible, and the sensations the organism evaluates perceptually as food may poison the organism or, in turn, eat the perceiving organism instead of being eaten. But for the same reason that food could not be successfully gotten were it not the very subjectivity of the environmental sources of sensory stimuli that were perceptually evaluated, so mistakes would not be possible if the objective being evaluated were not something including indeed yet more or other than what simply exists subjectively. Just as subjectivity and objectivity begin together as providing the terminus for relations of sensation, so subjectivity and objectivity manifest their distinction in principle when a perceiving organism misperceives, that is to say, evaluates what it objectifies by presenting it at variance with what is ‘really there’, present as *ens reale*, outside and independent of the biological needs which motivate the evaluation, an evaluation that turns out more right than wrong as long as the organism continues to flourish – otherwise it could not flourish!

The things of the environment, then, begin as objects in the interaction between the animal organism and its material surroundings inasmuch (and only inasmuch) as this interaction sparks awareness, sparks a cognition. In this initial cognition the environment is aspectually and in limited ways objectified or made to enter into the awareness of the organism, made known; whence this initial awareness is interpreted by the organism on the basis of its biology and experience (in which the past and the hopes too of the organism for sure come to bear) and presented within the animal’s objective world as to be sought, avoided, or safely ignored. These interpretive relations cognition-dependently relating the cognition-independent sources of sensory stimuli to the needs and desires of the organism perceiving, then, are the first appearance in objectivity of relations that do not reduce neither to the intersubjective relations among nor to the subjective being of the environmental things which, in their own constitution, simply are what they are without regard for what the perceiving organism may or may not happen to perceive. These superordinate relations of perception, incorporating

but not reducing to the relations of sensation in which something of the environment is revealed according to the subjectivity of the environment impacting the subjectivity of the sense organs, by transforming the bare physical surroundings into an objective world, are the source of the first appearance of objects distinct from things.

Of course the animal, in constructing thus its *Umwelt*, does not advert to these distinctions between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, perception and sensation, proper and common sensibles. Indeed, the animal as subject of sense perception is not even interested in the difference between objectivity as such and the independent being of things, whether or not partially manifested in objectivity. Not at all. The animal forms the relations that it forms not for the purposes of speculative understanding, but for the purposes of survival and thrival. The animal wants to avoid mistakes not for the sake of ‘being right’ or ‘seeing the truth’, but for the sake of surviving and thriving. It has no disinterest in truth. It has no interest in truth. It neither knows nor cares how things are, but is concerned only with things-being-the-way-it-wants-them-to-be and doing what has to be done to ensure that its interactions within perception come out the way it wants them to come out. It tries things out not for the sake of truth but for the sake of victory. Every animal, we might say, is insofar a natural politician, with the proviso that it is irremediably incapable of becoming anything more. The problem at this level is not that the animal does not care about truth. The animal at this level *cannot* care about truth. For the notion of truth supposes a grasp of the difference between objects and things, and this difference escapes the cognizance of any animal whose awareness is restricted to related things without being able to consider and play with relations themselves in their difference from related things, hence with things (*entia realia*, as including categorial relations) in their difference from objects (as including *entia rationis* as well as *entia realia*).

So the answer to the question with which our chapter opened. ’Tis in sense-perception as (analytically) opposed to or contrasted with sensation as external sensation that begins the process of interpretation we call knowledge, a process enabled in the first place only by virtue of the difference between environmental things existing in their own right (their own subjectivity supporting intersubjectivities) and those same things as now terminating also relations based on the psychological subjectivity of cognitive organisms (of, in a word, animals) adding to what is sensed relations which interpret the “data” by structuring it in accordance with the needs and desires which are not found in the environment but only in the perceiving organism, even though as *in* the organism perceiving and subjective to it these needs and desires provenate relations *terminating at* and thereby transforming the objectivity of the public world itself nascently revealed in sensation into the objectivity of a public world that (well beyond differences

of individuality) is species-specific to the biological type of the organism perceiving, an *Umwelt* in contrast to the species-neutral physical environment of things in their interactions and consequent (categorical) relations.

In short, sensations differ from perceptions in that sensations are *co-determined* by the subjectivity of environmental source of stimulation together with the subjectivity of animal body stimulated, while perceptions by contrast are actively interpretative rather than passively revelatory of the surroundings; rather than co-determined as sensations are, perceptions are determined more by the nature of the animal perceiving than by whatever is in the subjective constitution of the stimulus, with the result that perception adds to the awareness of sensations relations that do not reduce to the subjectivity of organism and environment interacting to create an intersubjectivity, but add to that intersubjectivity already in play objectively (as apprehended) a *further* interpretation consisting in relations which relate the environment objectively to the organism not according to the constitution of the things in the environment but according to the need and desires of the organism itself. This is why the objective world, the *Umwelt*, is both superordinate to (while incorporative of something of) the physical surroundings, and superordinate to the physical environment in a species-specific way, that is, according to an objective organization based upon and provenating from what is proper to and characteristic of the biological species to which the animal belongs. The environment is, so to say, and by comparison, 'meaning neutral', while the *Umwelt*, the objective world, is what it is precisely through and in consequence of the meanings that it provides for the animal that inhabits it.

The objectification of the world begun in sensation where thing and object remain factually identified in principle introduces the difference between what exists as known both subjectively *and* as terminating a cognitive relation, and what could exist *only* as terminating a relation of cognition. By introducing this difference, objectification opens the way to awareness as interpretive, a process (interpretation) which begins precisely at the point where the distinction between objects and things first manifests itself *as* a difference in fact as well as in principle, namely, in perception as superordinate to sensation. This process of interpretation, in turn, will become self-reflexively interpretive only in the human animal, and fully self-reflexive only when that animal awakens to the main thing that it is able to know but which remains hidden to the other animals, namely, understanding of difference between relations as such and things or objects related, a difference which sense, and consequently sense-perception, is unable to make precisely because no relation in its proper being is subject to being sensed. At that moment when the human animal can begin to play with relations based upon relations rather than upon the subjectivities of things, the way opens to linguistic communication, the frontier between  $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$

is crossed, and, the semiotic animal is born (however long it will take to reach its maturity and to develop globally a semioethics<sup>10</sup>).

But again we must hew to our line of analysis, and not let matters get ahead of themselves. Having shown where first arises the difference between objects as objects and things as things, and what is the ground of their sometime coincidence, let us turn now from *the objective side* of affairs where relations of cognition terminate indifferent to and often incorporative of a further subjectivity constitutive of the termini apprehended to *the subjective side* of the cognitive relation as based upon or grounded in the subjectivity of an *Innenwelt*, a realm as private and individual as the objectivity of the *Umwelt* is public as well as species-specific.

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10. The felicitous term introduced by Petrilli and Ponzio 2003 (see also Petrilli 2004) to awaken semiotics to this further dimension of the postmodern task.

## Chapter 5

# The Source in Subjectivity of Relations of Apprehension

Relations of apprehension, even when they are categorial relations, differ from categorial relations which terminate without bringing that aspect of subjectivity at which they terminate into awareness. Thus the bringing of the terminus of a relation into awareness is what distinguishes cognitive relations, even when they are categorial, from bare physical relations. This difference arises from what is distinctive about the foundation or ground of cognitive relations, which is not bare physical subjectivity but psychological subjectivity.

The word “psychology” derives from the Greek word for soul, ψυχή. For Aristotle, “soul” was but the name for that form of substantial subjectivity which was alive rather than inorganic. In that framework, plants too have souls, and hence their subjective states would be called, in an extended sense, psychological. But in fact we know that plants have, in modern terms, a physiology (e.g., phototropism) rather than a psychology, that their inner states are determined by physical rather than objective interactions. And we know from contemporary semiotics that animals but not plants live in an objective as well as a physical world, that animals but not plants have an Umwelt.

When it comes to objectivity, there is no outer world without a corresponding inner modification of psychological subjectivity: no outer without an inner. The Latins called these inner modifications of psychological subjectivity “specifications”, “*species expressa*” (later also “formal signs”), because they functioned precisely to specify what would be at the focus of the animal’s awareness in its dealings with the surroundings. But they understood very well the point of these inner specifications or modifications of psychological subjectivity, a point which would be lost upon the moderns, to wit, that the whole being and purpose of these inner states is to relate the animal to its surroundings and, more generally, to manifest, develop, and maintain its Umwelt.

When I need my pen or glasses or a bathroom, I do not look inside my mind with the hope of finding them; but unless the idea of pen, glasses, or bathroom were in my mind, I would have no hope of finding them outside my mind either – not in the sense that I couldn’t find them absolutely speaking, for we have seen that it is the nature of sensation to introduce into perception physical realities with which we come into contact; but in the sense that when I did so encounter them in the absence of corresponding ideas I would not know what it was



that I had found. Thus we see easily that, exactly as Peirce said and the late Latin philosophers of sign well anticipated before him, sensation deals in brute secondness with a consequent intersubjective triadic network supervening, but perception introduces thirdness from the start. Into this thirdness of the objective world the relations formed in sensations, necessarily intersubjective in the sense our last chapter considered, are incorporated into a further network of perceptual relations in order to acquire the meaning of what has been revealed through and by the outer senses.

It is, then, to these inner states beyond the activation of the outer senses that we must look if we are to understand the inner ground of semiosis as it gives rise to the public sphere of objectivity, to the *Umwelt* of any given animal. Only then will it make sense to inquire how the *Umwelt* of human animals differs or is unique unto itself, and even then we must keep in mind that *every* *Umwelt* is species-specifically unique, not just the human *Umwelt*. The human *Umwelt* generically considered is no different than any animal *Umwelt* in its basic constitution. Every *Umwelt* is made up of relations wherein perception “makes sense of” the world in which it lives, which would not be possible, as we have seen, if perception did not add to the order of *ens reale* manifested in sensation any number of mind-dependent relations whereby perception (“*phantasiari*”) is enabled, by involving *ens reale* in the order now of *ens rationis*, to construct a “familiar place” in space-time where it can make its way according to its inner needs and desires, according to its biological heritage. Thus, what starts out as bare physical surroundings the animal is able to furnish according to its type to arrive at a comfortable home in which to live. This home is supported and sustained neither by categorial relations alone nor by purely objective relations alone, but by the fabric of experience which is a weave of both types of relation in every possible pattern and combination. *Sense*-perception is exactly this, the transformation of bare surroundings into a comfortably furnished and familiar place so far as circumstances allow the animal to dominate its physical surroundings according to the type or kind of animal that it is.

It should be clear to any reader, then, that an *Umwelt*, an objective world, would not be possible in any way were it not for the difference between things and objects, on the one hand, and for the singular being of relations as uniquely indifferent to the difference between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, on the other hand. As we have seen, this is not at all to say that the animal adverts to or even could advert to the difference between relations as *ens reale* and relations as *ens rationis*, between mind-independent and mind-dependent being. If it could, you can be sure it would set out to investigate the difference between the two, the difference between objects classified as +, –, or 0, on the one hand, and those same objects insofar as they reveal in their objectivity a subjective dimension

of being which can be investigated according to its subjective structure which determines the objectified being not only in relation to the knower, the cognizing organism, but more basically “in itself” as a participant in *ens reale* independently of being cognized or known, independently of happening to be an object of which some animal has become aware.

To undertake such a project, the animal in question would have to be capable of distinguishing relations, which are imperceptible, from the related things, which are alone perceptible as objects, in order further to consider objects perceived under a relation of self-identity.<sup>1</sup> Such a relation is clearly an *ens rationis*. For a thing is not “identical with itself”, it simply *is what it is*, and the ‘relation’ of self-identity arises only when one and the same thing is distinguished conceptually within its objectivity as being from one side fundament and from another side terminus of a ‘relation of reason’, in this case fundament and terminus being materially identical, one and the same, and distinct only in the understanding as giving to the identical single thing two distinct formalities, one as fundament, the other as terminus, of a relation enabling the knower to consider the object in question outside of or apart from (or *in addition to*, for the scientist or philosopher, indeed, never ceases to be an animal until death!) the interaction categories of animal objectification *per se* as something to be sought, avoided, or ignored.

To consider “being as such”, then, is far from considering only being as *ens reale*. To consider being as such is precisely to consider “that which can be said in many ways”, beginning with the first apprehension of being as the difference within objects between what exists *only* or *purely* objectively, and what *also* exists with a being of its own to be investigated as such if we wish to understand what things are in their own right – not solely in relation to but over and above and regardless of our particular interests and designs as animals.

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1. It is this addition to the animal objectivity, the Umwelt, that constitutes τὸ ὄν under the rubric Aquinas assigns it as *ens primum cognitum*: see Deely 1994, 2002, and 2007a. This was a point over which Peirce (c.1890: 1.365) stumbled badly, or at least (for the determination of what distinguishes human understanding vis-à-vis zoösemiosis was not a focus in his analysis) seemed not to realize that precisely this *ens rationis* – the objective world or Umwelt conceived in or ‘placed under’ relation to itself – creates Firstness (*ens primum cognitum*) which, over the course of experience, will reveal to semiotic animals (but only to semiotic animals) the difference within Firstness of objects or aspects of objects which do and which do not reduce to our experience of them (the difference between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*) by the intrusion of Secondness, thus revealing Thirdness as the reason for the unity of the Umwelt as a distinctive whole superordinate to Secondness.

Of course, nothing prevents us from turning such knowledge of the subjective or ‘real’ being of things in the physical universe to our own purposes as animals. As the objectification of subjectivity expands through human inquiry into the way things are in themselves our ability to do something about the way things are increases proportionately. The inquiry into being begins with wonder, but nothing prevents it to end with turning what has been discovered to human use for good or ill. The ability to inquire into “the way things are” beyond their appearances to the human animal as desirable, undesirable, or ignorable, the Latins termed *intellectus*, “understanding”, in contrast to the powers of sense-perception, *phantasiari* based upon and incorporating *sentire*. So they distinguished *intellectus* into two phases or modes.

The first mode which distinguishes *intellectus* from animal perception as such the Latins called “speculative”. Understanding is “speculative” when thought is used to objectify the subjectivities as such within objects, or to identify the intersubjectivities which obtain not only in the objective order but more generally in the order of what obtains whether or not it is known (“*ens reale*”). Thus a relation of biological parenthood is one thing, a relation of parenthood which obtains in the cultural order through adoption or de facto upbringing is quite another, the first a relation in the order of *ens reale*, which need not be known in order to be, the latter a socially constructed relation which, apart from the social order as objective, would not obtain at all. And so on. (But notice, of course, that even socially constructed or objective realities pass over through interactions into the order of *ens reale*, something that would not be possible were it not for the unique indifference of relation as we have examined it to the difference between the two orders, which is not determined by relations as such but by the external circumstances surrounding the relations which pertain not only to relations but, more fundamentally, to subjectivity in its substantial and accidental dimensions constitutive of individuality).

The second mode which distinguishes *intellectus* from animal perception as such is the effect that it has upon perception when it returns to the order of what is sense-perceptible in order to affect that order in line with the animal nature of the one conceiving. In other words, the second mode of *intellectus* is that whereby it returns to its origins in *phantasiari* in order to serve the arrangement of objects proper to *phantasiari* to accord with the needs and desires of the human organism, the human animal, the human person. The Latins called this mode of *intellectus* “practical”, and recognized its status as derivative from the awareness distinctive of human understanding in the formula “speculative understanding

becomes practical by extension”, *intellectus speculativus per extensionem fit practicus*.<sup>2</sup>

So the awareness of relations in contrast to subjectivities turns out to be as crucial in its own turn as the being of relation unique in being indifferent to having its original provenance in the objective order alone, in the subjective order alone, or in both orders simultaneously, is crucial to the possibility of there being such a thing as objectivity in the first place. Objectivity begins with relations of awareness, relations which, though having their fundament or ground in subjectivity, have their terminus not simply in another aspect of some *other* subjectivity, but in making that terminating aspect *known or apprehended*, regardless of whether the object thus presented actually corresponds with a subjective identity as well, or not. (A given woman burned for being a witch would burn nonetheless even if she were not a witch – that is, even if her objective identification was mistaken and, in this crucial regard, was *purely* objective in matter of fact.)

Such relations occur only for living beings, and in beings living as animals, not as plants. They are, precisely, *relations of awareness*, and they differ from categorial intersubjectivities in being triads rather than dyads, in being necessarily and not merely contingently part of a semiosis, an action of signs. In the first instance, as sensations, the terminus of such relations, as we have seen, is in one sense no different from the terminus of any relation as such, dyadic (categorial) or triadic: the formality of both fundament and terminus as such derives from the being of the relation, rather than from the aspect of subjectivity upon which the relation rests or at which the relation terminates. In the first instance, the terminus of such relations is in yet another sense no different from the terminus of any relation in the order of *ens reale*, to wit, it not only terminates the relation, but, precisely in its being as terminating, it is materially identical with a subjective characteristic of an existing subject within the specific interaction context required for the sensation prescissively taken to arise in the first place.

The subjectivity of the source and its being as sensed are partially identical in this first flicker of fully objective being. The stimulus, a subjective existent acting upon the subjectivity of the animal organism, determines or *specifies* the sense power of the animal to become aware here and now of this rather than that. The stimulus is thus an *impressed specification* (a “*species impressa*” in the Latins’ sense) determining the subjective power of sense (seeing, hearing, etc.) here and now to see this shape against that background, to hear this sound coming from that direction, etc., which means to provenate a relation which, *founded* upon the specified subjectivity of the animal sense power, *terminates* at

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2. Aquinas c.1266: *Summa theologiae* 1.76 sed contra.

the environmental aspect or source which manifests something of its subjective and intersubjective being in and through the relation of sensation, and does so precisely “to” or “for” the animal sensing.

That is the beginning of objectivity, the first occurrence of objective being, of being as object or objectified in addition to the subjective and intersubjective being which the things of the environment had well before and quite independently of the advent of life upon earth, or indeed before and quite independently of the subjective formation of earth as a distinct planet in the first place. While it is not here in fact yet distinct from the subjective and intersubjective being which, as we have seen, defines the notion and order of *ens reale* within which the animal itself exists as a subject and upon which it depends for its continuance in being, yet it is so distinct in principle. For the being of the object is *constituted and defined by its being as terminus*, and this is not true for any subjective being as such. And since the terminus of any relation, as terminus, derives from the being of relation and not from any subjective being purely as such, once we have a form or mode of being – namely, the being of object as object, objective being – that is constituted by being a terminus regardless of any intrinsic further connection it has with some subjectivity as such (such as obtains in the case of the terminus of any categorial relation, any relation *necessarily* and not merely by reason of circumstance intersubjective), we have also a being which in principle at least has a relative independence of the order of *ens reale*.

For while physiological aspects of subjectivity give rise only contingently to pure relations, and physiological aspects of subjectivity only contingently serve to anchor or terminate these same relations, psychological aspects of subjectivity cannot exist *except* by giving rise to or provenating pure relations, and these relations, dependent upon psychological subjectivity as their ground, lend their own being as relations (just as do *all* relations) to the being of their terminus as such, with the difference that, in this case, the being of the terminus is not *necessarily* tied to or linked with some aspect of a subjectivity *other* than the subjectivity of the knower – though, at the same time, there is nothing that prevents it from contingently happening to coincide with some such aspect of a subjectivity *other* than the subjectivity of the knower (the crucial detail missing in the Kantian analysis).

So a relation arising from psychological subjectivity can reveal something of the order of *ens reale* in its subjective dimension, but, beyond sensation, it does not *have to* so reveal *ens reale*. What it *has to do* in every case is simply *relate the organism cognizing* to its surroundings as objective or known, and contribute to the structuring of that objective world, for better or for worse. Those surroundings objectified necessarily contain *something* of the order of *ens reale* as such, insofar, at least, as sensation is involved in any given perception. But

exactly *what* they reveal of that order is incidental to their constitution of an objective world within which the animal finds the “meaning” of its being and life. The physical surroundings contain for the animal only what is present here and now as accessible to sense. But the Umwelt contains as well objects that are not present here and now, sometimes objects that no longer are present anywhere in the physical environment, but in every case it contains absent as well as present objects, if by “absent” we mean objects which, though they exist as things, are not in the vicinity accessible to the sense perception of the given animal, and by “present” we mean objects which are also things and as things are in here and now sense-perceived interaction with the cognizing animal subject.

So the animal can “go looking” for an object which is absent here and now to its subjective being as thing (is not perceived in the vicinity), but the only reason it can so go looking is because the thing sought is *objectively present and desired* from the start. The objective world or Umwelt, more and more complicated as the animal is higher and higher in the order of substance as relatively independent subjective being or individuality, thus, not just sometimes but always transcends the physical world insofar as perception is involved in the awareness of animals.

What we need to consider, then, are the psychologically subjective states which enable the animal to have an awareness of objects which are not tied as such here and now to the order of surrounding things, the immediate physical environment. And we need to note from the start that psychologically subjective states are not only cognitive but affective and emotional as well.<sup>3</sup> In a word, following the pioneering work of Parsons and Shils,<sup>4</sup> we must start from the realization that psychological subjectivity as necessarily provenating triadic relations orientating the subject of the awareness to its surroundings not merely or even mainly as physical but primarily and principally as Umwelt, as objective world, is always *cathectic* as well as cognitive.

The Latins, in this differing hardly at all from the moderns in philosophy, were so preoccupied with cognition that they executed their analyses of human knowledge all but exclusively in terms of “ideas” or “concepts” as cognitive modifications of the knowing subject. For them it was the logical priority of cognitive over cathectic states that alone counted, whereas in fact the most important thing to note in this regard is not just the logical priority of the cognitive but the *temporal simultaneity* of the cathectic (just as the temporal simultaneity of common with proper sensibles establishes the semiotic character of their connection).

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3. Damasio’s distinction (2003) between feelings and emotions requires consideration in its own right, but the notion of cathexis here at work covers both.

4. Parsons and Shils 1951.

Thus, just as we saw the logical priority, for example, of seeing the differentiation of light constituting color over the seeing of shapes and movements tending to blind the philosophers to the semiotic character of sensation both before and after the pioneering work of Peirce demonstrating this character, so has it also been the case that the logical priority of cognition over cathexis has tended to conceal from the philosophers (including Peirce) the semiotic character of emotions or feelings, affective subjectivity (cathetic states *tout court*).

Here is another area in which Peirce as the principal father or founder of semiotics as a postmodern intellectual movement made a decisive advance over his Latin predecessors in the doctrine of signs. Just as he *was not* the first decisively to demonstrate the triadic character of the relation constitutive of every sign in its proper being,<sup>5</sup> so he *was* the first expressly to name and identify the distinctive character of the ‘third terminus’ of the sign relation as that in which the proper significate outcome of an action of signs or semiosis consists, and which becomes in turn a sign loosely so-called (a sign-vehicle, to be technically correct) in its own right in that spiral of semiosis<sup>6</sup> we call “experience”, namely, the interpretant, which may be either logical (cognitive), cathetic (emotional), or interactive (energetic).

The Latins in the first phase of development of semiotic consciousness came expressly to realize and label the cognitive states of psychological subjectivity as “formal signs”.<sup>7</sup> The brunt of this designation was to recognize that so-called ideas and mental images of whatever sort – “expressed specifications directing the attention of the cognitive powers independently of physical presence on the side of the objects of awareness” or “*species expressae*” (as they laconically termed the cognitive states of psychological subjectivity) – as aspects of subjectivity (subjective modifications of the being of the knower as an individual existing in its own right within the environment and not simply as ‘part’ of some larger whole with *its* own intrinsic principle of unity or being<sup>8</sup>), are sharply

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5. Cf. Peirce 1932: Book I, Question 3.

6. For a diagrammatic representation of the “semiotic spiral”, see Deely 2001a or 2003: 164.

7. Peirce 1932: Book II, Question 1.

8. Hence the saying of the later Latins (Aquinas c.1266: *Summa theologiae* 1.76.2 ad 2, and after), “unumquodque hoc modo habet unitatem, quo habet esse, et per consequens idem est iudicium de multiplicatione rei, et de esse ipsius”, ‘a thing has unity in the very same way that it has being, and so our judgment of how many things there are is the same as our judgment of which things have being’ – where the “being” principally considered is the subjective being constitutive of individuality in its ground, namely, the being of substance.

different from the physiological aspects of subjectivity. For while physiological modifications give rise to relations only contingently obtaining,<sup>9</sup> the psychological modifications give rise to relations of awareness and feeling necessarily and of their very nature. These are the relations which transform the physical surroundings into an objective world, as we have seen – a world of familiar places comfortable or dangerous or safe to ignore.

This objective world, in its difference from the physical surroundings or world,<sup>10</sup> consists *entirely* of relationships, among which only a few, as we have seen, terminate at the physical subjectivity of the surroundings as such, while the rest terminate in objective being according as it is in principle distinct from the subjective being of the things present-at-hand, and *all of which without exception* have their proper being as relationships *over and above* the subjectivity of the knower and of the things of the surroundings alike. All the relations constituting and contributing to the objective world or Umwelt have their being as *suprasubjective* modes, even when (but regardless of whether) their suprasubjectivity is intersubjective as well as suprasubjective. Circumstances, after all, will determine that, and the determining circumstances are more or less constantly changing, so that the animal living in a world of primarily real relations at one moment can find itself at the next moment, simply by virtue of changes in the circumstances, living in a fantasy world of mind-dependent being the next – ask any abandoned lover to whom the abandonment came as a surprise rather than as something anticipated.

For objectivity itself, like the relations upon whose being objects draw as terminating the relations, is neither mind-dependent nor mind-independent but open to both according to circumstance, yet in every case and in all circumstances public in principle and set over against the “private world” of the psychological states as such constituting the Innenwelt. No “outside” without an “inside”, no

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9. The relation of parent to offspring, for example, arises necessarily when the offspring is begotten, but it continues to exist only as long as both parents and offspring live; it is thus “necessary” only under certain conditions. The relations consequent upon psychological states, by contrast, provenate whenever the psychological state itself exists, regardless of the surrounding physical conditions. Thus, these relations are necessarily *prevenant* under *all* circumstances. A psychological state, cognitive or cathectic, cannot be *except* as giving rise to a relation having a terminus objective in status. A physiological state gives rise to a relation only under such circumstances as its terminus has subjective being within and sustentative of the termination.
10. Which, as we have seen, consists primarily in substantial subjectivity as supporting accidental modifications of that subjectivity and, consequently, contingent and ever-changing intersubjective or categorial relations based upon those accidental modifications.



Umwelt without an Innenwelt; but what correlates the two and maintains the “outer world” as something *known*, as something of which we are *aware*, is neither the foundation of the relations in the Innenwelt nor the termination (the *termini*) of the relations at the Umwelt but the relations from whose being the fundamentals and *termini* alike derive their being as other than purely subjective or modifications of subjectivity.

So we see a continuity in formation of objects from the first beginning with the stimuli (the *species impressae*) specifying sense to become aware of the aspects of the physical surroundings acting upon the organs of sense and provenating on the basis of this action in the animal a network of relations triadic in character but naturally determined in their interweave, and passing thence to the coordination of these stimuli in the nervous system of the animal as the basis for a further active production by the animals themselves of subjective forms objectively specificative of how the animal will interpret the stimuli available to it (“*species expressae*”) through a yet further series of triadic relations finding their proper significate outcome in the series of interpretants which will shape the organism’s awareness (‘logical’ interpretants) of objects and its attitude towards those objects (‘emotional’ interpretants) as forming together a basis for action in relation to or in the midst of the objects of awareness here and now present with some measure of physical subjectivity as well as objectively (‘energetic’ interpretants).

When the Latins recognized the extraordinary and distinctive character of cognitive psychological states as necessarily giving rise to relations *even when the termini of those relations had not a subjective anchor here and now as well* (as do categorial relations as such), thus, they should have recognized at the same time – *per consequens*, as they liked to say, or “by extension” – that cathectic states of psychological subjectivity are no less “formal signs” which likewise cannot be except as manifesting something other than themselves as desirable, undesirable, ignorable, or a mixture of the three, as terminus of relations the psychological states necessarily provenate. In short, psychological states of subjectivity as fundamentals of objective relations are no less “formal signs” (sign-vehicles by necessity) when they are cathectic than when they are cognitive.

All the inner states of psychological subjectivity have a twofold manifestative function. Insofar as they are subjective modifications, “*species expressae*”, specific determinations of the subjectivity of the individual animal, they are manifestative of the attitudes and objective condition of that subject (Maritain

spoke of them in this sense<sup>11</sup> as “reverse signs”). But even this manifestation of the “inner” they achieve only by way and reason of the *pure relations* which they provenate as being and providing the fundamentals thereof, relations whose termini are not “inner” but “outer”, and only some of which – those founded on the specifying impressions of the external sense organs (the *species impressae*, ‘the impressed specifying forms’) made by the action on the animal of its physical surroundings – necessarily terminate at subjective features of the surrounding environment objectified or ‘made known’, i.e., made part of the awareness of the animal cognizing and cathecting.

Yet even beyond sensation, in perception, and beyond that (if the animal be a semiotic animal, able to know being in its transcendence of the difference between things and objects), in understanding, all the relations founded and grounded in the psychological subjectivity of the animal, all the relations which multiply over time and constitute the *experience* of the animal as structuring its present objective world (for the objective world, in a certain sense, knows no ‘past’, but only a future, as it were, ‘built-toward’<sup>12</sup>) both incorporate something of the physical subjectivities surrounding the animal with which it is in bodily interaction and, at the same time, by virtue of the character of the relations as suprasubjective, render those surroundings *aufgehoben* – present physically, indeed, but in a higher way than simply as subjective, namely, as *objective*, and, in many of their actual aspects, *purely* objective, yet all the while sustaining and maintaining the physical world *as cognized or known* (and to this extent it matters not a wit whether that objective world is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in terms of a reductive notion of ‘truth as correspondence’, if by ‘correspondence’ is meant in conformity with the subjectively or intersubjectively preajacent physical).

To be an animal is to live in a world that is simultaneously physical and objective; and just as the subjectivity of the physical dimension exceeds what the animal is aware of, so also does the objective dimension transcend the physically given and present at any ‘here and now’ we may choose to designate.

“Things are sensed”, said the Latins,<sup>13</sup> “in accordance with that existence which they have independently of the animal, in its individual particularity”, but the nature of the thing as objectified in perception, while indeed it exists independently of the perception, yet it does not have independently of the perception that mode of being according to which it is perceived; for it is perceived

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11. Maritain 1938. “Reverse signs”, indeed, by which the knower becomes self-aware and which often enough “give away” through bodily manifestations (so-called ‘body language’, which, of course, can also be used to lie) that very ‘inner self-awareness’.

12. See Deely 1992.

13. Aquinas c.1266: *Summa theologiae* 1.76.2 ad 4 (28/4–10): “res sentitur secundum illam dispositionem quam extra animam habet, in sua particularitate”.

as beneficial or harmful or safe to ignore, and this perception is based on the needs, desires, and past experience of the organism more than on the subjective constitution of what is perceived, even in relation thereto. And, if we go beyond sense-perception to the intellectual perception distinctive of the human animal, what is presented as being the nature of the thing goes beyond the categories of +, -, 0, as we have seen, to attain in objectivity a hypothesis (not excluded from being correct, moreover, by reason of the indifference of relation to the difference between *ens reale* and *ens rationis* which provides the basis for the prior possibility of any truth as correspondence, as we have earlier seen) as to the subjective constitution itself (if indeed it has one) of the object known and of the intersubjectivities that would follow upon that nature in a given set of circumstances. To summarize again from the Latins:<sup>14</sup> “Human understanding attains the nature of things existing in the physical world as that nature is not tied to individuating circumstances, even though the things do not exist independently of the understanding except under individual circumstances.”

Thus perception and understanding have in common an attainment of objectivity which does not reduce to the physical surroundings. But what is presented in *perception* as sense-perception is always a network of objects based on sensation as incorporated into perception but rooted as transcending and interpretive of sensation in the subjectivity of the knower, in its biological constitution and heritage, where the objects as terminating the animal’s cognitive and cathectic relations achieve generality not necessarily and, indeed, only incidentally according to what they actually are in their subjective being. The ‘generality’ by which the interpretation of perception structures the objects perceived places those objects wholly in relation to the needs and desires, the biological heritage, of the animal perceiving. *Understanding* as species-specifically human adds to this perception yet a further dimension wherein, thanks to the mind-dependent relation of self-identity which enables the object to be presented outside its exclusive relations to the biological heritage of the perceiver, the semiotic animal makes use of signs to discover (or try to discover) the very subjective constitution itself of the surrounding things which makes them be what they are independently and regardless of what this or that animal makes of them for the purposes of its Umwelt.

So we have perception as incorporative of sensation, and insofar always moored to the subjectivity and intersubjectivity, the “categorical being” or *ens*

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14. Ibid: “natura autem rei quae intelligitur, est quidem extra animam, sed non habet illum modum essendi extra animam, secundum quem intelligitur. intelligitur enim natura communis seclusis principiis individuantibus; non autem hunc modum essendi habet extra animam.”

*reale*, of the surroundings. But when the perception is only sense perception, this *ens reale* element of objectivity is thoroughly subordinated to the needs and desires of the organism perceiving. The animal cares not a whit what things may be as distinct from the objects perceived. It cares only for what is perceived as constituting a menace (–), an opportunity (+), or an irrelevancy (0). But when the perception is also intellectual perception, that is to say, when understanding incorporates sense-perception in just the way that perception incorporates sensation, namely, by adding to its network of revelatory triadic relation yet further triadic relations interpretive of what is revealed, the interpretation in this case by no means eliminates the self-interest of the animal conceiving but *extends it* to include interest in the independent subjectivity and intersubjectivity of the object perceived as a thing in its own right, in contradistinction to its being as object. Thus things are always reached, more or less successfully, only through objects; but understanding tries to reach them consciously in their dimension of *ens reale*, where perception (pure sense perception, the perception of animals who make use of signs without knowing that there are signs) does not extend to them under the guise of being at all but only under their guise as objects rooted in the self-interest of the perceiving animal.

This, of course, is precisely why every Umwelt is a species-specific objective world, shared across species lines only to the degree that the bodily type of the organisms involved permits; but the human objective world has a kind of opening unto being and to the difference between what of reality is socially constructed (thus mixing *ens reale* with *ens rationis*) and what is prior to and independent of social construction as constituting an “environment” that is common to all living things irrespective of their biological differences (*ens reale* in the hardcore sense: the revolution of the earth about the sun even while all men, including the wisest, believe otherwise). This is the distinction between Umwelt as such, i.e., as generically common to all animals, and Umwelt as species-specifically human, which I think is best labeled “Lebenswelt” as revealed in the work of Husserl<sup>15</sup> and (later and better, or at least more in line with the semiotic understanding achieved by the later Latins, which phenomenology as a moment of modern idealism was not) his student Heidegger.<sup>16</sup>

By a curious inversion, then, the human capacity to recognize things in their independent being tends to blind the human individual to the difference between things and objects, especially to the logical priority of objects over things in experience, and to the further priority of signs over objects, inasmuch as it is only through the action of signs, semiosis, that objects are revealed in

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15. Esp. Husserl 1936.

16. Esp. Heidegger 1927.

the first place, and it is only in and through the semiosis of objects that some animals – human animals – are led to discover things in their being independent of objectivity (independent in existence as exercised, not at all independent in their existence as *known* to be exercised), as we have seen. The animals other than human see no difference between objects and things; the human animal sees objects as things. But while the former blindness cannot be remedied, the latter in principle can, once the semiotic animal begins to discriminate the role of relations in the structuring of experience and the suprasubjective status or being of signs *as* relations.

Yet every Umwelt is an “outer” world respecting the psychological subjectivity or “Innenwelt” of the animal. Objective being is never “in the mind”, even though without the mind there would be no objective being at all, and even though, while some objective being is purely objective, some objective being is also physical being able to continue in existence quite well and quite as it is when every living animal ceases to breathe. The Umwelt is public in principle, even though directly accessible in its fulness only for the animal whose species-specific objective world it is. Some Umwelts are shared in part, that is to say, are partially trans-specific; but only the human Umwelt has an opening to the way to explore what is different about the different Umwelts, so that what is species-specific to the human Umwelt is precisely that it is not absolutely limited by the biological type of the animals whose Innenwelt (as psychological subjectivity) sustains that Umwelt, whereas what is species-specific to all other Umwelts is precisely and wholly determined by the biology of the animals within it as their “shared” or “public” environment and space. Both objective world and physical environment, thus, are “outside” the subjectivity of the animal cognizant of its world; but the Umwelt is “outside” wholly as terminating relations as in their proper being always being suprasubjective respecting psychological realities as such, while the physical environment is “outside” as obtaining whether or not it is partially incorporated within an Umwelt or whether or not there is an Umwelt at all. And – notice this – both Umwelt and whatever else it includes objectively of the environment are “inside” the animal’s awareness, not external to it.<sup>17</sup>

So what is “outer” can be in the absence of any “inner”. But what is “outer” in that scenario is not *objectively* outer, but only physically so, as one substance in its subjective being differs from another substance in its subjective being, even

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17. Which gives us the reason why the modern idea of the world as “external” is a quasi-error – “quasi” because the physical universe is in much of its subjective and intersubjective being still outside of our awareness; yet an “error” nonetheless because it is precisely not external to our awareness insofar as our awareness includes it. And that goes for cœnoscopic knowledge (liminally shared with other animals, be it noted) no less than for ideoscopic knowledge.

while and as the two may be physically interacting. Objectivity arises only when and in the physical interaction of two or more physical substances one at least of the interactants is an animal, in which case the interaction partially specifies and determines the awareness of the animal (*species impressa*) semiosically to form and construct a further awareness of its own (*species expressa*) transforming the bare physical into an objective world with which the animal can and must deal according to its biological type.

Purely objective reality is not enough. An Umwelt requires also to incorporate the objectification of what exists subjectively and intersubjectively in the surroundings as well. But without purely objective reality, the subjective realities would neither be known nor able to serve the interests of animal lifeforms dependent upon awareness in order to make their way. Every animal is an idealist, in the sense that it transforms the bare given of physical sensations into an objective and public world shaped according to its needs and desires. But every animal is also a realist, in the sense that if it fails to shape that objective world in a manner that sufficiently incorporates and takes into account the bare physical surroundings it will neither find the food it needs nor escape becoming food. To survive, then, every animal has to be *both* realist *and* idealist – in other words, engage through its awareness in semiosis.

A preliminary sketch of objective being, that is to say, being as known, which is to say being as terminating relations of awareness based in and provenating from as superordinate to the psychological subjectivities of animal life as determinately modified and specified by environmentally governed sensations (*species impressae*, ‘specificative stimuli imposed through interaction with surrounding bodies’) and biological heritage or ‘nature’ as responding actively to fashion specific interpretations (*species expressae*, ‘*phantasiari*’) of these sensations, may be drawn as follows. Later,<sup>18</sup> after discussing focally the matter of socially constructed realities, we will be in a position to fashion a more complete diagram.

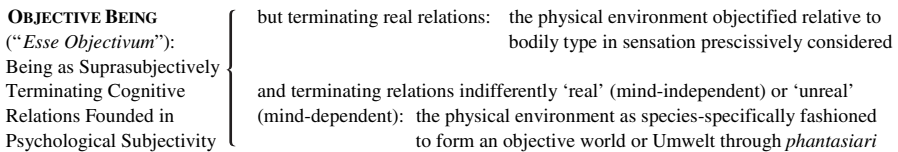


Diagram 6. Preliminary Sketch of Objective Being

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18. See Chapter 7, Diagram 8, p. 117 below.

## Chapter 6

### The Sign – Arbitrariness or Historicity?

So why not just say that objective means whatever exists as known and subjective means whatever exists independently of being known or exists as a thing, and let it go at that?

After all, aren't we in charge of words, the language that we speak? Is not language arbitrary, so that words can mean just what we want them to mean, no more and no less (the "Alice in Wonderland" approach of the Mad Hatter)?

Or, if you think I am confusing *langue* (the system of language as a whole unto itself transcending the individual speakers) with *parole* (the words chosen by an individual to express him or her self within the context *langue* determines), where the former as a complicated system of internal relations between signifiers and signifieds actually controls the words to be spoken or written, and it is only the relation of signifier to signified that is actually arbitrary, such that "tres bien", "very good", and "MHOΓO MHOΓO" mean or 'say' "the same thing" even though there is no internal reason why these particular acoustic images should attach to the signified in question, then it is you that stands in need of correction, as I hope the present chapter will show.

For, unless you want to stipulate<sup>1</sup> that the slash "/" in "*signifiant/signifie*" represents and stands for the missing third element, to wit, the interpretant, the factor to or for which, the factor on the basis of which MHOΓO MHOΓO enables me to convey to a Bulgarian either that something is very good or that it is too much of a good thing, or even if you do want to stipulate some such, the famous "arbitrariness of the sign" – by which is meant a characteristic or feature which distinguishes the signs of species-specifically human linguistic communication as such from the communication of animals whether vocal or gestural (though seldom written) – in a case such as we confront is not very helpful, indeed, perhaps, not helpful at all.

Wittgenstein famously noted, perhaps in a futile gesture against nominalism, that "for a large number of cases, but not in all, the meaning of a word consists in its use in the language".<sup>2</sup> In those "large number of cases" it is to the arbitrariness of the sign and to the subordination of *parole* to *langue* that we can successfully

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1. The ingenious suggestion of Eero Tarasti reported in Deely 2004: 135.

2. Wittgenstein c.1931–50: 42: "For a *large* class of cases – though not for all – the meaning of a word is its use in the language".

look in determining “what we should say” in the circumstances. If I know very little or not a word of Bulgarian, and am in the kitchen of a host who has given me some food, and a third party present tells me my host wants to know if I like what has been served, rather than answering through the third party I may instead grab a dictionary and look up the English word “very”, which I then find has a more-or-less equivalent Bulgarian expression “МНОГО”. Keeping that in mind, I turn to “much” in the dictionary and find, for the Bulgarian, again “МНОГО”. Of course, it makes me wonder if the dictionary maker has not erred; but assuming that not to be the case (after all, it is a *Pons* dictionary), I look to the host and say brightly, “МНОГО МНОГО”, and can tell, as through a confirmatory glance at the third-party bilingual person present, that indeed I have conveyed that I find the food very good indeed.

But, fortunately or unfortunately, as is pretty much the norm when it comes to treating a philosophical question, the “large number of cases” where meaning in use are marginal to useless in determining what needs to be said when it is usage itself that has gone awry. So it is with the family of terms “objective”, “objectivity”, etc. Our problem is that the “use in the language” here is a mess, and the stipulation proposed in opening this chapter to replace the established modern usage has not a prayer of catching on and actually becoming common usage unless it is advanced by an army of argument sufficiently powerful to overcome the fortification of established usage and to plant in its ruin the seed of a new proposal, a *signum ad placitum* – the stipulation with which this chapter opened, in fact – which, with any luck, through the readership of this book and discussion beyond, will establish itself in turn as a new understanding which common usage has to reflect. In this manner, what started out as a *signum ad placitum*, a stipulated or arbitrary sign, will become in its turn a *signum ex consuetudine*, an established and not merely a proposed usage. But in so doing the new usage will change the very understanding and intellectual perception of the world about them for those who adopt or are even influenced by the “new usage”.

Such is the nature of change in the habits of linguistic communication in every language. The arbitrariness of the sign in such cases is a point of departure, no more. It is that aspect of language which, as open to stipulation, allows any given speaker to try his hand determining how the community of inquirers might best think about a given subject matter at a given historical moment. It is the first word, not the last word, and certainly not the only word, that conveys the uniqueness of species-specifically human communication. However, it is the one feature of anthroposemiosis that, perhaps more than any other, appeals to the heritage of Nominalism in philosophy, as we shortly shall see.



Those who play on the arbitrariness of the sign as the essence of language actually miss quite fundamentally the nature of linguistic communication as a reality dependent upon and arising out of *zoösemiosis* itself as providing always the background and context, the “nonverbal inlay”, as I have elsewhere called it,<sup>3</sup> without which linguistic communication could neither exist nor succeed in any case. In fact, in my estimation, the best description of language in this sense (of the species-specifically human linguistic communication consequent upon the exaptation of language as the biologically underdetermined aspect of the human modeling system whereby semiotic animals alone are able, by founding relations upon relations, to picture and to communicate objectivities which do not derive as such from *sentire* or even *phantasiari* but from *intelligere*, from understanding as able to see relations distinct from related things and to reorganize things accordingly under relations not to be found as such in the direct experience of the sensible world) was given not by Wittgenstein or Saussure but by Heidegger.

“Language”, Heidegger said,<sup>4</sup> meaning thereby *langue*, the species-specifically human whole of linguistic communication as a system of irreducibly mind-dependent relations based not simply on the subjectivities of things (as are relations in the order of *ens reale*), but relations based on relations, something that cannot even occur outside the order of *ens rationis* grasped in its contrast to the order of *ens reale*, the result of perceptions – intellectual perception – unique to a semiotic animal, “is the house of being”, the place where that which must and can only be said in many ways finds its home across the generations living and dead, across time. The place where truth is possible (and, along with it, not mere deception but the veritable lie, unfortunately: the price finite understanding has to pay for being finite).

To sum it up in a word, the heart of linguistic communication lies not in *arbitrariness* but in language being a *seinsgeschichtliches Wesen*, “an essence freighted with being”, the means whereby human experience accumulates and brings to bear in structuring the objective world in all of its parts the termini of all the relations collectively sustained by the psychological subjectivities that are the human speakers in linguistic communications, such that the *Umwelt* of human understanding, the *Lebenswelt* of a people, can be conveyed not only to conspecifics now living but even to those yet to be born, providing a means whereby, alone in the human case, understanding can reach across graves and

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3. Deely 1980. But much more thoroughly now Deely 2009d.

4. This was in the *Letter on Humanism* (Heidegger 1947), but it reflects the fact that Heidegger is what he found in climbing the mountain of *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger 1927).

enable voices long dead to influence understanding today as is illustrated in the present case by the understanding of relation initiated by Aristotle's theory of the categories of *ens reale* as developed by Aquinas and applied to semiotics by Poinot (and, later, Peirce).

Well, if objects exist as and at the terminus of relations which are in turn both suprasubjective (as relations) and irreducibly triadic (as sign relations), then we can say that objects in their partial difference from things realized depend on the action of signs in the life of animals, signs which consist in irreducibly triadic relations, in some measure (not inconsiderable) prior to and independent of linguistic communication even in the case of the semiotic animal itself. These relations, the relations constitutive of signs, that is, as eventually also the signs or words and syntax of language have, then, in addition to their direct termination in objects, an indirect termination at the interpretant to or for which the sign-vehicle manifests its significate, its object.

In the original Latin development of semiotic consciousness between Augustine and Poinot we find a clear if gradual movement of the understanding toward a grasp of objectivity according to its distinctive being in principle different from the being of things, even while including something of that being (both formally, in the relations themselves as ontological realities, and terminatively, in the terminus of the relations as able to include and sometimes actually including but never reducible to aspects of subjectivity physically present here and now in the immediate surroundings). So how did it happen in modernity that we got so far off the track as to think that "objectivity" was a term that could or should be used to express hardcore reality instead, that "object" is a synonym for "thing"? especially when we realize that hardcore reality (*ens reale*) most properly consists in subjectivity before all else, the subjectivity of substance with its inherent accidents, individuals interacting, giving rise to intersubjectivity only in and through those physical interactions, while objects commonly turn out to be otherwise than they are presented to be (as in lies) or turn out not to be at all (as in many scientific theories and philosophical arguments, not to mention in fictional tales presented as such)?

The road to the late modern usage of "objectivity" as a term of common speech follows that deviation from the way of signs to the way of ideas that we call mainstream modern philosophy, but it has earlier roots, specifically in the work of William of Ockham, who was the most successful to overturn the understanding of relation as irreducibly intersubjective achieved with such difficulty by Aristotle and developed in the Latin terminology for the question introduced by Boethius, developed by Aquinas, and finally applied full-scale to the question of the being proper to signs and their action by Poinot in the very time that Descartes was beginning to work. In other words, while modernity in

its positive achievements in establishing modern science may be said decisively to have begun in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (not without earlier anticipations, to be sure, just as the official beginning of Spring seldom or never coincides with the first Spring-like days), modernity in its philosophical slide into an idealism unable to account for the inclusion of *ens reale* within the objectivity of animal sense-perception and human understanding was more the flourishing of the Nominalism begun by Ockham than it was any positive development in its own right.

Perhaps no one has better summarized the slide than did Bertrand Russell. “What I maintain”, he said, “is that we can witness or observe what goes on in our heads, and that we cannot witness or observe anything else at all.”<sup>5</sup> And, lest there be any doubt as to his intent in this matter, he applied his words to the whole question of the physical universe at large. “The starry heaven that we know in visual sensation”, he alleges, “is inside us. The external starry heaven that we believe in is inferred”; so that “the whole of what we perceive without inference” – be the perception purely sensory, then, or intellectual perception as well – “belongs to our private world”.<sup>6</sup> This is fully in the Kantian line, where the representations formed by the mind itself and informed by relations of reason are alone attainable in knowledge, while forever hidden behind them are the famous or infamous “Dingen-an-sich”, the subjectivities of substances which make the world be what it is as something that endured prior to and would endure without human knowledge, “unknowable”, according to Kant, in laying down the prime paralogism of modern thought in the area of philosophy which would separate forever objective being from the subjective reality of things around us, including our conspecifics, the community of semiotic animals with whom we marry, beget new generations, and enjoy life together.

All that communication of persons with one another and with their surroundings becomes one grand illusion on the assumptions and central arguments of the Kantian system, which is exactly why Kant is the Master of the Moderns, for he alone had the courage (or the folly) not merely to embrace the modern assumption that, in Latin terms, the active interpretive formations specifying consciousness (*species expressae*) do not begin in *phantasiari*, in perception in contrast with sensation, but are already at play and at the heart of sensation itself, but systematically to demonstrate the consequences of the modern *point de départ*. Sensation itself is not the response only whereby the organism becomes passively and necessarily aware of environmental aspects here and now existing subjectively in their source as acting upon the organs of outer sense, as Aquinas

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5. B. Russell 1959: 26.

6. Ibid: 27.

followed Aristotle in asserting (“*sensatio est actus sensibilis in sensu*”). No. Sensation itself is already an interpretive response, the formation of a specific psychological state presenting an object interpreted *omni ex parte* right from the start. The interpretation can be added to by the higher powers, but objectivity is from the start an interpretation, a “mental image”, not a subjectively existing thing in its own right now made partially to exist also as cognized, apprehended, or known, objectified (as we might say).

Not even sensation, then, provides the least purchase upon which the intellect, beyond while including the interpretations of perception (of *phantasiari*), can revisit with the aim of determining the internal constitution of that subjectivity outside of my body which is stimulating my body to see moving shadows on the wall of the cave (let us say).<sup>7</sup> Solipsism writ large, monads with no windows, is the story of mainstream modern philosophy. It is to this development, above all else, that we owe the current paralogism-laden dictionary entries that we find for the terms “subject” and “object” upon which we have based this present essay. The modern argument is that like minds form like objects under like stimuli, that is all. But what each mind forms is the bubble of objectivity within which each mind lives.

The fact that the bubbles are similar for all conspecifics does not change the fact that *between* the bubbles there are no actual lines of communication, for relations are mind-dependent, *ens rationis*, purely objective, and develop only within minds, not across them, as Aristotle thought mistakenly to be the case with his false idea that relations can also be *ens reale*, that is to say, intersubjectivities which actually create a union between and transcendent to subjectivities, a union that, within knowledge, can then actually form a partial communion between minds, a awareness shared objectively, that is to say, in the object and objects apprehended, a genuine *community* of inquirers each of whom is an individual, yes (a ‘substance’ with its individual characteristics and modifica-

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7. The semiotic consequences of making sensation exactly as perception consist in the active production of a mental representation, a specifying cognitive determination of psychological subjectivity (“*species expressa*”), rather than distinguishing sensation from perception by the former’s not passing as such the boundary of passive stimulation by environmental sources (“*species impressa*”) were explicitly drawn out by Peirce in his *Treatise on Signs*, Book III, Question 2, 310/37–312/6, a passage which concludes with the trenchant summary of what modern thought would take as its philosophical starting point: “But if the object exists in something produced by the sense itself as in an image or effect” – as happens with memory, imagination, and estimation (“*phantasiari*”, in a word) – “then the stimulus will not be apprehended immediately as an environmental source but rather as contained in the image, while the image itself is that which is apprehended”.

tions), but not a simply *isolated* individual (an *ens abosolutum simpliciter*, as Kant conceived of substance<sup>8</sup>): an individual related to other individuals according to various shared objectivities (and not only that of linguistic communication by any means) containing intersubjectivities included among which is a *partial* grasp *exactly* of “the way things are in themselves”, *however limited* that grasp may be (and, as I pointed out in the case wood, much more limited for me than for my friend Sonny McDonald).

Yet it is precisely according to our understanding and grasp of the subjective constitution of existing things that we choose one material over another for building, for example: tin rather than cardboard in seeking shelter from rain. And while the human animal by distinguishing objects from things can systematically undertake the investigation of environmental subjectivities, “things in themselves”, the sense-perception of animals, without having that thematic possibility, nonetheless, is not without a genuine grasp of the constitution of things so far as pertains to its biological heritage in present needs and desires: the cat ДЖИМКА (“Jimmy”, an American might rather say; the cat adapts fine to both *signifiants* with the interpretant of its own *signifié*, a specification of its cognitive subjectivity – *species expressa* – actively expressed through *phantasiari*) in the Bulgarian household where I have a room knows well that it must change the relation between door and jamb in order to enter or exit a room where the door is closed, and it knows how to change that relation through affecting dynamically the door itself (I have observed this directly) – while to the relation itself as a mode of being between door and jamb, distinct from though dependent upon them, it gives not a moment’s consideration, for that relation cannot be perceived, and the cat cannot intellectually conceive.

So the animals other than the semiotic animal are just not aware of their grasp of related things as involving a relation as such in its being different from the subjectivities between which it obtains, and so are not able to thematize and extend their objective experience of intersubjectivities, as semiotic animals are able to do, most notably in creating channels of communication as linguistic (once they have added to their experience of objects the objective relation of self-identity which, though itself an *ens rationis*, a purely objective relation, is nonetheless necessary to sever the exclusive link between objects and the animal interests alone of the perceiving organism), which alone in turn further enable the creation of cultural artifacts within the objective world to which the

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8. Kant 1747: 8: “Since every self-sufficient being contains within itself the complete source of all its determinations, it is not necessary for its existence that it stand in relation to other things. Substances can therefore exist, and yet have no outer relation to things, nor stand in any actual connection with them.”

sense-perception of animals always remains blind, even though they can well apprehend these artifacts in their physical being.

That is one, perhaps the principal one, of the things that semiotics has shown that makes it postmodern rather than modern or late-modern (“ultramodern”, like semiology in its original trajectory). Intellectual culture has no greater debt than the debt of thanks it owes semiotics for restoring to the *res cogitans* its animality, without which language in fact could never have become possible in the first place.

If we look at this rather unhappy development in its philosophical origins, it is mainly to Ockham that we must look. It is not that Bertrand Russell, or Kant before him, did not include relations in their account of knowledge and reality. (Indeed, as far as Kant is concerned, it was the treatment of mental representations as giving rise to objects at their terminus that distinguished him from the founding fathers of modern philosophy, Descartes and Locke.<sup>9</sup> But the decisive step he never took. The relations Kant considered were through and through objective relations, never ontological ones. The uniqueness of relation as a mode of being indifferent to existing as such – as relation – in objectivity alone or in *ens reale* as well as intersubjectivity never crossed his consciousness.) It is rather that the relations the post-Kantian moderns include are conceived as exclusively mind-dependent relations, which is to miss the point about what is ontologically unique and constitutive of *all* relations as suprasubjective modes of being, namely, their indifference to provenance in having external circumstances decide whether a relation belongs in any given case to *ens reale* or to *ens rationis*. Yes, even a relations which has its origin in thought, or “in mind” as objective, is not in anywise prevented by that fact from also being intersubjective, bringing thereby through its terminus something of *ens reale* itself into the objective order.

For the *relatio secundum esse*, or ontological relation, is of itself neither *ens reale* nor *ens rationis* but the rationale of suprasubjectivity which can be realized in either or both orders, in the order of *ens reale* alone as an intersubjective reality, in the order of *ens rationis* alone as a purely objective reality, or in the objective order as an intersubjective reality which is also known to exist as *ens reale* (or even mistakenly as a socially constructed intersubjective reality which, apart from the social construction, would belong to the order of purely objective reality, but which, thanks to the social construction, participates in that measure in *ens reale* as well as in *ens rationis*).

It is the essence of nominalism: the denial that relation as a mode of being has any reality of its own over and above the the subjectivity of multiple individ-

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9. See the details of analysis in Deely 2001: 556–575, esp. 554–55 & 557 text and note 24.

uals apart from comparisons made in awareness, through which comparisons alone relations may be said to exist as something other than (i.e., something superordinate to the subjectivity of) the related objects or things, the “objects of comparison”.<sup>10</sup> And perhaps the reader is in a position now to understand why. The doctrine that our awareness remains always external to what things are in themselves, that our nothing of thing amounts to no more than and reduces to the resistances encountered in the world of bodies, is certainly the brunt of the Kantian heritage of thought. By why would such an obtuse doctrine, a doctrine so contrary to the scientific development in every sphere and even to the experience of the serious workman with wood, for example, take and maintain a hold so tenacious as finally to be weakening only somewhat and only after dominating the three centuries of modernity?

The answer, it seems to me, lies in the consequences of consciously adopting the view that apart from the mind there exist only individual subjectivities with their subjective characteristics. Recall our Illustration in Chapter 2 of the intrinsic order of dependency among the ontological levels of hardcore reality,<sup>11</sup> *ens reale*, along with Diagrams 3 and 4, respectively,<sup>12</sup> on the doctrine of relation after Aquinas and after Poinset, together with Diagram 5 which showed<sup>13</sup> the terminology proposed by Boethius that implied the overlap through ontologi-

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10. A fair summary of the tangled historical discussion may perhaps be distilled in the following extract from Poinset 1632: Second Preamble, Article 1, 80/15–81/4: “aliqui existimaverunt nihil aliud esse [relationes secundum esse] quam . . . aliquid rationis; quod Nominalibus attribui solet . . . Unde non in respectu, sed in comparatione relationes constituunt; in re autem . . . nihil aliud est relatum quam res absoluta cognita per comparationem ad aliud.” – “Some have thought that the ontological reality of relations has only the status of a cognitive creation; which is a position attributed in particular to the Nominalists . . . Whence they constitute relations not in a respect but in a comparison, while holding that independently of thought something related is nothing more or other than some individual thing that is considered in thought through a comparison with something else.” Especially noteworthy, it seems to me, is that this very same assessment of what makes Nominalism be Nominalism (of the “essence” of Nominalism, if you like, though the term ‘essence’ has become so polluted in the resistance traditional philosophy put up to the ever-increasing evidence of science that no part of the universe is free from change and evolution that I almost hate to use it) was arrived at independently at the end of modern times by philosophers as different in background as Charles Peirce (1903: CP 1.19; c.1905: CP 8.208; 1909: CP 1.27; *et alibi passim*) and Jacques Maritain (1959: 8). In general, consult the Index entry “Nominalism” in Deely 2001: 941–42.

11. See p. 51 above.

12. See Diagrams 3 and 4 above, pp. 42 and 53, respectively.

13. See p. 55 above.

cal relation of mind-dependent and mind-independent being. The Latin advance consequent upon Aristotle's demonstration of the uniqueness of intersubjectivity as a proper category expressive of the irreducibly distinct "ways in which τὸ ὄν must be said" to be exhibited through experience as realized mind-independently lay in their calling attention to the further fact that relation within the order of *ens reale* is the only instance of *ens reale* that exhibits a positive structure<sup>14</sup> which is *also* realized as such by *ens rationis*, and pointing out the further consequence that one and the same instance of that positive structure objectively existing could pass back and forth between *ens reale* and *ens rationis* depending on circumstances of which the one aware of the relationship might or might not be aware.

Thus, from the standpoint of the animal aware of its world, a relation estimated or judged to be real could in fact be fictive, and conversely, for it is not the estimation of a relation that makes it belong to the order of *ens reale*, but the prevailing circumstances within *ens reale*. Since objects depend upon cognitive relations as providing the being of termini as such, objects too participate in the indifference of relation itself as a mode of being to the reality (mind-independence) or unreality (mind-dependence) of those objects. But whereas objects mistakenly thought to be substances or intrinsic modifications of substance are not substances but termini of relations only, objects mistakenly thought to be intersubjective relations are still relations and suprasubjective as such; so that all objects, the whole of objectivity, consists irreducibly in a structure of relationships as such indifferent to the difference between 'real' and 'fictive', because what decides the difference between objects which are real and objects which are fictive is not the relations or network of relations constitutive of the objective world as such but the subtending network of interacting subjectivities and modifications thereof, including the intersubjective consequences of such modifications. Thus, just as nothing prevents a thing from becoming an object, so nothing prevents an object from being or becoming a thing, depending upon the circumstances prevailing in any given region of the physical universe with its subjectivities psychological as well as physiological and merely physical.

So when we say that an object necessarily involves a relation to a knower, whereas a thing involves such a relation only contingently, we are speaking a truth, but not yet in such a way as to foreground the fact that the object as object *depends* upon that relation as being its terminus, not simply as being extraneously involved in some adventitious circumstance. The key insight is not barely that a thing as object necessarily involves a relation to a knower; the key insight is that a thing as object terminates a relation with a knower, and that

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14. Or "essence", in the traditional language.



this termination as such owes its being to the relation even when it exists *also* subjectively so that its being as terminus is only part – the apprehended or known part – of its subjective being exhibited objectively (as when a fugitive is spotted fleeing, for example). The object thus, but not the thing, *formally* depends in its being upon the relation through which it is manifested as a self-representation based upon the other-representation constitutive of psychologically subjective states in their difference from physiological and bare physical subjectivity.

If we simply say that objects involve a relation to a knower, then, we have not yet overcome the tendency embedded in common usage to confuse or conflate object and thing. For a thing that *happens* to come into apprehensive relation to a knower *happens* also to become an object, but it does so *only insofar as* it enters into that relationship, and only because of *the being of the relation itself as involving correlatively a fundament and a terminus suprasubjectively linked*. And while the being of the thing as thing does not need the relation of apprehension in order to exist, the thing as object exists only as and so long as the relation giving it being as terminus exists. And this ‘relation of apprehension’, always suprasubjective, will be also intersubjective under either of two conditions: that its terminus along with the knower exist subjectively prior to and along with the relation as manifesting it objectively; or that the terminus though no longer (or even never, or perhaps just not yet) obtaining in the order of *ens reale* subjectively is yet attained in common by two knowers actually existing whose respective objective worlds in respect of this object enjoy a partial overlap, with the consequence that while the relation between the knowers and the object known is no longer intersubjective the objective relation between the knowers themselves in respect to that partially common object is intersubjective (and here we see the unmistakable triadicity of the relation of apprehension as triadic). A memorial service for a dead loved one fulfills exactly the conditions for this latter situation, as do many other social and cultural circumstances.

So an object, even when it is in fact identical in some measure with a subjectively existing *ens reale* (never completely identical, be it noted, save in a knowledge such as the theologians attribute to God: awareness of a thing in itself is one matter, *exhaustive and complete* awareness of the subjective being of any individual, or even of the intersubjectivities in which it is or has been or will be involved, is quite another matter), as happens in sensation prescissively considered and also in sense-perception necessarily insofar as the perception incorporates sensation and contingently insofar as the perception depends upon the memory, imagination, and estimation of the animal perceiving, whether the perception be also intellectual or only sense-perception, is always in principle

distinct from that *ens reale*, as anyone recalling a lost lover or waiting for a present one to show up can amply attest.

The being of the terminus of a relation of apprehension when its distinction in principle from the order of *ens reale* is realized also in fact is tenuous indeed, but it is never simply an aspect of the subjectivity of the animal that apprehends. For the lover mourning a lost love or the lover awaiting the arrival of a present love is not simply waiting for something in his or her mind, but something in the order of hardcore reality subjectively as well as objectively existing (or so the expectant lover hopes, though, as Aristotle would remind him or her, “when things are beyond our perception it is a mystery whether still they actually exist” – something all too fully discovered by the Finnish lover en route to a rendezvous in Helsinki at the Sibellius monument who at first thought his girlfriend had decided not to come, only later to discover that she had been killed by a meteor half-way to the rendezvous: a horrible tale which I have reported elsewhere in detail<sup>15</sup> and so will not repeat the whole awful story here.

But notice, again from Diagrams 3 and 4 above,<sup>16</sup> that this whole experience of objectivity as able to reveal the world of nature as well as worlds of fiction and the socio-cultural world (the *Lebenswelt* as a whole, we might say, as the species-specifically human Umwelt) wherein *ens reale* and *ens rationis* inextricably intertwine, as we further shall see in the next Chapter, is possible only in and through the ontological constitution of relation as positively indifferent to its provenance in being always suprasubjective, even when it is sustained by a single psychological subjectivity here and now. For it is in *adesse*, not *inesse*, that the two orders of being (*ens reale*) and nonbeing (*ens rationis*), of subjective and intersubjective realities objectified and purely objective reality, meet and penetrate one another.

But once the mind-independent reality of relation as able to exist intersubjectively (‘categorially’) **as well as** purely objectively is removed and relation is mistaken for an objective comparison *omni ex parte* mind-dependent, this passage or interface whereby the structures of *ens reale* can pass over into the order of *ens rationis* and the creations of *ens rationis* pass over into the structures of *ens reale* is removed. The two orders are now irreducibly and forever distinct, each locked unto itself, as it were; so it will only be a question of time until those holding this position will have to face the unwelcome consequences (so much the worse for fabled “common sense”) that objectivity and subjectivity are

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15. On Monday, September 9, 2002, to a session of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Early Fall School of Semiotics held annually by the Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies of Sofia’s New Bulgarian University at St Kyrik.

16. See pp. 41 and 53, respectively, above.

*opposed* orders which neither have nor can have any interpenetration beyond the subjectivity of the knower as *res cogitans*.

This can effectively be shown in a re-drawing of Diagram 1<sup>17</sup> above more directly and fully to show Ockham’s view in contrast with both Aristotle and the Latins upon whom I have mainly drawn in thinking about this quintessentially postmodern problem for semiotics: how can there be a common interface, as Sebeok posited the sign in its action to provide,<sup>18</sup> between nature and culture, between φύσις and νόμος? Notice that there is no such interface in Ockham’s scheme, the scheme adopted in principle by all the moderns, ‘rationalist’ and ‘empiricist’ alike, to say nothing of the synthesis of the two mainstream modern currents in the dominating work of Immanuel Kant.

Here then is a diagrammatic presentation of Ockham’s scheme the more easily comparable on the point in question with the schemes of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Poinot, above,<sup>19</sup> as well as with our concluding diagram of objective being as a whole within the Lebenswelt of the semiotic animal:

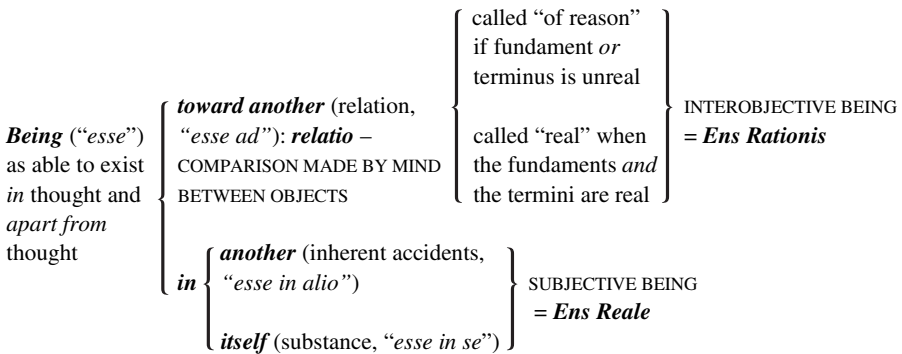


Diagram 7. After OCKHAM (†1349): Relation Excluded from the Notion of Categorical Being as Ens Reale; Relations Occur as Objective Modes Within Subjectivity through Mental Activity. (How mental subjectivity and physical subjectivity – ‘entia realia’ – are united in objectivity is initially assumed but not accounted for; later will be resolved with Kant’s “2<sup>nd</sup> Copernican Revolution” claiming that there is no uniting but only a determining from the side of thought)

17. See p. 25.

18. Sebeok 1975.

19. For Aristotle, see above Chapter 2, p. 29 Diagram 2; for Aquinas and for Poinot, see Chapter 3, p. 42 Diagram 3 and p. 53 Diagram 4, respectively. On the matter of objective being as a whole, see Chapter 7, p. 117 Diagram 8.

There remains, as you can graphically see, only the two distinct orders of *ens rationis* on the side of objectivity and *ens reale* on the side of subjectivity, with a “no passage” between them, no prior junction in  $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$  as *primum cognitum* wherein the objectivities of experience have not yet begun to be sorted out through the experience of resistances that will slow by slow make plain that neither are the objects of our experience wholly reducible to our experience of them nor are all of those objects capable of existing apart from the experience in which we encounter them.

In short, Aquinas and, in the explicit terms of a doctrine of signs, Poincaré after him, show that Aristotle’s doctrine of relation as a mind-independent reality of  $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$  is the key to understanding our experience of the overlap between fact and fiction, such that, even in trying to tell a lie, by accident we might in fact speak the truth.<sup>20</sup> The rejection of that doctrine makes of the distinction between things and objects a complete diremption, an opposition rather than a factual divergence which can in principle be sorted out and sometimes overcome in making the very subjective being itself of things enter into the order of objectivity by sustaining the termini of real relations as more than *mere* termini. And *voilà!* the turn toward psychological subjectivity and an epistemology without ontological roots has begun, a turn which will lead to the full-blown Way of Ideas and solipsistic modern philosophy after Descartes, along with Locke and Hume, has been fully taken account of in the transcendental idealism of Immanuel Kant declaring the order of *ens reale* itself a fiction, or rather an unknowable realm forever closed to human knowledge.

It is just that frontier of the ‘unknowable’ that semiotics as the doctrine of signs manages to cross, and in doing so introduces the postmodern era of intellectual culture so far as the life of the mind includes philosophy. It is a new dawn, a new era, where even “common sense” can come back into its own, as Reid, Lagrange, Maritain, Peirce, and many others hoped throughout the modern darkness. It is nothing less than the beginning of *postmodern* times.

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20. Another embarrassing tale of academic experience, where two students got drunk the night before a final exam, and one of them could not wake up the next morning. Covering for his friend, the first student told the professor that his friend had been hospitalized, then, worrying that his friend might come to the exam late and expose his lie, raced through the questions then raced back to the room to make sure that his friend got the story straight when he requested a make-up exam from the stern professor. Imagine the first student’s surprise when he returned to an empty room where excited friends from the adjoining room told him that shortly after he had left for the exam his hung-over friend had forced himself to arise, but before he could get to the exam late or even out of the dorm building, he had collapsed and an ambulance had whisked him away to the hospital!

Let us conclude the chapter, then, by casting the semiological notion of sign as “arbitrary” in the full perspective of the postmodern doctrine of signs, not as presupposing and taking for granted, as it were, the modern “epistemological” or “critical” standpoint, but rather as semiotics is developing its own standpoint on the basis of its own paradigm, to wit, the understanding of sign in terms of the being proper to itself as an instance of relation. For the sign appears as *anything but* “arbitrary” when it comes to be viewed not in terms of some pre-existing paradigm developed from outside the perspective of semiotics, such as that of linguistics. The pre-existing standpoints established within modernity by the special sciences are inadequate to the problem of the sign precisely because the being of the sign as such cannot be restricted to any one such standpoint but requires a standpoint, exactly as Poincaré put it in opening his *Treatise*, that transcends restriction either to *ens reale* or *ens rationis*; and the action of signs consequent upon the sort of being signs are permeates all those standpoints and penetrates their boundaries in a manner discomfiting to the “specialist” not used to what cannot be presupposed, but simply must be used whether to warrant or to undermine specialized presuppositions.

In short, the problem of the sign is not that it is “arbitrary” but that it transcends the limits of every point of view and requires the understanding to follow, not lead, when the understanding tries to impose the limitations of specialized presuppositions on the action of signs. This is nothing less than the problem of transcendence – not “arbitrariness” – that the sign presented from its first general formulation in Augustine. Wherever the sign acts it carries within its action a history, and that is what the notion of “arbitrariness” glosses over. In making possible culture as distinct from nature in the first place, the sign, already pregnant with the gestation of a cultural world within nature, did not simply break with nature but extended nature itself into a new realm where the action of signs as anthroposemiosis opened to the infinite and revealed the extent of a possibility that had been developing in nature all along the path of what has heretofore been termed “evolution”, namely, the possibility for the mind to understand all things and through that understanding to acquire responsibility for all things.

In other words, just as zoösemiosis implied the possibility of anthroposemiosis, so anthroposemiosis opened the possibility of semiotics; and the realization of that possibility, in turn, implied the need for a semioethics. And zoösemiosis itself was but the manifestation at a new level and across a new threshold of the possibility of objective being inherent in the suprasubjective being of relation previously realized in exclusively or mainly intersubjective forms.

It would be far more accurate to speak of the *pregnancy of the sign* than of the “arbitrariness of the sign”; for in the interactions of physical nature giving rise to relations in the first place already was seeded the possibilities of objectivity

and understanding that emerged actually only much later, when critical thresholds were crossed – the threshold of zoösemiosis in the case of objectivity, the threshold of anthroposemiosis in the case of understanding. And it is precisely the world that human intelligence is given to understand through the attainment of a critical objectivity, that is to say, an objectivity not only able to include the subjectivity of physical and psychological being, but an objectivity within which these various inclusions are able to be *discriminated and sorted out* under the transcendence of the sign finally realized in the birth of human understanding. To see this magnificent development and flowering of nature as the achievement of “arbitrariness” is the manifestation of a staggering myopia, the myopia wherein and whereby modern philosophy sought to replace the *animal rationale* of ancient and medieval thought with the *res cogitans* of modernity, a thinking thing above and apart from the rest of nature, which it could only guess at hidden behind a veil of misunderstood objectivity in which the psychological states – particularly the cognitive ones – that have as their whole purpose to objectify and relate to the self the surrounding environment were (mis)conceived rather as being *themselves the objects directly experienced*; and nothing extended this modern misapprehension further into the study of the action of signs than Saussure’s definition of the “*signifié*”, the “signified”, continuing the modern mainstream philosophical notion of the interiority of human awareness as the limit, the *ne plus ultra*, of understanding.

So let us conclude this chapter by freeing, or at least trying to free (for its advocates are deeply entrenched in their Kantian resistance to the continuity of human life with the animal kingdom from which science, by doing what the philosophers all along ridiculed as impossible, has given us every reason to think human beings emerged, even if by a stroke or single step<sup>21</sup>), even the semiological

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21. The semiotic animal, like every animal, and like animal life itself, underwent a long gestation in nature, a long “pregnancy”. But from its original “conception” it differed in being able to know that there are signs *as well as* to use them, by virtue of being able to pre-sciss relation in its suprasubjective proper being distinct from related objects or things. The “rational animal” of the ancients and medievals was not free of the weakness for thinking that the world of νομος was its own invention, cut out of whole cloth, as it were, and owing nothing to the “inferior” world of φυσικ which humans were ‘free’ to dominate as they liked, linked to it as they were by no more than extrinsic connections. The history of sophism in this regard is as old as philosophy itself; and this weakness or liability to misconstrue or outright deny the intrinsic dependency of νομος on φυσικ was exactly what Descartes (and after him the whole philosophical mainstream up to Peirce, who said unhesitatingly to the moderns what Hegel had earlier tried to say, but hesitatingly and without much success) exploited in replacing the *animal rationale* with the pure consciousness of the *res cogitans*. The

notion of sign of its unnecessary and counter-productive mainstream modern philosophical “epistemological” influences. Let us see if we cannot interpret Saussure’s view of the “arbitrary” in the sign in a somewhat more balanced way, by reviewing it in the full perspective of the doctrine of signs not as an offshoot of some previously established standpoint, such as that of linguistics, or indeed modern philosophy, but as adopting a standpoint based on the paradigm proper to itself, to wit, the understanding of sign in terms of its proper being as an instance of relation and of the consequent transcendence that the sign confronts us with from its first general formulation in Augustine as verified neither in nature nor in culture (let alone language) exclusively, but in both.

In short, let us conclude by examining the phenomenon of so-called “arbitrariness” of the sign within anthroposemiosis in the light of the remark made by Paul Bouissac at the sixth annual meeting of the Semiotic Society of America on the 2nd of October, 1981, in his presentation, “Figurative vs. Objective Semiosis.” All previous semiotic “theories,” he observed, be they Greimasian,

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realization of the proper being of the human as an *animal semeioticum* puts an end to that foolishness, and just as the action of signs in anthroposemiosis transcends the limits of that same action in zoösemiosis but does not do away with it and continues to depend upon it, so the semiotic animal now is in a position to realize that in consciously seizing upon the transcendence of the sign to the world of objectivity no less than to the world of nature in order to create the order of νομος, this achievement does not sever all ties with the order of φυσικη but, on the contrary, creates in its own turn a responsibility of the semiotic animal for the rest of nature in assessing the consequences of the developments of νομος, neglect of which responsibility eventually imperils the well-being or even survival of the semiotic animal itself as the price of wrongly conceiving the transcendence of anthroposemiosis over zoösemiosis and of νομος over φυσικη as an independence pure and simple. That is exactly the weakness or failure of thought which is embodied in the expression “arbitrariness of the sign”. It is not arbitrariness, but the full flowering from within nature of the transcendence of the sign, its pregnancy for the understanding, rooted in the unique being of relation itself which points toward that transcendence from the first moment of its appearance even at the level of bare physical interactions, as we have seen. The sign proves to be nothing less than nature’s way of transcending itself; not by leaving φυσικη behind in creating culture (Sebeok 1977a: 183), but by bringing it rather to full flower and openness to the infinite. Thus, “semiosis is a pervasive fact of nature as well as of culture” (Sebeok 1977a: 183); and in fact with νομος we are dealing precisely with “that minuscule part of nature that we call culture” (Sebeok 1984), wherein the “arbitrariness of the sign” is actually the opening of the Umwelt to the objectivization of the subjective structure of things whereby they are precisely “things in themselves”, existing independently of the intentions of animal life, as well as objects of sensation and perception.

Saussurean, Peircean, Poinsonian, have come to the study of signs late in the day, on the basis of a thoroughly worked out system of concepts, a “pre-existing philosophical paradigm.” To this pre-jacent paradigm, then, their subsequent notions of signification were referred and required to conform. The coming of age of semiotic as a perspective in its own right requires exactly the reverse. It can have no paradigm of philosophy given in advance. Beginning with the sign, that is, from the function of signs in our experience taken in their own right (semiosis), it is the task of semiotic to create a new paradigm – its own – and to review, criticize, and correct so far as possible all previous accounts of experience in the terms of *that* paradigm. What happens when we look at the semiological conception of cultural, and especially linguistic, signs as “arbitrary”, “unmotivated”, in the light of what semiotics has been able to accomplish so far in arriving at a self-understanding based directly on the consideration of semiosis first of all, rather than of something else first of all and only therefrom semiosis?

The ontological feature distinctive of relation as such wherever relation is verified is its indifference in objectivity to its subjective ground, an indifference rooted in and consequent upon the positive structure of relation as in every case suprasubjective. It is this feature which enables the animal to think the environment, “*phantasiari*”, in relation to its dreams, even though the environment in its physical subjectivity is indifferent to those dreams. The tree does not grow in the area of the stream to the end that the beaver will have material for the dam it wants to build, but that’s the way the beaver sees the tree when the time is right. So it is the ontological indifference of relation to the difference between *ens reale* and *ens rationis* which enables it to obtain sometimes intersubjectively alone, sometimes only objectively, sometimes both intersubjectively and objectively. And it is this feature which, once relation is grasped in its difference from objects or things related, makes it possible for semiotic animals to exapt some among the relations consequent upon their psychological states as provenating an objective world to establish linguistic communication, the only system of animal communication that is freed from the total subordination of Umwelt as perceived and including something of the physical environment (through sensation, as we have seen) to the animal within the Umwelt.

The motivation in the formation of such a communication channel is to intersubjectivize a way of modeling the world (Innenwelt) that presents the objective world modeled (Umwelt) as possessing or possibly possessing features that go beyond anything that can be directly exhibited in sense perception. It is the crossing of the frontier of understanding that requires the exaptation in question, the introduction into the Umwelt of a new kind of sign-vehicle, one the sensible features of which as such give no direct clue – nothing that can be sensed as such or, consequently, sense-perceived – to the objective content



the one employing the sign “has in mind”. Of course, the objective content as such is not in his mind, only the *species impressa intelligibilis*, a subjective specification of psychological subjectivity, the psychological state giving rise through a relation to an objective aspect of the Umwelt seen under the aspect of self-identity, i.e., under the aspect of independent of subordination to the subject aware of it as suprasubjective, something that can become intersubjective if only the conspecific to whom the new kind of sign is directed can pick up enough clues in turn to modify *its* Innenwelt along the lines that will engender a new aspect of the objective world overlapping the suprasubjective objectification at which the speaker’s thought (“species expressa”) terminates and which motivates his attempt to convey by a linguistic sign this new objective content.

If the effort succeeds, the object of the original semiotic animal’s conception, as such suprasubjective, will now become intersubjective as well, not in itself, necessarily (for that will depend entirely on the sort of objectivity being conveyed), but at least between the two semiotic animals now linked by an objective relation which has brought about a new aspect of overlap within their individuated but species-specifically common objective world. It is the beginning of the transformation of Umwelt into Lebenswelt, where things can now appear in their difference from objects, at least in particular cases (for, as we well know from the history of the semiotic animal, often as not it gets the two as confused as any animal or moreso, for only the semiotic animal thinks things in their difference from objects in the first place).

Saussure calls this new kind of sign “arbitrary”, not because it is uniquely subject to manipulation (which it is), but mainly because the sound or mark or gesture (the “word” or “*signifiant*”) in question has no motivation in its physical or subjective reality as directly exemplified in or through sense-perception that indexically links it to the content (“*signifié*”) of speaker and/or hearer’s Innenwelt sufficient to account for the resulting objective alteration of the public sphere of the objective world, the Umwelt-now-becoming-Lebenswelt. The feature of linguistic (and post-linguistic) communication that Saussure identifies does indeed exist and is indeed a distinguishing feature. But the choice of the term “arbitrary” to name that feature already demonstrates the influence on Saussure of the modern “epistemological stance”, for the feature can only be called “arbitrary” when it has been subjected to a one-sided, unbalanced appraisal made from the standpoint of the psychology of the semiotic animal.

Within the animal semiosis where the transcendence of the being of signs over the order of *ens reale* (not just over subjectivity, as in Aristotle’s categories, but over the *whole order* of *ens reale* as including also the categorial or necessarily intersubjective relations) first manifests itself, namely, in the seizure upon the possibility of linguistic communication from within anthroposemiosis, what will

later appear from a one-sided modern appraisal to be “arbitrary”, “unmotivated”, appears rather *in relation to Umwelt as well as, as perceptually correlative with, Innenwelt* as the full realization *de facto* of the distinction between objects and things which began in principle with the *de facto* identification of object and thing in animal sensation prescissively considered as the selective but not interpretive origin of objectivity providing perception the seminal awareness upon and in terms of which perception in its turn will interpret the environment. This interpretation, as we have seen, will always be *first* in terms of the species-specific self-interest of the organism; but then, in the semiosis of the semiotic animal, *also* in terms of the indifference to animal interests that the subjective dimension of the being of those objects manifests as belonging to a world of “things”.

This being of things, both partially manifested within but also as exceeding finite objectification at any given time, enters the animal Umwelt only for the animal capable of thinking the objective world under the mind-dependent relation of self-identity. And while the whole objective world of every animal is shot through with mind-dependent relations (otherwise the Umwelt would in nowise differ from the bare physical environment, as we have seen, and the animal could not make its surroundings into a familiar world), these relations *as such* are no part of the animal’s thematic awareness or interest. It is the *related things objectified* that consumes the whole of animal attention. Only when an animal comes along that can separate in awareness relations from relateds, and conceive the latter as somehow independent of the perception, whether in whole or part (for it will spend the rest of its life trying to sort this matter out), does the way of signs open, the path of the semiotic animal as the only animal that, besides using signs, knows that there are signs, and begins to fashion a new kind of sign that no other animal of any other species will be able to apprehend in the way that the semiotic animal apprehends it. After that, there will not only be a social world, but also a cultural world, a Lebenswelt, an objective world to which only the semiotic animal has direct and full access through the species-specific channel of linguistic communication which it itself has created within anthroposemiosis.

To see in this novel development of semiosis mainly something “arbitrary” is quite to miss the far more fundamental point (and not only the history of semiology over the twentieth century, but also the history of sophism beginning among the ancient Greeks, testifies to this) that anthroposemiosis in its distinctive features is possible in the first place only by reason of the peculiarity which distinguishes relation in its positive being already at the level of *ens reale*, the physical universe even prior to the advent of life, let alone animal life; and that anthroposemiosis in its distinctive features is possible further only by

reason of the objective being which arises through the psychology of animals not in its subjectivity as such but in its necessarily giving rise to suprasubjective relations terminating at an objective world that partially incorporates but partly also transcends the things as such of the physical surroundings; in short that anthroposemiosis in its distinctive feature is possible only as the full realization and actualization of the objective being of relations as indifferent in objectivity to their subjective termini and grounds, something that is present but not consciously realized or realizable in an animal restricted to *phantasiari* in its difference from *intelligere*, which is to present the world of objects always in subordination to the animals needs and interests, with no way to extend that interest to the subjective and intersubjective constitution of things in their difference from objects.

In other words, anthroposemiosis, through the being proper to relation, is continuous with the semiosis of animals in creating an objective world in the first place, and through the necessary but partial incorporation within that objective world of the subjectivity of environmental things is continuous with nature itself as the original source of relations as intersubjective being. Indeed, were it not for this continuity, neither science as the exploration of the physical universe nor philosophy as the clarification of the cœnoscopic grounds of that possibility and of the attendant responsibilities could arise.

And here Bankov's idea of the twofold "resistance" that anthroposemiosis encounters,<sup>22</sup> one from the side of things in the environment, another from the side of the social organization itself within which anthroposemiosis fashions its objective world as *Lebenswelt*, reveals how profoundly anthroposemiosis, even while giving rise to culture as something more than the social relations of other animals, remains in continuity with *zoösemiosis*. On the side of things, that is to say, in relation to sense-perception ("*phantasiari*"), "the obstacle is to separate that representation out from our desires, expectations, and dreams."<sup>23</sup> But on the side of our intersubjective relations with conspecifics, we also encounter constraining elements, again objective "resistance", but of a rather different kind, since it consists now not in the subjectivity of things but in the intersubjectivity of the relations provenating from the psychological subjectivity of our colleagues and, more generally, of those with whom we live, especially as part of a "linguistic community". Thus, for example, "when an unobvious statement needs to be defended before the scientific community, we are deep inside a social space"<sup>24</sup> whose 'resistance' is quite different from the resistance of things. Yet notice that,

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22. Bankov 2004: 175–181.

23. *Ibid.* 176.

24. *Ibid.* 177.

though the resistance is of a different sort in the two cases, the overcoming of the resistance by the understanding is in both cases the same: it consists in the objectification, the bringing into fuller awareness, of the “otherness” rooted in a subjective reality other than the subjectivity of the knower.

The objectification that natural science is concerned with, nonetheless, bases itself above all on the ‘resistance of things’, while the objectification that social science and to some extent the humanities is concerned with bases itself on the ‘intersubjective resistance’ of established customs, the habit-structure of the community. The natural sciences want to objectify the subjectivity of the things of the surrounding environment, “hardcore reality”, as we have put it. Not only is far from the whole of reality hardcore, but also even that part of reality which is hardcore depends for its becoming more and more known upon a context of socially constructed objectivity through which the *ens reale/ens rationis* distinction becomes manifest, and the social construction of reality, the construction of species-specific objective worlds, as we have seen, is the business of zoösemiosis before it becomes a further possibility for anthroposemiosis.

What Saussure called the “arbitrariness” of the sign, in fact, is something much more profound. It is nothing less than the threshold of the possibility of purely objective realities, the interface between  $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$  – indeed, rightly understood, it is, as Sebeok said, the intersection of the two. Respecting this nexus, the notion of “arbitrariness” considers only one side of the equation, a one-sidedness that distorts what is at play, the reason and role of what it names. Integrally considered, we confront here not a question of arbitrariness so much as a question of fulfillment – the realization in anthroposemiosis of the full possibilities virtually introduced into nature by the being proper to relation. For it is in that being – the being proper to relation ontologically considered – that is included the possibility of the eventual development of a  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$  transcendent to  $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and of an “epistemological” dimension to being in general, indeed, as *ens rationis* is transcendent to *ens reale*, and socially constructed reality is transcendent to hardcore reality. But the latter terms are made possible in the first place by the terms they transcend, and ignore that ground of their prior possibility at their peril, as we are leaning with global warming. So the consequences of the modern denial of the ontological character of relation as realizable in *ens reale* as well as *ens rationis* have not only led to a sterilization of so-called epistemology, but begin to manifest themselves in the practical order of human affairs as well.

Consider the lie, a basic semiotic phenomenon, so basic that Umberto Eco once<sup>25</sup> famously proposed a definition of semiotics as anything that can be

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25. Eco 1976.

used to lie, and Thomas Sebeok demonstrated the origins of the phenomenon in zoösemiosis.<sup>26</sup> Animals certainly make extensive use of subterfuge and deception (as do plants, for that matter).<sup>27</sup> Should we go so far as to say that they lie? If by “lie” is meant “deliberately deceive”, then the answer is that animals certainly do lie. But if by “lie” is meant a deliberate deceit which depends for its success on linguistic communication, then only semiotic animals lie. Taken in either sense, however, the phenomenon of deceit already transcends the cause-effect dyadic interaction of physical subjectivities. It already stands as a phenomenon of objectivity, not of subjectivity per se. And it already exhibits what Saussure, unfortunately, by virtue of being overly steeped in the influences of modern philosophy on intellectual culture, called “the arbitrariness of the sign”. I entered a mini-bus in Sofia yesterday with the question, “Orlov most?” The driver shook his head “No”, so I began to exit, whereupon he gestured emphatically for me to stay. It turns out that he did not shake his head “No”. He shook his head “Yes”; but I was not aware of the Bulgarian custom that is the reverse in this matter of head movements of the custom established in my homeland. That too is Saussure’s “arbitrariness”: but what it really is, is the transcendence of objectivity over the world of subjective being and *ens reale*. It is the freedom of the sign to establish communication at the level of perception and thought through an intersubjectivity that is of a higher order than the intersubjectivity established in consequence of physical interaction as such.

Most, if not all, animals make use, thus, of arbitrary signs. My dog in Houston knows well that a shaking of the head from side to side means “No”. If I brought him to Bulgaria and at the same time adopted the Bulgarian custom of shaking my head from side to side to mean “Yes”, Bethóven would be confused at first, but I assure you that it would not take him long to realize that, for reasons beyond his ken and bound to remain so (since the only way of manifesting them would be through the very channel of linguistic communication that his Innenwelt, restricted to *phantasiari*, is incapable of supporting as such), the sign in question had undergone a reversal. Thus animals can and do use and perceptually grasp the meaning of “arbitrary” signs. It is not that they cannot use and even invent such signs; it is that they cannot know that the sign-vehicles in question are arbitrary, because they cannot distinguish relations from related things and deal with the relations directly in their objective being as able to be

26. Sebeok 1975a, 1981; and cf. esp. 1979.

27. On the whole question of the action of signs outside the worlds of animals and men – phytosemiosis and physiosemiosis – there is a large literature to be consulted. Of the two, of course, the last is by far the most controversial. Without going into the matter here, let me simply note my opinion as given elsewhere: Deely 1982a, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001a, 2001b.

detached from subjectivity. Moreover, they could not care less whether the signs are “arbitrary” or not, as long as they work within the Umwelt. They may not be able to deal directly with the arbitrariness of whatever arbitrary signs they happen to use quite well; but at least they do not have to worry about getting lost in the Hermetic drift (as Eco<sup>28</sup> well-termed deconstruction indulged in for its own sake) whereby semiosis becomes infinitely pointless, either.

There are advantages in being an animal, and the human animal loses sight of or neglects that fact to the peril of its own health as a semiotic animal. This is no less true in matters of psychology, both social and individual, than in matters of physiology and the health of the body. Semiosis, like any activity of life, has its pathologies. Unlike the *res cogitans*, at least the semiotic animal is in a position at last to assess the risks. There may well be nothing for which the postmodern culture owes thanks to semiotics more than for restoring to the *res cogitans* its animality in the properly human form of semiotic animal.

An animal, yes, but one that lives with an awareness of life as a task to be accomplished rather than something finished and given in advance. The animals whose world is wholly objective neither have nor can have any concern beyond themselves. But for the semiotic animal the objective world as actually constituted at any given moment is never enough; for the semiotic animal lives with the awareness that there is always more, more to be learned, more to be done, to infinity. Heidegger characterizes this as “being-toward-death”, but it is more even than that. Death is only an milestone for the human species as a race of semiotic animals. By becoming aware of the difference between physical universe and objective world, the semiotic animal also becomes aware of the historicity within human experience of nature as a whole; becomes aware that the domination of human existence by various world-views (especially religious traditions, including such secular ones as Marxism) not known to reduce to fact – by historicity, in a word<sup>29</sup> – is the counterpart in νομος of that inconscient striving in φυσικς whereby the conditions for the emergence of life were established in the first place, whereby the development of life led beyond the life of plants to include the life of animals and eventually semiotic animals. Thus, just as the life was the extension of the development of nature by another means, so animal life was the extension of the development of living nature by another means – objectivity, to wit – that prepared the way for the emergence in living

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28. Cf. Eco 1990: 32, and surrounding passages.

29. A word first defined for me in a way that made sense by the now-deceased Ralph Austin Powell, in a conversation the fruit of which in this regard became a focus of my introduction to Heidegger (see Deely 1971).

φύσις of a semiotic animal destined for the final extension of the development of nature by introducing into its heart νόμος.

Throughout, it has been the action of signs, I would argue, from the inorganic beginnings as physiosemiosis through the initial organic phase of physiosemiosis to the establishment of zoösemiosis as foundation for the emergence of anthroposemiosis. But notice that each stage does not simply transcend the other and leave it behind. No. Each stage transcends the other by presupposing the continuance of the earlier level as foundation and surroundings for the new stage as making strikingly new accomplishments possible. Such is the relation of νόμος to φύσις.

Superficially, the semiotic animal discovers that the subjectivity of the Innenwelt is not wholly determined by stimuli (“*species impressae*”) coming from the physical surroundings, and that this subjectivity has room (by reason of the distinction and interplay between *ens reale* and *ens rationis* in the constitution of animal experience as a fabric of objective relations) for a free creativity that exapted establishes the species-specifically unique channel of linguistic communication, the seed of νόμος. But this seed to reach full flower has not only a root in nature, but a tap root, a root that goes all the way down to the categorial relation as the mode of being in the order of *ens reale* that makes possible objectivity in the first place,<sup>30</sup> including the freedom within objectivity that semiosis achieves (along with the burden of responsibility) as linguistic communication sustains within anthroposemiosis the ever-expanding sphere of νόμος, the extension of the development of nature by another means, the means of explicit awareness and partial conscious control of the action of signs.

The “arbitrariness” of the sign at bottom is nothing else than the ontological feature of relation which distinguishes it within the order of *ens reale* as not restricted to that order, and which distinguishes it within the objective order as able to import into awareness termini which sometimes are and sometimes

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30. I would suggest that this is the answer to the question raised by Martinelli (2005; cf. 2002), “what is communication really?”, now that semiotics has forced us to realize that articulated communication is not simply anthropological but zoological as well. In fact, communication is a phenomenon co-extensive with the physical universe as a whole, for communication occurs wherever relations occur. But, though the uniqueness of relation as a mode of being lends its ontological character to all communication as the root of its basic possibility, the subjective constitution of the beings making up the physical universe has its own impact upon the manner in which communication is realized at the various levels, most notably with the factual separation of objectivity from the being of things in the Umwelt of animals, with the further openness to the critical control of historicity in the objective lifeworld of semiotic animals.

are not also verified subjectively. It is this feature ontologically distinctive of relation throughout the whole of nature and culture, of φύσις and νόμος alike, that becomes manifest especially in linguistic communication as “arbitrariness”, the irreducibility of relation to its subjective ground together with the consequent indifference of relation to its subjective provenance (the ground equally of truth and lies, as we have seen, according to intention and circumstance).

But what thus comes to light within anthroposemiosis does not by any means begin to exist there. There in anthroposemiosis it begins to exist only in a new way, or, rather, with a further modality, a new possibility. For with understanding in its difference from *phantasiari* what the ontological distinctness of relation enables is a critical control of objectivity through a semiosis which now has an individual insertion point for the possibility of another way of looking at things not heretofore considered, a point of departure for the possibility of a better understanding of things than has heretofore obtained in the awareness of an individual or a community, a means, therefore, of shaping tradition for the better by enabling those subject to its shaping to realize and introduce into the tradition itself new possibilities. This is the so-called (or miscalled) “arbitrariness” of the sign.

But the individual with “a new idea” nonetheless is always stepping into a larger history, is always a part of the *seinsgeschichtliches Wesen* which the νόμος or lifeworld of the semiotic animal is. That is why historicity, not arbitrariness, is the true essence of the sign as an active form of being shaping not only φύσις but also, within the framework and on the basis of φύσις, the transcendent sphere of νόμος where semiosis, open to the infinite from the start, becomes aware of that openness and ponders its possibilities and consequences, both for the individual and for the community of inquirers which the semiotic animals form, as well as for nature itself in its development overall.



## Chapter 7

# The Social Construction of Reality

In the twentieth century, what turned out to be the era of transition from modernity to postmodernity as semiotics emerged from the margins to assimilate all the sciences to a new paradigm (the paradigm of the sign in its proper being as triadic ontological relation), the work of Berger and Luckmann<sup>1</sup> entitled “the social construction of reality” quickly achieved classic status. For that in fact had from the first been the proper subject-matter of the distinctively modern “social sciences”, anthropology, psychology, and sociology alike. Auguste Comte deserves a mention here, as does Karl Marx with his observation that (I paraphrase) “to discover  $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  today you would have to go to the Australian Outback”.

Just as it took postmodern semiotics to restore the notion of *ens reale* as “knowable” and given in experience properly analyzed, so it took perhaps modern philosophy fully to establish the notion of *ens rationis* as itself fully knowable and present throughout the experience of animals, especially human animals. For the ancient Greek and medieval Latin worlds, for all their great achievements, were far from understanding or taking full seriously the objective status of *ens rationis* as essential to the fabric of experience, a fabric woven of relations from its origins in sensation to its farthest theoretical reachings in human understanding in search of the quark, black matter, the dating of the beginning and end of the physical universe as known in human thought on the basis of experience – to mention only an illustrative few of the objects of inquiry today.

Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, those most direct inheritors of the medieval Latin heritage, the Neothomists, retrogressive homeward-looking angelists that they tended to be,<sup>2</sup> failed all but utterly to grasp Aquinas’ notion of *ens primum cognitum* as prior to the distinction between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, mind-dependent and mind-independent being, what Aquinas sometimes also termed “ens” and “non ens”. They should have taken sufficient clue from the fact that the Latins insisted that the relations constitutive of logic as a distinct subject matter were all of them *ens rationis*, inasmuch as logic is the very antithesis of the modern notion of subjectivity as “what depends upon an individual mind’s

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1. Berger and Luckmann 1966.

2. I take the expression from an unhappy review of a work by Garrigou Lagrange that I happened across in my youth.

perception for its existence”:<sup>3</sup> for logical consequences of “thinking things this way or that way” are binding upon all, freeman and slave, barbarian and Greek, female and male, living and dead. Only what belongs to the objective world can be binding in that way, like the laws of thermodynamics or the laws of planetary motion.

Yet the Neothomists, in their eagerness to affirm and re-establish the knowability of reality in the hardcore sense, *ens reale*, and to oppose the idealist modern tenet that only *ens rationis* can be found in objectivity as such, the world around us as directly experienced and known, fell into the opposite end of the same trap that had ensnared the moderns in their first attempt to untangle what is independent of from what depends upon human thought by shifting the analysis of sensation from the Latin distinction between proper and common sensibles (which turned out to be implicitly semiotic, as we saw above Poinot demonstrated<sup>4</sup>) to Gassendi’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities,<sup>5</sup>

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3. Recognize the close paraphrase from Jewell and Abate 2001: 1694 as discussed in the opening chapter of the present essay, p. 14 ff. above.

4. Pp. 63–64 above.

5. The moderns little realized that their new distinction, while it had the advantage of foregrounding the aspect of substance which lends it to mathematical analysis, namely, quantity (which is no doubt what attracted Galileo to the new perspective), had the disadvantage of subordinating the origin of sensation as terminating in *ens reale* to an implicit claim that *ens rationis* is the original purchase and starting point even for sensation itself (“sentire”) prescissively considered. Berkeley reached this outcome in a single leap (Berkeley 1710: Part I, Section 10) but few among the moderns were willing to follow the direction taken in the leap. Yet the painful outcome of the complete gulf between objects and things implicit in the assumption common to Rationalism and Empiricism can be demonstrated by a step-by-step analysis from premiss to solipsism, as I have twice taken the pains to manifest (Deely 1994: 77–88; but in much greater detail in Deely 2001: 522 ff., “The qualities given in sensation, a comparison of modern and medieval treatment”).

Of course, what the priority of primary over secondary qualities implied was exactly what Hume embraced (Hume 1748: Section 12, Part I), and what Kant explicated more thoroughly (if not exhaustively) in his own way: the realm of objectivity is one thing, the realm of “things-in-themselves” quite another, and n’er the twain can meet in this life. Subjectivity as the prison of consciousness, indeed, was celebrated in Leibniz’s doctrine of the monad without windows well before it was systematized in the Kantian *Critiques*. But it was in Kant’s doctrine of categories that the reversal and overthrow of Aristotle’s doctrine of categories on which the medieval development had been largely based became, as it were, “finalized”. It was nothing less than the definitive establishment of modernity as a philosophical epoch in full contrast to the Latin Age of medieval thought and the Greek epoch of ancient thought.

what I have called (picking up on a typically seminal suggestion from Sebeok) the “quasi-error” of the external world.<sup>6</sup>

For in fact the physical environment external to our bodies, like our bodies themselves, is precisely *not* external to our awareness to whatever extent we are aware of it and have taken the trouble to develop some further knowledge – a deepened objectivity, we can say, by comparison with the objectification that occurs cœnoscopically in perception – of its subjective constitution in the order of *ens reale*. Only to the extent that we have no awareness of the things of the universe can they properly be said to be “external”. And internal to the objective world are not only things of the physical universe but the dreams and aspirations of animals required to proportion that indifferent physical environment to their species-specific needs. Yet the Neothomists assumed without adverting to the parallogism involved that the “external world” of modern philosophy was the *ens reale* of medieval Latin thought, and that *ens rationis* overall could be assigned to the privacy of psychological subjectivity in the modern sense. It was a kind of extension of the Latin failure to realize the semiotic character of cathectic states along with the cognitive ones.

For, as we have seen, the objective world could not be an Umwelt without *ens rationis* alongside *ens reale* at the terminus of cognitive and cathectic relations, for objective relations also include in their terminus something of the *ens reale* of the physical surroundings revealed through sensation and incorporated into perception both sensory (*phantasiari*) and intellectual (*intelligere*), and on this the Neothomists were right to insist. In experience as a whole *ens reale* and *ens rationis* are equally objective, notwithstanding the logical priority of *ens reale* as sustaining and giving rise to intersubjectivity in the first place, prior to and independently of as well as within cognition as terminating suprasubjectively at objectivity throughout. Thus objective being of its very nature is suprasubjective respecting the foundations of relations as ‘inherent accidents’ of ‘substances’, i.e., subjective modifications of actually existing individual entities; the objective world is public in principle and throughout,<sup>7</sup> accessible to all conspecifics in principle, not because it is “external” to us as knowers but precisely because it is *not* external to our awareness as provenating from and sustained by but not reducible to psychological subjectivity. The objective world is always suprasubjective, even as given in the most secret and private musings of the “isolated individual” (who in fact would be dead if truly fully isolated from what surrounds him or her), and often intersubjective as well. The love of my life who died three years ago is not only inside me as a cathectic and cognitive

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6. Sebeok 1986b; Deely 2003. “Quasi-fallacy” was Sebeok’s literal expression.

7. Which is why there can be, as Wittgenstein alleged, no ‘private language’.

modification of my subjectivity (“*species expressa*”) but also publically present to all who knew her in the objective world which includes always (even if no longer her) something of the physically existing subjectivities which comprise the universe and make the objective world possible even in the measure and ways that objects go beyond things as relations go beyond subjects.

Just as the arising of intersubjectivity on the basis of physical subjectivity opens the way to objective being as able to include *entia rationis* as well as *entia realia* in the experience of animals, so the foundation of relations upon relations made possible within *ens rationis* by the effective discovery (it need not be fully conscious, as the adherents of Nominalism amply prove) of the difference between relations as such and related things opens the way both to linguistic communication and to that consequent social construction of reality that we call the world of culture. The objective world of the higher animals is already a social construction, of course. But those animals have no awareness of the social construction as such. They are concerned only with the manner and measure in which objectivity enables them to deal with *ens reale* to satisfy their needs and aspirations. And successfully attain *ens reale* within their objective worlds they do indeed. Sebeok liked to quote Jacob on the point:<sup>8</sup>

No matter how an organism investigates its environment, the perception it gets must necessarily reflect so-called ‘reality’ and, more specifically, those aspects of reality which are directly related to its own behavior. If the image that a bird gets of the insects it needs to feed its progeny does not reflect at least some aspects of reality, then there are no more progeny. If the representation that a monkey builds of the branch it wants to leap to has nothing to do with reality, then there is no more monkey. And if this point did not apply to ourselves, we would not be here to discuss this point.

Yet things are different for the semiotic animal, and not only different from objects. For the semiotic animal becomes aware that there are signs, and out of that awareness comes the possibility to erect or construct a system of signs that will be under our control in some measure, that will enable us to communicate new insights that arise in the privacy of the semiosis of our *Innenwelt* and modify accordingly our *Lebenswelt* with conspecifics insofar as we share with them within objectivity a correspondence, i.e., some measure of experiential overlap. Language, as Sebeok was the first to point out,<sup>9</sup> at its root is the human *Innenwelt* as a modeling system that is biologically underdetermined.<sup>10</sup> This *Innenwelt*, in forming representations that present the world not only as other than it is but as

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8. Jacob 1982: 56.

9. Sebeok 1984a, 1985a, 1986a, 1987, et alibi.

10. Aristotle and Aquinas had the same idea in their notion of the distinctiveness of the intellectual soul as able to become all things (“*quodammodo omnia*”), in contrast to

consciously *realized to be* other than “the way things are here and now”, can then be exapted to communicate by the establishment of a code which will correlate signifiers with signifieds (so to say) so as to express this “new insight” which is not directly reducible to sensory stimulus. It is the beginning of linguistic communication in the species-specifically human sense.

Once in place, linguistic communication, itself nothing but a network of objective relations among sounds and marks rooted in the habit structure of a human population (a “linguistic community”) and based upon the experience of intersubjective relations in the order of *ens reale* (so relations founded upon relations, something that cannot occur in the order of *ens reale* prior to the emergence of objective being, and cannot occur thematically even within objective being before the pure relational character of *ens rationis* is taken in its full contrast with *ens reale*, which is not purely relational in character but more fundamentally subjective in its distinctive being), opens the way in its turn to an objective world for which the semiotic animal is responsible, and one which only the semiotic animal as linguistic can access according to its cultural character in contrast to its merely social or interactive character – for this the perception of many animals besides human animals can very well access. The monument outside the main train station in Helsinki is accessible to birds and to dogs as well as to humans. But to understand that monument for what it is as a monument requires species-specifically linguistic communication, and this communication is not available as such neither to birds nor to dogs but only to semiotic animals who know there are as well as make use of signs in their difference from objects and things alike.

It is this establishment of an order of postlinguistic objects as such – objects that may be perceptible as physical constructs but are understandable as cultural realities only through and on the basis of linguistic communication, understanding in its difference from perception<sup>11</sup> – that I principally intend by the term “socially constructed reality”. It would in some ways be more accurate to speak of “culturally constructed reality”, but we need to understand that there is no living culture without animal society, animal social organization; no *Lebenswelt* without an *Umwelt*. In speaking of “socially constructed reality”, then, I am not at all repeating the blunder of Radcliffe-Brown in reducing culture system to social system (a move redolent of the enduring influence of Hume on British intellectual culture), still less the structuralist error of thinking that the cultural world is or adequately can be treated as a self-contained objective whole (for, as

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the perceptual soul able to become only those things objectively to which its body as such is proportioned to become aware of; but that is a whole other story.

11. The very distinction I have spelled out semiotically in Deely 2002.

I have tried throughout this essay to show, just as there could be no *ens rationis* without the *ens reale* of intersubjective relation, so there could be no objective world or Umwelt without the *ens rationis* of purely objective relations, and without purely objective relations based on the experience of intersubjectivity there could be no language upon which, in turn, an enculturated society in contrast to a purely animal society would not be possible).

In a clever play on Berger's classic title, Searle wrote recently (1995) of "the construction of social reality". That is what I am speaking about here, but while keeping in view that socially constructed reality among semiotic animals establishes an interface between the cultural world as such, the *Lebenswelt*, accessible only to semiotic animals and only on the basis of a shared linguistic code, on the one side, and the physical environment as such, the subjectivity of physical being, on the other side. Socially constructed reality in the case of semiotic animals mediates not only physical environment and objective world, but objective world as generically animal and *Lebenswelt* as a species-specifically human objective world accessible only through but not at all reducible to linguistic communication, "language" in the loose common sense.

Neither *Lebenswelt* nor Umwelt, then, is a self-contained whole. The only self-contained whole is the total universe of finite being as including subjective realities and intersubjective realities and also, where animal life has evolved, the partial objectification of subjectivity and intersubjectivity within a network of relations some of which exist only as a consequence of animal awareness (psychological subjectivity), which last in turn make possible a *further* level of objectification based upon linguistic codes but going well beyond the objectivity of such codes and in no way reducible to them. Yet even this whole of the finite universe of interacting and co-dependent things, some but not all of which have an awareness of their surroundings, Aquinas would argue,<sup>12</sup> depends upon an absolutely independent being, a "Pure Actuality", which could exist in the absence of all finite beings in just the way that *ens reale* in contrast to *ens rationis* would continue to exist in the absence of any animals whatever (or, for that matter, of any plants).

So the levels of dependency in being are complete, from the most tenuous of pure relations to the fullness of the divine being, with the twist that, according to Aquinas, the inner life of God consists in a community of persons each of which is a pure relation, but now relations themselves subsisting! It is an astonishing picture, much more interesting and intricate, actually, than anything dreamed of in modern philosophy, bogged down as it became in the technical detail necessary to try to maintain at all costs the facade of representations blocking

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12. See Diagram 3, p. 24 above.

our access to the order of *ens reale*, our development of knowledge of the things-in-themselves, things in the subjective constitution according to which they exist and interact among themselves and with our bodies.

The most important point in the social construction of reality, no doubt, occurs in the political order, when the semiotic animals sit down together to try to decide how to govern themselves, how to decide what is to be permitted and what not permitted in social behavior and arrangements. Thus the constitution of a state, for example, the document, I mean, which details what the arrangement shall be for a given human community, is a prime example of a purely objective reality which can yet be realized in the subjective order of living and interacting individuals. Reality as we experience it is neither purely objective nor purely subjective nor purely intersubjective, but rather a constantly shifting mixture and proportion of all three not at all easy (perhaps not even fully possible) to keep complete track of.

But the highest achievement of objective reality occurs in human thought, when the semiotic animal succeeds in various cases to penetrate to the causes of “the way things are”, a penetration which finds its ground in the individual consciousness but which can then, thanks to the linguistic code, be shared with other semiotic animals to shape the *Lebenswelt* according to what has been newly or uniquely discovered by one. Let us make a stab at summing up in the form of one last diagram (page following).

Semiosis, thus, anthroposemiosis, is the process where what is seen by one can come to be seen by all, and where nothing is left out – in principle at least, though never fully in fact; for in practice semiosis becomes in anthroposemiosis open to the infinite, and some think able even to touch the face of God,<sup>13</sup> but it yet falls always short of actual infinity. But for all of this, neither subjectivity nor intersubjectivity is enough. For all of this, ontological relation is necessary, the *sine qua non* of semiosis itself, however far the action of signs extends. That is why Ratzinger had to insist that ‘the age of substance holding undivided sway is over’. But whether the action of signs extends even to the physical universe prior to and independent of the emergence of objectivity, whether the true measure of semiosis is the influence of the future upon the present in constantly reshaping the past, as I have come to suspect, I yet leave to treat at another time. For now it has been enough to show why objectivity and subjectivity are not opposed, as modern usage has come to presume; and how subjectivity itself can be objectified and known in the semiosis, first, of animal life, and then, thematically, in human life

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13. Either in an intellection produced through rational discourse or, in quite different fashion, in mystical experience, or in both ways – as both Aquinas and Peirce deemed.

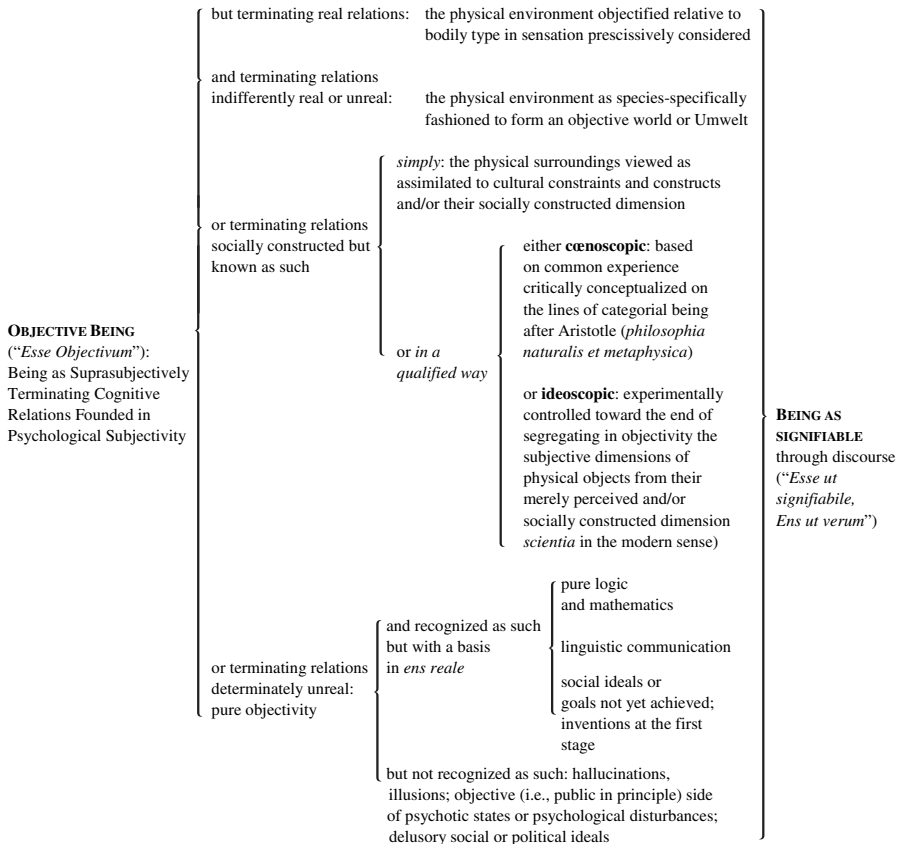


Diagram 8. How *Esse Objectivum* Exists as Terminating Ontological Sign-Relations Indifferently Real (Mind-Independent) or Unreal (Mind-Dependent) but Normally a Mixture of Both Relational Types – after Galileo and Comte (early 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> cent.), looking toward the postmodern development

to the extent especially that the community of inquirers sustains the enterprises of science and philosophy.

Now that objectivity can be seen to include *ens rationis* and *ens reale* alike, and that sciences and philosophy can be seen semiotically to have the task of sorting out the objective interplay of *ens reale* and *ens rationis* in in experience and reflection as a whole, now, that is to say, that the semiotic animal has become conscious of the fullness of its being as an animal able in understanding to create signs that both expand experience and carry interpretation beyond sense-perception to questions even of God and the angels, now that the frontiers both



of the Ding-an-sich and of the Noumenon<sup>14</sup> have been seen to be crossable, in a word, now begins in earnest the postmodern adventure.

“Reality” is more than a word, but it is also more than hardcore reality as well. In fact, “reality”, even in the hardcore sense, would not be accessible at all in awareness were it not for purely objective relations necessary for animals to orientate themselves in the environment, objective relations which provide, just as did the intersubjective relations of the physical environment in the first place, that further interface whereby semiosis in the human animal becomes conscious of itself, and semiotics begins to exist as a postmodern perspective on “reality” as involving social construction, yes, but involving the hardcore elements of the physical universe as well. This is the awareness that enables the semiotic animal to expand the objective world to the infinite, in a semiosis asymptotically assimilating the whole of reality to the level of human understanding, a “reality” wherein truth is an accomplishment, not a given, and where the human responsibility for finding what is true and making what is true go together.

The physical universe may exist in advance of the human animal, but the objective world as open to intelligibility and infinite semiosis does not. For the semiotic animal, once it has become conscious of semiosis, responsibility for the humane shaping of that objective world within which the physical environment forms a part becomes inescapable, according to the saying of Aquinas that speculative understanding of being becomes practical by extension,<sup>15</sup> as we saw above.<sup>16</sup> The line between the real and the unreal, between *ens rationis* and *ens reale*, between  $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and  $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$ , thus, is not fixed once and for all, as the ancients sometimes and the moderns in philosophy almost always came to think, but is a boundary constantly shifting through semiosis both inside and outside the Lebenswelt. Taking responsibility for some of those shifts, the ones that concern humanity (including the physical surroundings upon which humanity depends), becomes an inescapable obligation for the semiotic animal, both individually and as a community, a community for which inquiry is a *sine qua non* for long-term success in making of the Lebenswelt an objective world in which human being can find its fulfillment as human.

When Karl Marx famously wrote<sup>17</sup> that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it”, in fact, he was unwittingly affirming the thesis of Aquinas that understanding creates responsibility, and responsibility pertains to the realm of “what needs to be done”

14. Deely 2001: 558–559.

15. Aquinas c.1266: *Summa theologiae* 1.76 sed contra.

16. Chap. 5, p. 72 f.

17. Marx 1845, Thesis 11: “Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretirt*, es kommt drauf an sie *verändern*.”.

(“*bonum faciendum est*”, as Aquinas formulated the first and constantly guiding principle of practical thought and action).<sup>18</sup> There are many things to be said about Marxism, one of which was certainly that it did not understand the distinction between speculative and practical understanding as the Latins had developed it alongside their growing semiotic consciousness, and confused the two orders,<sup>19</sup> in effect, making the understanding of practical affairs itself a speculative science – a blunder which could not but result in a rigid ideology impervious to the malleability that practical action, in politics above all, requires in order to draw its proper nourishment from a community of inquirers.

For “the point” is neither simply to interpret the world nor simply to change it, but to change it on the basis of interpretations which find their measure in a constant and ongoing inquiry into “how things are” which is not systematically subordinated to ideology of any kind. Practical thought is not speculative, and it cannot legitimately be substituted in the place of speculative thought, as Marxism attempted. For while ideology always plays an *ad hoc* role, if that role is made the rule, inquiry is systematically distorted, and what distinguishes understanding in the human animal is subordinated to what mere perception is for brute animals, namely, a reduction of objectivity to and an enclosure of objectivity within its relation to us, with the consequent loss of the transcendence in principle of objective being as intelligible to just that exclusive relation. The *Lebenswelt*,

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18. Aquinas c.1266: *Summa theologiae* I, q. 79, art. 11 ad 2: “verum et bonum se invicem includunt, nam verum est quoddam bonum, alioquin non esset appetibile; et bonum est quoddam verum, alioquin non esset intelligibile. sicut igitur obiectum appetitus potest esse verum, inquantum habet rationem boni, sicut cum aliquis appetit veritatem cognoscere; ita obiectum intellectus practici est bonum ordinabile ad opus, sub ratione veri. intellectus enim practicus veritatem cognoscit, sicut et speculativus; sed veritatem cognitam ordinat ad opus.” – “What is true and what is good enfold one another, for the true is a kind of good (otherwise it would not be desirable), and the good is a kind of truth (otherwise it would not be intelligible). Just as the object of appetite, therefore, can be something that is true insofar as that something has the rationale of a good (as when someone desires to know the truth), so too an object of practical understanding is something good that can be accomplished under the rationale of something true. For practical understanding knows truth, just as speculative understanding does, but orders the known truth to what needs to be done.”

19. In what he calls “practical-critical activity” (Marx 1845, Thesis 1) by which he understands (Thesis 2) that “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice [not so far removed from Mao’s conclusion that “power comes from the barrel of a gun.”]. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.”

open in principle to being, by ideology can be and often is closed down again to become just another Umwelt – but this time one in which the fulfillment of human beings as human is stifled and practically precluded.

But, equally certainly, ignorant of premodern philosophy as he may have been (for, after all, the cultivation of such ignorance was central to the distinctively modern heritage in philosophy, as Descartes explained right from the start<sup>20</sup>), Marx was prophetic and right in proclaiming that understanding had developed to a point where the time for action transforming the socio-cultural order had arrived, an imperative all the clearer and more forceful as postmodern thought restores *ens reale* to its rightful place in human understanding without losing the modern discovery that the development of objectivity beyond bare sensations is impossible without the involvement of *ens rationis*. Semioethics as a post-modern development within semiotics, therefore, we may expect to establish an understanding of human affairs beyond the opposition of “Capitalism” vs. “Marxism”, even as semiotics itself has established an understanding of human knowledge beyond the opposition of “realism” vs. “idealism”.

Long-term success in making of the Lebenswelt an objective world in which human being can find its fulfillment as human, arguably, would leave the universe better for the presence of semiotic animals as a species – but only if the species does not fail or fall too far short in assuming and fulfilling the responsibilities which fall to it as a consequence of its unique consciousness of relation and what relation makes possible in the world of human affairs and in the world surrounding and penetrating that world, the physical universe in its relatively independent subjective and intersubjective being.

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20. “There is considerable danger”, he warned (1628: 13), that “if we study these works” of our Latin and Greek predecessors in philosophy “too closely traces of their errors will infect us and cling to us against our will and despite our precautions.” Better by far to neglect and forget them, than to carry forward their errors. In this recommendation to neglect and ignore his predecessors Descartes had even greater success than he did in the recommendation of the universal adoption of his new method of doubt, and this heritage of ignorance is one of the main obstacles semiotics has had to face in opening up the frontiers of a postmodern era, wherein not only has it proved essential to the doctrine of signs to recover the original florescence of semiotic consciousness among the Latins, but also to recover *ens reale* from the erasure under which the Kantian stricture of things in themselves as unknowable had placed it. Ignorance on the epistemological side and unknowability on the ontological side go together in the baggage of modernity that needs to be jettisoned, according to the ancient saying that it is sometimes necessary to throw the cargo overboard in order to avoid shipwreck (“*navicula ad naufragium evitandum merces proiecent in mare*”).

## **Part II**

### **Background to the Text**



## Chapter 8

### What Difference Does It Make What a Sign Is?

It is a strange thing, surely, to realize that all of us are gathered in this room in what, for many of you, is your home country, and for many of us, as for me, a distant land, to ponder the matter of signs. Nor are we gathered here, I daresay, by our common agreement as to what exactly a sign is, so much as by our common interest in that peculiar and singular being, whatever it actually be, and, more especially, by the action proper to it, commonly called, nowadays, yet only recently, “semiosis”.

This is a strange force, semiosis, for we now know that it is the force, actually, that holds together all special interest groups, all academic conferences, all communities of beings joined by more than gravity or disaster (yet without excluding even those) – indeed, communities of whatever sort. It is not only that all thought is in signs, as the Conimbricenses were the first to say in 1606 and as Peirce (who, like Poincaré before him, was their student) so forcefully was later to insist. There is the further fact, as we now more than suspect, that all *feeling* is in signs as well; so that we can say, in a post-feminist, postmodern version of Peirce’s famous declaration that “man is a sign”: the *human being* is a sign, a sign of what is known, felt, and imagined about the world, rightly or wrongly, at any given time.

Consider the human being, the individual human being first. Isolated in one sense (born alone, alone to die, whether with or without others present), never alone in another sense (member of a species, dependent upon others both human and nonhuman in order to live), as far as consciousness goes the world begins and ends with the individual, but consciousness is much more than individuality. Individuality is the root of subjectivity, that complexus or total of aspects that separate me from you and each of us from the rest of the universe. Subjectivity defines where I end and everything else begins. But consciousness is something quite different. Even as individualized, it never includes only me. That is to say, it is never simply a part of subjectivity so much as subjectivity is but a part of consciousness. And to the extent that subjectivity is known, that is to say, to the extent that subjectivity falls within awareness, that subjectivity is not opposed to but veritably part of objectivity, part of what exists as known.

Here we encounter one of the most important but also subtle shifts that semiotic analysis has begun to impose on common usage: especially since Kant (1724–1804), subjectivity and objectivity have been opposite terms, wherein the

former signifies more or less what is private and relevant only to me, while the latter signifies what is the case regardless of and independently of my subjectivity, the “unbiased truth”, if you like, or “reality”, the “way things are”. This oppositional meaning of the subjective/objective distinction, which still prevails in popular culture, time and again has shown itself in discourse analysis to be ultimately incoherent, insupportable, a chimaera. Yet it has prevailed. Why?

The reason is that it is a function of the epistemological paradigm by which modernity in philosophy and thought about mind established itself, a paradigm within which self-representation is central and primary.

By contrast, within semiotics, representation is central but not primary, because the sign is not what represents so much as it is what causes the representation to be a representation of something *other* than itself. A representation always stands for something, *aliquid stans pro aliquo*. But the representation which is part of a sign always stands for something *other than itself*, *aliquid stans pro alio*. The difference is subtle, *alio* vs. *aliquo*, but it is huge. It is the divide, as we might say, between modern and postmodern.<sup>1</sup> We have seen such huge divides summarized in a diphthong before. How great was the divide in 4<sup>th</sup> century AD Byzantium between “homoousios” and “homoiousios”?<sup>2</sup> We confront here again one of those not altogether infrequent cases in which the sounds and characters of language which approach the nearest to each other happen to represent the most removed of ideas.

And here we must note too the inadequacy, in the current state of semiotic consciousness, even of so classical a formula as this *aliquid stans pro alio*. For it falls short of manifesting what we now know is an irreducibly triadic structure in the sign – there is not only the sign vehicle (or “representamen”) and object signified (or significate), but further is there the interpretant, the one to or for which that vehicle conveys that signified. So we must say not simply *aliquid stans pro alio*, but rather (the final formula to become classic): *aliquid alicuique stat pro alio*.<sup>3</sup>

So what is a sign, *aliquid alicuique stans pro alio*? A sign is to a human being what water is to a fish, its proper environment, that within which it lives, moves, and has its being, something presupposed, so basic that it is taken for granted, unnoticed, at every moment in every turn. Essential to the discovery of everything else, the sign itself long eluded discovery by its very ubiquity, its very essentiality, its very pervasiveness of every thought and feeling and

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1. This was the thesis of my 1993 Thomas A. Sebeok Fellowship Inaugural Lecture, reprinted in Deely 1994: 201–244.
  2. Cf. the *Four Ages* (Deely 2001: 178).
  3. This further qualification of Jakobson’s *aliquid stat pro aliquo* formula I realized only in Deely 2001a.

behavior. Thought is of objects, feelings are about persons and things: signs first appear as marginal to consciousness, or occupying only a special place, small but important, in the fields of our interests. And even when important, the sign is so only for a time, temporarily, in context, and only for what it directs us to or enables us to discover, not for itself.

No wonder that interest in signs as such was slow to dawn,<sup>4</sup> slower still to mature, of all the developments of modernity the last of its fruits, discovered only when it had become over-ripe, so to speak, and was virtually fallen from the tree of knowledge. I have been asked to talk later in the week about the history of semiotic consciousness, the history, that is, of the awareness or knowledge that there are signs. Here I will only remark on the last stage of the development, the later 20<sup>th</sup> century/dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century emergence into popular consciousness and culture of the idea that brings us together here today, the idea of semiotics as the study of semiosis, the action of signs.

What difference does it make what a sign is? In a word, the difference it makes is in how a sign acts, for action follows upon being: a thing acts according to the way that it is. Indeed, it is only from action that, in any arena, we come to a knowledge of being and nonbeing. Biology is the body of knowledge about living things that is acquired and developed only by observation and reflection upon the behavior – that is to say, the ways of acting – of living things. Just so semiotics is the body of knowledge about signs that is acquired and developed through our analysis and reflection upon the action of signs in this or that area of our attention. What has turned out to be surprising about semiotics is the gradual realization or discovery that there is no area of our attention which is not replete with evidence of the action of signs, once the being proper to signs has begun to dawn on us.

The term “semiotics” has come so generally to be used that there are probably many of the younger scholars in this room who are not particularly cognizant of the fact that it was not always so. If you go back forty or fifty years, “semiotics” is spoken of only at the margins, and “semiology” rather is all the rage, in the literary bastions of Paris, London, and New York. Today it is semiotics that is the term everywhere bandied about, though “semiology” is still used commonly enough, often with the velleity<sup>5</sup> that it is but “another way of saying”, a “synonym for”, semiotics as the doctrine of signs. What is going on here? It is worth inquiring, for, as usual, more is going on than meets the eye.

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4. Deely 2009: Chap. 12, Sec. 1, “Why so late?”, pp. 234–236.

5. Actually, more a case of wishful thinking; for few assertions could be more false than the suggestion that “semiology” and “semiotics” are synonyms, as is amply demonstrable both lexicographically (see Deely 2003c, 2004) and philosophically (Deely 1983 *inter alia*).



In 1982, a book was published in the United States under the title, *The Time of the Sign*. Resorting to the inveterate synchronicity that is the default mode of understanding in our species, the MacCannells, who authored the book, meant by “the time of the sign” exactly then, the later twentieth century, the first century in which the study of signs had come into its own as a phenomenon of mainstream intellectual culture. Signs were the talk everywhere. It was the eighth decade of the twentieth century, in whose first decade Saussure had said<sup>6</sup> that the subject of signs, though as a science it “does not yet exist”, has “a right to existence”, a place “marked out in advance”. In other words, as the twentieth century opened, the study of signs was nowhere on the intellectual scene, even though the place for such an investigation had always existed within and beyond the human world (and even though Peirce even then had already been at work excavating traces of the original development of semiotic consciousness among the Latins between Augustine and Poincaré.<sup>7</sup>)

The first awareness of signs in that late modern century, actually (though no one realized it at the time) the twilight of modernity in philosophy, was in terms of the place and role of signs in human culture. It was an anthropocentric awareness of signs, particularly of those signs thoroughly anthroposemiotic, namely, the artifacts of language and culture. These above all were conceived to be signs, and anything else, any other phenomena, Saussure went so far as to say, could or should be considered signs only insofar as they could be assimilated to the cultural model in its linguistic essence. The artifacts of culture do indeed depend upon language for their being. Any organism can see the huge statue of Mannerheim by the railway station in Helsinki, but only an animal capable of language can ever come to know the history it summarizes and represents, and that dimension of the statue does not lay open to the senses but only to the understanding ignited and formed by language, by the “story of the statue”. In 1982, I emphasized this point in a series of diagrams designed to show that language was a diaphanous interface separating the cultural world in its proper being from the physical environment open and accessible to any organism capable of sense perception. In those diagrams, I distinguished within experience a prelinguistic, linguistic, and postlinguistic dimension, the latter of which is accessible in what is proper to it only for human beings on this planet, that is,<sup>8</sup> to animals with language for a modeling system prior to questions of communication or communicating what is modeled.

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6. Saussure 1916 (posthumous): 33; the reported remark dates back i.1906–1911.

7. The “protosemiotic development”, as it has come to be called: see the Elsevier “History of Semiotics” (Deely 2006), and Deely 2009a for fuller detail.

8. Sebeok 1984, 1987; Deely 2007.

One might almost consider it natural that human beings studying signs would turn above all to the signs that human beings themselves make and surround themselves with to constitute their proper environment as human. So it is sobering to be aware that in the beginning of human reflections on this matter, so far as our records show, it was not so at all. In fact, the “signs” paradigmatic for Saussure and his followers had not even been dreamed of as signs, let alone thematically considered to be such in the ancient world. But this is the part of the story we have to take up later in the week,<sup>9</sup> and here at the beginning we are concerned only with the matter of what difference does it make, what a sign is?

Well, in the case of the signs of human creation, the most outstanding feature, as Saussure noted, was their *arbitrariness*, the fact that nothing requires that they be the way that they are, that they signify what they do in the way that they do. With words and cultural artifacts, in short, we enter a zone of maximum prospective control, something very attractive in modern culture, where the idea of science had long gone hand-in-hand with the idea of the control of the world. Knowledge in this context is power, and the more we understand the more control we can exercise. Of course, there is plenty about language that we do not control. If you speak English and want your audience to think of camels, you cannot, at least without further ado, make the noise “horses”. Nor, without considerable ado, can we do much about the fact that *tree* is well-formed in English while *tbky* is not.<sup>10</sup> But *the fact* that the character string “horses” does not signify the animal we signify rather by the string “camel” has nothing necessary about it. And, if we exert the freedom proper to the human use of human signs, we can soon enough have our audience thinking of camels when we say “horses”. I dare say that has already happened with this audience; and you will well recall that the early Marxists in Czarist Russia used just this feature of human speech and writing to circumvent the censors of the Czar in working up to the revolution of 1917. Those who think it makes no difference what a sign is or is not might well consider that what a sign is in this case wound up costing the whole royal family of Russia its rule and its life.

Moreover, this feature of language – its “arbitrariness” in Saussure’s sense – can be extremely useful in loosening up interpretations of past or present events and texts that have become too rigid in their construction, that have lost sight, as we might say, of their labile character and fragile origins. By the time the century had turned, Derrida with his technique of “deconstruction” had created a cottage industry of savaging texts and cultural phenomena on every side, wherein the

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9. And a part of the story for which the best narrator remains the work of Giovanni Manetti, notably (*inter alia*) 1987.

10. Sebeok 2001a: 6.

only limit that had to be acknowledged was the limit to the cleverness of the individual wielding the scimitar of deconstructive readings. Not only did “nothing have to mean what it seemed to mean”, but nothing had to mean in the end anything at all definite. Interpretation gone on holiday – it was the answer made by semiotics to Wittgenstein. Eco went so far as to write an essay on “the limits of interpretation”,<sup>11</sup> in order to show a difference between symbolic growths that are justifiable and symbolic growths that mimic rather cancer at work on a healthy body. It remains that “deconstruction” is a legitimate and valuable semiotic technique, albeit a limited one, one of the permanent achievements of semiology within semiotics. And why it is a *limited* technique depends upon exactly the same factor that make it a *legitimate* technique, namely, what a sign is. For the arbitrariness of signs, so prominent in human affairs, turns out to be far from the whole story.

The modern pioneer who first fully suspected the limits to arbitrariness in the action of signs was a contemporary of Saussure as unknown to Saussure as Saussure was unknown to him. As far as I know, Charles Peirce, born (1839) eighteen years before Saussure (1857) and dead (1914) one year after Saussure, knew nothing of Saussure or his work. As a check on this suspicion, I accessed the Past Masters database which includes, along with the *Collected Papers* of Peirce, the works of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Poincaré, Wittgenstein, the Empiricists, the Rationalists, and a smattering of others, and entered “Saussure” into the search engine, expecting to find nothing. The five hits that came up astonished me, but as I visited each in turn, thinking, at first, perhaps Peirce had known of Saussure after all, my astonishment turned to the ashes of discovering that all five of the mentions of Saussure were in editorial materials of my own authorship (1994b) included in that huge database. So let us say, subject to disproof, that Peirce, that other pioneer of our common interest who is mainly responsible (after John Locke) for the designation “semiotics”, as Saussure was for the designation “semiology”, conceived and pursued his own interest in the subject of signs completely independently and ignorantly of the parallel conception and pursuit of Ferdinand de Saussure.<sup>12</sup>

Peirce came at the matter from an entirely different (and considerably more historically informed) angle than did Saussure. In particular, he took unusually

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11. The essay, it must be said, was more successful than the book (Eco 1990) that bore its name.

12. There is a prevailing myth, launched by Max Fisch (1900–1995) and perpetuated today mainly, perhaps, by Ken Ketner and T. L. Short, that Peirce preferred “semeiotic” to “semiotic”; but an examination in detail of Peirce’s actual practice (Deely 2009b: 62–65) reveals that the myth is contrary to fact, and even, in the case of Short, mere snobbishness.

a diachronic route to his interest, coming at the matter not only through the late 17<sup>th</sup> century suggestion of Locke, whence he apparently took up the term “semiotics”, but more especially through the early 17<sup>th</sup> century suggestions of the Conimbricenses, Poinot’s as well as Peirce’s teachers in matters semiotic,<sup>13</sup> whence he took up the expression “*doctrina signorum*” or “doctrine of signs”, which he constantly preferred (as also did later Sebeok) to any talk of a “science of signs” (that is, of a science in the *ideoscopic* sense, “doctrina” being an older term of Latin yet fully compatible with a *cenoscopic* science, which Peirce conceived semiotics to be); and whence he took up, more importantly, the idea of the sign as necessarily involving three terms in a single relation. Where he got the further idea<sup>14</sup> that the sign itself, therefore, strictly and technically, consists not in the three elements tied together by the sign relation but rather in the triadic relation itself as constituting the sign in its proper being – the sign, if we may so speak, in its essence, including the representamen as the *other*-representative element presenting some object or other to me as here and now signified – seems to belong to his original genius (even though, as we know now, it was a rediscovery of a consequent reached by Poinot<sup>15</sup> before him).

Now here, as forcefully as I can, I want to preclude a misunderstanding. In introducing Peirce after Saussure, my purpose is not to introduce him in preference to Saussure, in the sense of setting up an opposition between “semiology” on the one hand and “semiotics” on the other, for, as I have tried more than once to make clear,<sup>16</sup> on any reasonable accounting, semiology is properly understood as a *part* of semiotics. What is needed in fact is “a program for the amalgamation of the main trends”,<sup>17</sup> Saussurean and Peircean and some others as well, such as Sebeok had called for as early as 1977. In fact, just such an amalgamation is what has largely occurred in the closing decades of the last century through the achievement of a paradigm shift *from* the representation-based epistemology characteristic of modern philosophy *to* a new paradigm derived directly from the analysis of semiosis in its many spheres wherein representation remains essential but no longer primary as “self-representation”;<sup>18</sup> and the gradual realization of what a sign is has been the driving force of this paradigm shift.

Nor is this surprising. Consider. If Saussure successfully identified, as he did, a central feature of the sign insofar as it occurs in the context of culture, how could any general science or doctrine of signs after him dispense with the main

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13. Beuchot and Deely 1995; Doyle 1984, 2001.

14. Peirce 1904: CP 8.332.

15. Poinot 1632: esp. Book I, Question 3.

16. First in Deely 1986, more definitively in Deely 2001: Chapter 16, and Deely 2003.

17. Sebeok 2001: xvii.

18. See the “TimeLine of Semiotic Development”, Appendix E in Deely 2009: 239–246.

achievements of what he called semiology? By the same token, if Peirce was right in learning from the Conimbricenses that the sign cannot perform its function, cannot achieve its “proper significate outcome”, as he put it, in the absence of a triadic relation, the usual dyadic interpretation of the *signifiant/signifié* relation as constituting signification cannot possibly be the whole story. Indeed, we find that neither Peirce alone nor Saussure alone provided a model fully up to the task before us. Under the prodding of Richard Parmentier, I found it necessary to write an entire book<sup>19</sup> just to incorporate into the model of sign as triadic relation proposed by Poinsoit and Peirce the central Saussurean notion of *code*. At the same time, it took that same book to demonstrate that the notion of *text* in the context of triadic relations can neither be restricted to cultural phenomena nor reduce natural phenomena to cultural phenomena by a complete assimilation in the context of human experience, as Saussure delusionally proposed.

So the question is what a sign is – what difference does that make? The question is not what difference does it make if we primarily follow Peirce or primarily follow Saussure in understanding what a sign is; for neither is adequate, as I have pointed out, once we agree that, as Sebeok best and most constantly put it, “semiosis must be recognized as a pervasive fact of nature as well as of culture”. A good reminder of this is the singular case of A. J. Greimas (1917–1992), surely one of the most important scholars in the Saussurean line over the last century, but one who normally termed himself a “semiotician”, and his work “semiotics”, not semiology. No matter how we come at the problem of what a sign is and what difference does it make, we cannot end up with a simple opposition of semiotics to semiology, or of Peirce to Saussure. These were the two masters who launched the “time of the sign”, but there was in particular a third master, our late friend Thomas Sebeok (1920–2001), who saw, beyond Peirce and Saussure both, the need within late modern intellectual culture for a paradigm shift away from modern representationalism to precisely what we have come to call “semiotics”, that developing body of knowledge (derived especially from the later Latins, as it turns out) based upon and derived from the study of the action of signs within human experience.

If it was Peirce and Saussure independently who set the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the Way of Signs, it was yet Sebeok who called the followers of these two together in a larger vision. What is needed, he saw, is not the addition of yet another “new science” of the modern type (ideoscopic). For it has precisely been modern science above all that has wrought the conditions requiring the ever new kinds of specialization that cause, in effect, atomization of research and fragmentation of intellectual community, a process at once necessary and

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19. Deely 1994a.

yet counterproductive in its extreme – as the development of modern academic culture came to demonstrate. “Think deeper”, was Sebeok’s creed. Think what the sign does, even in the process of scientific understanding, yes, but *before* and *beyond* the limits of the ideoscopic context.

The sciences in the modern sense arose when we began to realize that our senses do not reveal to us the physical universe in its independent character but rather the physical universe as it relates to animal bodies of our type, a species-specific objective world rather than a universe common to all the life forms such as even ancient science (the “physics” of Aristotle) sought to envision. To achieve understanding of this larger universe, this common realm of being, we must supplement our bodily senses with instruments and experiments, and systematize the results of this supplementation with mathematical means. It is not that our initial access to our environment by our unaided bodily instruments (cenoscopic knowledge) is unsound in its results, but simply that it is inadequate to the dimensions of the common environment of physical being upon which all cognitive species of life, including our own, depend in their different ways. In a word, modernity began with the realization that cenoscopic knowledge is not enough, that ideoscopic knowledge is essential to the realization of the possibilities of human understanding.<sup>20</sup> With this realization, specialization of theoretical knowledge and research may be said to have begun; and every modern century has seen specialization advance to the point that, by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, educators everywhere felt the need to provide some alternative, some check, as it were, on scientific specialization in order to try to show and maintain some unity of knowledge as the common aim of education in preparing individuals, whether scientists or not, to be citizens of a free society concerned with welfare and destiny of all human beings.

What makes specialization necessary, Sebeok saw, is that it is necessary to achieve a deep understanding of any given object-domain. We can all see the stars. But no amount of simple staring and wonder could ever reveal to us what we now know: that these stars are of the same nature as our own sun. For that, telescopes were necessary, and not just telescopes but the many incredible experiments by which we came to know the speed of light and the consequences of gravity and the time it takes for stellar and planetary formations to establish themselves. **The need, then, is actually not to counter specialization of knowledge**, a move which, if fully successful, could only bring scientific knowledge to a stand-still. The need **rather is to understand the very activity of knowledge which makes scientific specialization possible and necessary**

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20. See the opening chapters of Deely 2008.

**in the first place,<sup>21</sup> because this activity,** we find, is an activity that is common to cenoscopic as well as to ideoscopic knowledge, and **is the activity** moreover **that gives rise to perception among all animals as well as to understanding among linguistic animals,<sup>22</sup>** and before that even to sensation as the cognitive soil from which grow all perceptions as well as human understanding. There is no answer to the specialization necessary to scientific advance. **The solution to the problems specialization creates for intellectual communication and education is** not something counter to specialization but rather **the realization of something deeper than specialization, namely, the realization that knowledge of whatever kind is a growth achieved through the action of signs, semiosis.**

The common framework of knowledge for which educators have sought since the time of Plato is not to be found in some minimal “objective core” of knowledge to be taught to and accepted by all. Still less is it to be achieved by “overcoming” the results of or need for scientific specialization in higher education. The way to achieve the desired common framework for understanding knowledge itself is by realizing the one dimension or element that is common to all knowledge of every type wherever it is found and to whatever degree, specialized or primitive, and that is the dimension of semiosis, the action of signs through which knowledge of whatever type and degree is acquired, communicated, and developed. **The “answer” to specialization is to be found within specialization itself: for what specialization produces is knowledge, and all knowledge results from an action of signs. Understand this and you will understand what it is to understand.<sup>23</sup>**

Leaving specializations intact, the realization that semiosis is the thread linking all of knowledge provides educators with exactly what they needed all along to overcome the barriers to communication that specialization of knowledge at first seems only to erect. Study the action of signs and you study a process that occurs, equally, within and between objective specializations of knowledge. “Interdisciplinarity” in this case ceases to be some artificial achievement or contrived goal of “general education”, but appears naturally as the very process of knowledge in general of which specializations are but offshoots, drawing their vitality and possibility from this common source. Semiotics, which is nothing but the sign (or rather, semiosis) become conscious of itself, that is, the knowledge resulting from study of the action of signs, equally leads into and cuts across the knowledge of objects of every other type; for the action of signs is

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21. See my 2009c discussion of Ashley’s masterful 2006 mapping of *The Way toward Wisdom*.

22. Deely 2007a.

23. Cf. Deely 2002.

what the knowledge of objects presupposes and depends upon throughout. Here “interdisciplinarity”, for the first time and only time, is no longer something contrived, but something inherent.

It is this inherently philosophical and interdisciplinary implication of the development of a unified doctrine of signs – the practically unlimited range of ramifications and applications – that is in my view the single most important feature of the semiotics movement, the surest guarantee of its continued growth and eventual acceptance within the formal curricula of the schools. From this point of view – that of the inherently interdisciplinary structure or “nature” of semiotics – semiotics is “the only game in town.” Semiotics in this important respect is the only development of knowledge which is from the beginning that at which all other programs fecklessly designed for “overcoming” or “remedying” scientific specialization vainly aim. We see now why “interdisciplinary programs” heretofore seeking to compensate for the myopic tendencies of specialization in modern times have always required *ad hoc* contrivances for their development, and why such programs have never attained more than a tenuous, personalities-dependent status vis-à-vis the specialties. We see also why, within semiotic perspective, and only within semiotic perspective, can this situation in principle change radically for the better. No longer with semiotics is an interdisciplinary outlook something contrived or tenuous. On the contrary, it is something built-in to semiotics by virtue of the universal role of signs as the vehicle of communication within and between specialties, as everywhere else, wherever there is cognition, mutual or unilateral. Semiotics is the root discipline of all disciplines as semiotic branches – some scientific, some humanistic – study of which not only restores unity to the traditions of thought (including philosophy), but coherence to the life of the universities. Semiotics can establish new conditions of a truly common framework, and cross-disciplinary channels of communication that will restore to the humanities possibilities that have withered so alarmingly when scientific specialization in its advanced stages knew no check of alternative. “Semiotics”, Pelc has summarized,<sup>24</sup> “simply offers to representatives of various disciplines an opportunity for leaving the tight compartments of highly specialized disciplines.”

The use of a general theory or, as I prefer to say – for the reasons stated both earlier and elsewhere<sup>25</sup> – doctrine of signs, in this remarkable “ecumenical” sense that Sebeok above all promoted by his work, was finely summarized by Professor Max Fisch in his Presidential Address to the third Annual Meeting of

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24. Pelc 1979: 51.

25. For example: Sebeok 1976: ix ff.; Deely 1978, 1982: Appendix, 1986a, 2003; Petrilli and Ponzio 2001, *passim*.



the Semiotic Society of America (principally founded by Sebeok). This address was given on Sebeok's campus of Indiana University, the Bloomington campus, in October of 1979. Semiotics, Fisch said:

will give us a map so complex and so detailed as to place any one field of highly specialized research in relation to any other, tell us quickly how to get from one such field to another, and distinguish fields not yet explored from those long cultivated. It will give us semiotic encyclopedias and dictionaries. It will supply the materials for introductions to semiotics. It will improve the expository skills of specialists whose reports and expositions are at present unreadable by anybody who does not have their specialties. It will thereby greatly improve communication between specialists in non-adjacent semiotic fields, as well as between semioticians and non-semioticians, or between semioticians and people who do not yet recognize themselves as such. It will enable us to place the results of researches now in progress; it will supply perspectives in terms of which to view and evaluate their results; but, at least for a long time to come, the general theory of signs will itself require continual revisions in the light of new findings.

I especially enjoyed Fisch's distinction between "semioticians and people who do not yet recognize themselves as such", reminding me of Sebeok's remark on the first occasion of meeting him in person, in Chicago in the Fall of 1971, I believe. "There are only two kinds of people", he advised me. "Those who are doing semiotics and know it, and those who are doing semiotics but have not yet become aware of the fact."

Now let me try to show you why "becoming aware of the fact" inevitably marks the beginning of a new era, one that, for intellectual culture in its mainstream development (at least for now – *faute de mieux*), can only be called "postmodern", and this by reason of what it is that a sign is, as I will now try to show.

The inspiration for the development of the study of signs into a mainstream phenomenon of intellectual culture, stabilized by the twentieth century's end mainly under the name "semiotics", albeit that Thomas Sebeok is the individual best emblematic of the phenomenon, has been a collective achievement rather than the work of any single man or founder of a school. One of the best, if not the best, of the assessments of the situation within which we find ourselves today as students of semiosis came in remarks delivered by Sebeok's erstwhile associate, Paul Bouissac, at the sixth Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America (on the 2nd of October, 1981) in his presentation, "Figurative vs. Objective Semiosis".<sup>26</sup> All previous semiotic "theories", he observed, be they Greimasian, Saussurean, Peircean, came to the study of signs late in the day, on the basis of a thoroughly worked out system of concepts, a "pre-existing

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26. Bouissac 1981.

philosophical paradigm”. To this pre-jacent paradigm, then, their subsequent notions of signification were referred and required to conform. The coming of age of semiotic as a perspective in its own right requires exactly the reverse. Semiotics can have no paradigm of philosophy given in advance. Beginning with the sign, that is, from the function of signs in our experience taken in their own right (semiosis), it is the task of semiotics to create a new paradigm – its own – and to review, criticize, and correct so far as possible all previous accounts of experience in the terms of *that* paradigm.

Bouissac was not aware of it at the time, and, I think, conceiving science exclusively ideoscopically as he does, would not likely appreciate the same point as it had been made three-hundred-forty-nine years earlier respecting the *doctrina signorum* as cenoscopic science. John Poinsoot, in the opening paragraphs of his *Tractatus de Signis*, pointed out that metaphysics as a science aims at the analysis and knowledge of *ens reale*, mind-independent being. Logic as a science aims at the analysis and knowledge of *ens rationis*, mind-dependent being. But a science of signs cannot be successfully conceived on either of those traditional paradigms, for semiotics requires the determination of a standpoint – a paradigm of its own – that transcends this distinction, that is not confined to either side of the *ens reale/ens rationis* divide, for the reason that signs pervade the whole order of the knowable, be it a question of hard-core reality, socially constructed reality, or indeed subjectivity or intersubjectivity of either type. Thus traditional logic and philosophy are not capable of dealing with the subject of semiosis in the terms required to understand the singular being of signs from which semiosis flows.

Semiosis, which is what semiotics has to take as its object of inquiry, is no less concerned with illusions than realities, with nonbeing than being, for objectively the problem is not so much that we can know reality as that we can mistake unrealities for realities in the game of life and need to know how and why this is possible in order to deal in full effectiveness with life. We can learn to sort out the difference between being and nonbeing, so to say, only by finding a standpoint from which we can examine both alike, not only in their separateness but also in their interaction and compenetration that we call “experience”. Thus Sebeok, who differed from Bouissac mainly in not conceiving science in the exclusively ideoscopic terms of the Enlightenment project, but well understood that the doctrine of signs in essence is rather, as Peirce said, a cenoscopic science prior to and capable of providing the warrant for the whole marvelous ideoscopic development to which today we alone customarily attach the term “science”, saw exactly what the standpoint for semiotic demarcated by Poinsoot implies,<sup>27</sup>

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27. Sebeok 1984.

namely, that “the central preoccupation of semiotics” is that “illimitable array of concordant illusions” which neither traditional philosophy nor logic – whether taken separately or jointly, because of their “either/or” standpoint and analytical mentality – can credence. The “main mission” of semiotics, accordingly, exactly as Peirce’s paradigm of the standpoint proper to the analytic of signs implies, is exactly as Sebeok outlined: “to mediate between reality and illusion – to reveal the substratal illusion underlying reality and to search for the reality that may, after all, lurk behind that illusion”.

This “abductive assignment”, Sebeok concluded, “becomes, henceforth, the privilege of future generations to pursue”, precisely because now at last, as the late-modern intellectual culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century morphs into the determinately postmodern intellectual and global culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has begun to form just that “community of inquirers” envisioned by Peirce and prophesied by Peirce, prepared to leave behind that whole array of modern philosophical paradigms which have in common a so-called epistemological orientation based on the confusion and conflation of other with self-representation. These inquirers are determined to fashion anew a paradigm that is based directly, not indirectly and half-unwittingly, on the action of signs as leading everywhere in nature and in culture, an action rooting human understanding in that semiotic action which is prior to any possible division between ontology and epistemology, *ens rationis* and *ens reale*, metaphysics and logic, such as all the schools of modern philosophy (in this no different from any of the schools of philosophy raised on Aristotle’s distinction between knowledge as speculative and knowledge as practical) presupposed. With semiotics, knowledge as speculative *becomes* knowledge as practical, and practical knowledge *becomes again* speculative as its limitations are faced up to, in that unending spiral of semiosis wherein abductions lead to deductions requiring retroductions which in turn lead to further abductions, and so on, in an asymptotic series of further approximations to some “final interpretant” supported by the community of inquirers developing over time.

So what has changed since the last century, so recent, in fact? How can we justify speaking now of semiotics as definitively *postmodern*, as inaugurating a new era of philosophical understanding and intellectual culture definitively displacing the representationalism of modern philosophy? Is it not an exaggeration to speak of so large a change in so short a time?

So it might seem. But consider. As recently as 1991, Thomas Sebeok considered it a fact, but not self-evident, “that each and every man, woman, and child superintends over a partially shared pool of signs in which that same monadic being is immersed and must navigate for survival throughout its singular life.” By the end of that decade, he considered that same fact to have reached the level

of self-evidence, as he makes clear in the introduction to the last of his books to be published within his lifetime.<sup>28</sup>

It may strike you a little odd to speak of a fact as one time not self-evident and at a later time self-evident. One might be inclined to think that something either is or is not self-evident; but actually this consideration has a long history in philosophy that quite warrants Tom's point of view in the matter. The medieval Latins, for example, commonly distinguished two kinds of propositions under the heading of "self-evident" (*per se nota* or *selbstverständlich*). A few propositions can be formed so as to be self-evident to anyone understanding the immediate sense of the terms themselves of the ordinary language from which the proposition is formed (*propositiones per se nota quoad omnes*). But other propositions (more interesting, on the whole) can be formed which are not self-evident to just anyone hearing them but only "to the wise", meaning those who understand not merely the terms as such but the further implications that follow from their arrangement in this particular proposition, those who have achieved a grasp of the larger context of intelligibility within which the proposition in question is able to maintain its sense (*propositiones per se nota quoad sapientes*) – in other words, "self-evident" to those steeped in observation and study of the matter to which the proposition applies and which it expresses.

What Tom is saying, by way of Introduction to his final book, is that the proposition that human experience throughout is an irreducible, labile interweave of sign-relations both mind-dependent and mind-independent is not a *propositio per se nota quoad omnes*, for it is hardly a proposition self-evident to one who has never or has barely heard of semiotics and what it involves. Yet it is indeed a proposition that has become self-evident *within semiotics* by the time we have entered the twenty-first century, a *propositio per se nota quoad sapientes*, something self-evident to semioticians insofar as they have come to understand that the being proper to signs consists in triadic relations indifferently real or unreal according to circumstance. Now that is saying a lot, and it brings us close to the heart of the matter in our asking what difference it makes what a sign is.

So the situation is not as strange as it might at first have sounded. To us, steeped in the study of signs, it sounds normal to hear it said that "all thought is in signs", only a little less strange (though it is far less common) to hear said that "all feeling is in signs". Yet both propositions, to Descartes in the 1640s, would have sounded odd indeed, perhaps ridiculous, since it was his view that all thought is in terms of objects, and among objects only a few are signs. Today we understand that, in fact, objects *presuppose* signs, that without the action of

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28. Sebeok 2001: ix.

signs there would be no objects of experience at all beyond the disconnected data provided through the distinct channels of external sensation which in turn depend upon the type of body that we have. Today we understand – but only from within semiotics – that the difference between sensations and perceptions is precisely the modeling system of the organism that forms representations actively joining sensations according to the interaction categories of what is to be sought (+), what is to be avoided (–), and what safely ignored (0).

Sensation is of features of the physical environment around us – which features, as I said, depending upon which type of organism our body belongs to, for sensations are not the same among dragonflies, crocodiles, and humans – and is comparable to the root systems of various plants which may take nourishment from different source elements in the soil, but have in common the need for physical contact, a dyadic interactive base, in order to discover those sources. Perception, by contrast, goes beyond the restrictions of dyadic interaction by its attainment of objects *classified* according to their relation to us. Dyadic interactions occur among things, but perception further concerns things become object not just nascently (sensation) but as *subjected to interpretation* of what sensations provide. Objects not only depend upon representations, they are themselves – even if “false”, i.e., wrongly interpreted – already *self*-representations; yet it is not on self-representations that objects depend for their being as objects but on *other*-representations on the basis of which the self-representations are made in the first place.

And here is the difference between the modern – early or late – representationalist paradigm in philosophy and the semiotic paradigm with which it has come to be replaced (or displaced) within semiotics: the representations primary within semiosis are subordinate to the objects presented by means of them, and these objects are always irreducibly *other than* the representations (the *other*-representations) which present them *to* some organism, whether as to be sought, to be avoided, or to be ignored – each category with its attendant “reasons” – and preliminary to the *further* distinction (which will occur only to that species of animal for which communication will subsequently become species-specifically linguistic) *within* objects, between what of the objects is *only* of interest to the animal aware of them and what of those exists *regardless* of that interest.

Descartes considered that the objects of which we are directly aware, since they need not be and often enough are not real, must be themselves our representative ideas. Today, we realize that the representations which are our ideas and which belong to our subjectivity are simply *that on the basis of which* we are related to objects – objects which are as public in principle as our ideas and our subjectivity are private; and that it is this *relation to* what the ideas represent (the objects as terminus of the idea-provenated relations), but which the ideas them-

selves *are not*, that is the essence of signification. But more than this, for this is yet not enough to move beyond modern representationalism. Even Kant realized that Descartes (and Locke) had gone too far in reducing objects to ideas as representations, and introduced between subjective mental representations and objects dependent on them the mediating structure of relations over and above subjectivity.<sup>29</sup> Yet he maintained that those objects to which ideas relate us contain and can contain nothing which is not reducible to the content a-priori of the representations themselves *we make* in the thinking of objects, and so remained a prisoner of the essence of modern representationalism: the solipsism of the awareness of each of us when all is said and done. It is an interesting problem. We are not solipsists if and only if it is true that our minds' contents insofar as we have consciousness of them are not wholly our minds' making; yet nothing in modern philosophy enables us to know that this is true. We are like bumble-bees which, according to modern aerodynamic theory, cannot fly yet do fly. We are not incapable, "slow by slow", of coming to know ourselves and our world, and of sharing that gradual awareness, also "slow by slow". The problem is to find a theory that can catch up with the experience of communication.

So the realization that representations within semiosis are not the same as representations within objectivity, the former being necessarily and irreducibly *other*-representations, while the latter are equally necessarily and irreducibly *self*-representations, is a decisive but not sufficient step for achieving the perspective proper to, the paradigm constitutive of, the veritable *point de depart* for, semiotics as the Way of Signs. There is the further realization that the foreground representative element which makes for a sign, which Peirce calls the "representamen", is not even necessarily something that we can detect with our outer sense, not necessarily something we can see and hear or point to, so long as it be a representation subordinated to something else as referent or object (real or unreal) within a relation which has the representative element as but *one* of at least *three* terms, the *second* being the object represented, but the *third* being the one to or for which the object is self-represented on the basis of that other-representation which we often can point out or hear and call in loose common language "a sign" – but which could not perform semiosis (and so could not be a sign) were it not for the *position it occupies*<sup>30</sup> within a triadic

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29. See Deely 2001: 554–559.

30. Here then we are in a position to see the difference between material objects which are instituted to be or through experience just happen to become vehicles of signification ("instrumental signs", in the later Latin parlance) and psychological states (the "formal signs" of Latin analysis), which is that the former only *contingently* come to occupy the foreground position of representing another than themselves within a triadic relation, while the latter *necessarily start out in that position* and only contin-

relation which has the two other terms of object (signified) and interpretant, the last constituting the in any given semiosis the “proper significate outcome of the sign”, as Peirce said, meaning: in the absence of which the “sign” loosely so-called would not be a sign at all but only some object (or thing) in its own right *representing itself* on the basis of fully-hidden-to-sense-relations which, in that case where the thing is an object, would be the semiotic relations unconscious to the perceiver.

In other words, as long as we continue to think in terms of the representative element *within* the “sign” as merely that one of the three necessary elements which happens to be standing in (to occupy) the foreground position of representing *another*, we continue to fall short of what makes that “sign” be a sign. We have not yet grasped formally what a sign is, as long as we think in terms of a particular kind of thing of the sort, in principle, that we identify by sense and can point to when saying “There!”, or even that particular kind of thing that, while not accessible directly to sense, yet forms part of our very own subjectivity as one among our “psychological states”. We realize what a sign is – that is to say, we realize what is unique about the being proper to signs within experience – only at that moment when we realize that there is *a relation* (a *suprasubjective* factor or element at play) which is not identical with or reducible to the related things that make up the sign “triadically”.

The relation is not the representamen, but that without which the representamen would not be a vehicle of signification. Still less is the relation the object signified, or the interpretant to or for which the object is signified. The relation, in short, *is* the sign strictly and properly so-called (as first Peirce demonstrated<sup>31</sup> and later Peirce independently but identically concluded<sup>32</sup>), with representamen, significate, and interpretant as the relation’s necessary and sufficient terms. Two people hear the same noise. Its physical attributes are identical. Yet for one it is a sign, for the other only an object. How is this possible? Because in the semiosis of the first that sound occupies the position of a representamen, an other-representation, for the other it does not; it is simply a self-representing object.

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gently come subsequently (at least in the case of semiotic animals) to occupy other positions as well within the triadic relation in which the formal being of signs strictly speaking always consists.

31. 1632: Book I, Question 3, 155/25–29, bold added: the irreducibly triadic relation “is **the proper and formale rationale** of a sign”.

32. Peirce 1904: CP 8.332, bold face added: “In its genuine form, Thirdness is **the triadic relation** existing between a sign, its object, and the interpreting thought, itself a sign, **considered as constituting the mode of being of a sign.**”

“Being a sign” (save perhaps virtually) for anything of the material order depends on falling within the experience of some organism in a certain relation, namely, a triadic one, and in a certain position within that relation, namely, the position of representamen in contrast to the positions of object signified and interpretant. The *same* element may occupy *different* positions within a triadic relation for different individuals, or even for the same individual at different times. But only when it occupies the position determining the role of representamen do we speak of it as “a sign”; and only when we realize the functional status of the representamen vis-à-vis the *relation itself* by reason of which the representamen *is* representamen (rather than significate or interpretant) do we realize that, strictly and technically speaking, the sign is the triadic relation itself both uniting the three essential elements and casting them in their respective roles. Loosely and commonly, we speak of some among the things we can point to as “signs”. But strictly and technically, we now realize that none of the things we can point to are signs, but only the relation which we can understand but not see, and only that form of relation which is triadic rather than dyadic (as are many of the relations among things in the environment).

We know of signs only through seeing them at work. But what we see directly are not the signs, but the elements which function as other-representations in contrast to objects as self-representations, which often enough we also see. But the relations whereby one thing represents another to us, these we experience without seeing, and in the creation of language we model them in their difference from things related. Relations, all relations, are indifferent in their own being as relations as to whether here and now they exist in nature or only in and through the awareness of some being. For the bone of a dinosaur, it makes no difference whether an organism aware of it realizes that this object here and now is the bone of a dinosaur that once was. But for the relation of that bone to a dinosaur to be actual, one of two things has to happen: either the dinosaur must exist here and now, or the one aware of the bone must be aware of it as a dinosaur’s bone. The bone as a subjective material structure in its own right is indifferent to the actuality of the relation. Yet for the relation to be actual the dinosaur must exist, whether in fact (*ens reale*) or in apprehension of past fact (*ens rationis*).

Of course, we may misclassify a bone. A poor anthropology student might mistake the bone of a mastodon for the bone of a brontosaurus. The relation that was once actual in fact need not be identical with the relation that is actual now in cognition, but fictionally so! What “the bone is a sign of” may be a false interpretant rather than an object truly signified. It was not the opinion of men that made the earth revolve relative to the sun. Were it so Galileo would have been justly condemned, and the doctrine that the earth has an orbit truly heretical.



So we arrive at the easily most important difference it makes what a sign is: because a sign is strictly not a representamen but a relation, a sign participates in the indifference of all relations to their subjective source or ground here and now. Accordingly, signs make possible in human affairs both truth and error. The possibility of truth and error combined with human intentions make possible as well the use of signs to lie. But the *use* of signs, like the action of signs, depends upon *what signs are*, and what signs are are relationships of a certain kind, namely, triadic relationships normally involving cognition and feeling (at least within the sphere of anthroposemiosis, which is where semiotics begins). Animals and plants can deceive, but they cannot lie, understanding by “lie” that distinctively linguistic form of deceit which, being linguistic, is also species-specifically human.

Without signs there could be no deceit. We would live in a world without lies, a world without false identifications. But it would be also a world without truth. That is the difference it makes that a triadic relation is what a sign is. We may conclude this particular consideration, then, by listing a few corollaries. A world without signs would be a world of pure physicality. A world without signs would be a world wholly deterministic, in which the past would be everything. A world without signs would be forever the same in its possibilities.

What, then, is the study of signs? It is the study of the world as more than physical, a world in which the future is not wholly contained in the past, a world in which new possibilities emerge in any given present, affecting and changing what may or will be possible in any future. Eco famously defined the sign as anything that can be used to lie, proving in advance Sebeok’s maxim<sup>33</sup> that “definitions of semiotics are plenteous: some thrive, but all are misleading”. Given the famous arbitrariness which, as we have seen, even the most “natural” of signs acquires when surrounded by the atmosphere of human experience, the signosphere of human thought and belief, we might rather say that the sign is anything that can be used to change the relevance of past to present via some prospective future; and that semiotics, certainly the sign’s way of getting to know itself, is the study of precisely that indirect *influence of the future* upon the present that changes the relevance of what is past (given that “the present” has no being other than what it borrows simultaneously from what has gone before and what lies ahead) – save only to add here Sebeok’s assertion<sup>34</sup> that semiotics “is something by means of which we can conjure reality from illusion by the use of signs”, and in no other way. (How that is misleading, I will leave for others to say).

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33. Sebeok 1991: 1–3.

34. *Ibid.*

## Chapter 9

### Why Intersubjectivity Is Not Enough<sup>1</sup>

Now let me explain to you an aim, to give you something to tie these remarks together in your mind from the beginning. In the last century, of the three greatest philosophers, one of them, in my opinion, was Jacques Maritain. Sometime around 1958, Jacques Maritain made a remark the profundity of which I am not sure if even he himself fully grasped at the time. “All animals”, he said, “make use of signs. But only human animals know *that there are* signs.”

Now what he meant by “human animals know that there are signs” was not that *all* human animals thematically consider the fact that there are signs, but that only the human animal is *capable* of such a thematic consideration. So what I want to consider here is what may well be the most surprising consequence of realizing what a sign consists in, the fact namely that, strictly speaking, it is impossible to see or to hear or to touch or to taste a sign by any sensory modality. I want to show you that semiotics so profoundly respects the sphere of the sensible, of the visible, so to say, that it knows how to distinguish that sphere, and that semiotics can only begin to acquire its full consciousness in distinguishing the visible from the invisible, because the sign belongs to the invisible. And I think that I can not only show this to you but, as my friend said in Oulu, “slow by slow” convince you.

Now, we are animals. At the time that Professor Sebeok died, there was one outstanding provisional disagreement between us, and I don’t know for sure if I could have persuaded him to my side or not, because he died too quickly. And that was the question of whether the action of signs can be limited to the sphere of living things. And I think that the action of signs cannot be so limited, that even in the inorganic sphere there is semiosis, an action of signs, albeit one less than fully actual (“virtual”, as the Latins used to say) and only intermittent as well. Yet what becomes constant with the advent of life was present fitfully and intermittently in advancing the universe from its lifeless beginnings incapable of supporting life toward intermittently rising, as it were, new stages where the possibility of sustaining life became less and less remote. When the sustenance of living things was an actual and proximate possibility, only then, obviously,

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1. This lecture was presented Sunday, September 8, to the New Bulgarian University, Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies, 8<sup>th</sup> International Early Fall School of Semiotics, 5–10 September 2002.

could life actually emerge, and it did. At that moment also what had previously been only fitful and intermittent, like a match unsuccessfully struck, became a conflagration spreading everywhere that life spread. From an occasional spark occurring actually only in a virtual and passing way, semiosis became a fully actual and constant phenomenon without which the actuality of life itself would have remained unsustainable.

But here I pass over this debate in silence. For present purposes, it is sufficient to start with the idea of a living creature which is an animal. What distinguishes an animal is not response to the environment, but a capacity to be aware of the environment *as basis for* response, the response itself being, therefore, not simply and directly to the environment as physical, but rather to that environment as and insofar as incorporated into and re-organized according to the *objective* world of the animal, its Umwelt or sphere of meaning (its species-specific “semiosphere”, so to say). Now, I want you to use some serious imagination here, because I want you to realize that your body is like a radio receiver. Right now, the place where you are is filled with all kinds of energies. Right now, I am sure there are radio programs going on, which none of us can hear. Why not? Because we are not radios. Our bodies are not proportioned to those energy levels. If we were radios we could hear them, or if we had a radio we could turn it on and that radio would transform that energy to make it proportionate to our ears, and we would hear the broadcasts. So. Not only that. But every living thing has its own kind of body: we do not have the body of a frog, of a dragonfly, of a bat, and so on. As a result, what we become aware of in a given situation is different according to our species. So there will be a species-specific awareness as the basis and at the center of an animal’s response to the environment.

Let us begin at the ground level. In the physical environment, certain energies impact my body. Certain parts of that body, and only certain parts, are proportioned to become aware of some energies that impact them. And those parts of the body that are so proportioned we call the senses – the eyes, the ears, the tongue, and so on; the so-called “external senses”. Now what happens when we become aware of some part of the environment? What change takes place? First of all, the energy is bombarding us. If it bombards us proportioned to the sense, it activates that sense and there is a change in us, such that we *become aware* of some aspect of the physical surroundings, some aspect of the environment. Now what has happened? The only change that has taken place is not in the environment. The change is “in” us, but it *relates* us to the environment in a way that we were not otherwise related to it. When I hear a sound, I become related to that sound, to that physical vibration, and not only it to me. There is a relation from me to that sound that was not there before I became aware of it.

In sensation, let us consider the eyes. A thing has to be illuminated in order for us to see it. We say that we see color, but all that color is is the differentiation of light, light differentiated by the texture of the surface off which the light bounces or reflects. So understand, when I say “color”, what I mean is differentiated light. The light strikes a body, the light bounces off that body, the body absorbs some of the energy, reflects other parts, and reflects the energy differently according to the internal or ‘subjective’ structure of the surface. I see the color: I see a black dress there, I see a yellow blouse there; I see black there and yellow there because of two things: the internal structure of that material (which structure I do not well see), and the fact that I have a human eye which functions within a normal range. If I had the eye of a bat, would I see just the same black and yellow? No, not exactly. If I had the eye of a dragonfly what would I see? And so on.

But I don’t only see color. I also see shape, for instance; and, because I have studied in the Berlin school, I recognize that the shape I see belongs to a woman. I see a shape, I see a position: this woman is sitting to my right, that woman is sitting to my left (I have a preference for seeing women, as a result of my semiotic training). Seeing the position that a body is occupying in the environment is logically dependent upon my seeing the color; but although the two things are simultaneous – I don’t see the color without seeing also the position – yet seeing the position is logically dependent upon seeing the color, not the other way round. I see ‘first’ the color and ‘then’ the position, not in time: for in time, I see the two simultaneously. But there is a dependency of one on the other. So between the color and the position there is a relation. And this relation is already a sign relation.

Pay attention to this: you cannot see the relation; you cannot see *any* relation. The very minimum concept of sign – if you were to go below this concept of sign you would have no concept of sign; you would be what we used to call in the United States forty years ago a “behaviorist”, pure and simple – one thing *stands for* another.

My friend Professor Cobley, criticizes me that I do not use high enough technology in my talks. So today I have gone to the highest level of technology. I am going to use *magic*. I draw for you here, in bright red, a triangle. You see it. Now here I am going to draw for you, in bright yellow, a triangle. There you see the red triangle and there the yellow triangle. You notice that they are both triangles. What does that mean? It means that they have a certain shape. *Where* is that shape? What do you mean, where is it? It’s in the triangle. Can’t you see that? Are you an idiot? (Pardon me for asking!)

Notice now, further, that this triangle, the red one, is *similar* to the yellow one. But again, now, *where* is *the similarity*? It’s not the shape, but only *based*

on the shape. The similarity is *between the two* triangles. The *shape* is *in* each of the triangles, but the *similarity* is *between* the triangles. The *similarity* is not in the red triangle, nor is it in the yellow triangle. What's *in* this red triangle is *the shape*. What's *in* this yellow triangle is *the shape*. But *the similarity* is *between* them *because of* the shape. The similarity is not the shape. The similarity is a relationship. Notice, again further, that the one triangle is red, the other yellow. They are dissimilar. And where is the dissimilarity? It is in the same place as the similarity: it is between the two triangles.

Now, by the powers invested in me as magician, I destroy the red triangle. No more red triangle. Is the yellow triangle still similar to the red triangle? If you had a mind, it would still be similar in your mind. But if you don't have a mind it can't be similar, because there is no red triangle. The first notion of intersubjectivity, the first discussion of relation that we find in the literature that survives to us, came from very near to here, Greece, in a series of remarks, but never fully thematized or drawn together, in Plato.<sup>2</sup> The first one thematically to discuss relation was Aristotle. Aristotle's concept of relation was precisely the concept of intersubjectivity. He made three attempts to define relation,<sup>3</sup> two of which failed. Let us look at this.

Aristotle had this idea of substance. Now what is a substance? A substance is an individual. Professor Bogdanov talked earlier about the problem of essentialism, how we need to have essentialism. Yes. Indeed. He's right. Essence is imaginary (at least not always). To say that the thing before us that we want to consider, the thing sitting in the environment responding to it with these relations of awareness is a living thing, what makes it individual? There is something, you have all noticed – I hope you have noticed: that there is a difference in a thing before it exists, after it exists, and after it dies. From the beginning of a thing's existence to the death of that thing, if it's a living thing, the constant Aristotle called the substantial form and, in the particular case of a living thing, a soul. No soul, no life. And then different souls have different powers; you can't see them, but you can understand them: digestive powers characteristic of plants; cognitive powers characteristic of animals.

Now watch this. The senses, in responding to the physical environment by making us aware, notice they don't make us *atomically* aware of color, sound, etc. They make us aware rather of a *pattern*, a *web* of interconnections. They make us aware of an intensity of sound, a direction of sound, a shape, a volume, a distance: all these things together, already through sign relations. Because,

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2. See Cavarnos 1975.

3. The Greek texts pertinent to these three attempts are set out in Deely 1985: 472–475, esp. p. 473 notes 112, 113, and 114.

as we saw, the shape, the position, the direction, all of these depend upon (if we're talking of visual sense), the color; and it's the same with the other sense modalities (we could spend quite a bit of time and space discussing in detail only this: why the relationship between what Aristotle called the proper and the common sensibles is already a sign relationship<sup>4</sup>). But in this net or web of sign relationships our organism is primarily passive, because what I become aware of in the physical environment depends only on being at a certain place and having normally functioning senses. Now how I *interpret* what I sense, how I construe it perceptually and intellectually, that is quite another matter: I cannot see here a blackboard unless I have been enculturated to see a blackboard, and, of course, you notice that it's *not* a blackboard that I am seeing (now-a-days it's almost always a *white* board; but no one calls it that), yet you know what I mean. But it is impossible for me to be a human organism in this position in space and not to see that shape in that position, unless I close my eyes. I may need interpretation to see that shape in that position as a "blackboard", but not at all to see that shape in that position. Whether I understand it to be a blackboard or not is a different question from the question of sensation prescissively considered examines. We are talking sensation; there is no understanding at this level – not even *phantasiari*, perception, the kind of interpretation common to all higher animals.

Immediately as an animal I become aware, not of all the environment, but only of that portion of the energies of the environment proportioned to my kind of body. Being an animal, I am 'interested', so to speak, in surviving: I want to grow, I want to reproduce, I want to live well – whatever that will mean for the type of animal that I am. These things that I am aware of from the energies of the physical environment, now I begin to do something to them that comes from me, not from the environment. What I do is begin to classify or arrange this sensory information. And how do I arrange it? Again, the arrangement depends upon my biological constitution, my biological heritage. Now, in this phase or dimension of the cognition, I become aware not of parts of the physical environment merely but of objects. And objects for the animal commonly speaking are of just three kinds: plus (+), minus (-), zero (Ø). Plus: the things to go after. Minus: the things to shun. Zero: the things I can safely ignore.

Now I have a problem, however, because there are other animals out there, different from me, and not only different from me, but ones that would like to eat me. Animals that would like to kill me. Animals from whose point of view I am very much a Plus. Animals which, from my point of view, are very much a Minus. Not only are these animals out there interested to get me, but they are

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4. Cf. Poinso 1632: Book I, Question 6.

sneaky. They use deceit. In a certain way they are liars – not really liars, but they do use deceit. They try so to organize the physical environment in the ways that I become aware of it that when I look around I will see either Plus or Zero – but not them, not the Minus that they are for me. And if they succeed in that, I lose my existence. As simple as that.

Where I grew up in New Mexico, on the ditchbank running beside our yard there used to be these strange little conical holes in the sand. They were very small, maybe an inch across and three-quarters of an inch deep, the big ones; and many were smaller. And what were these depressions or holes? In the sand of the ditch they were perfect conical cylinders, inversely triangular – they came to a point at the bottom. When I originally noticed these inverse conical triangles I first just wondered, “What the heck?” They were objects of curiosity (+). So, being curious, I sat around for a while watching one of them. After about half an hour, along came an ant, seeing no doubt Pluses and Zeros, but no Minus as it approached the cylinder in the sand. Then, on reaching the cylinder’s edge, the ant began to lose its footing, and, struggling, slid down the side to the pointed bottom. When the ant reached the point, to its surprise and mine, pincers suddenly appeared to grab it. There was a living thing hidden in the bottom that reached out, seized and devoured the ant. No more ant. I was astonished. The ant, of course, was past astonishment.

So then I said to myself, already being a semiotician manqué, perhaps, “I didn’t see anything there, but something must be there nonetheless.” I dug it out and indeed it was a little animal that fed on ants at least. Already the triangularly conical depression had become a sign as well as an object. I watched these cylinders over a number of years, and found the digger of the death trap fed on a number of things, not only ants, but a number of different bugs stumbling in to the triangularly cylindrical trap because failing to interpret and apprehend it for what it was to them, not + or  $\emptyset$  but definitely –.

So the animal makes this arrangement of objects as +, –,  $\emptyset$ ; but in doing so it has, even more interestingly, this further unfortunate capacity for making mistakes. Because when you register in perception some sensed environmental feature as Plus or Zero, and it is rather a Minus respecting your particular biology or bodily type, you risk to suffer the fate of the ant at the hands (so to speak) of this ditchbank creature the name of which I never learned.

So we move *from* the level of sensation to the level of the classification and experience of objects as Plus, Minus, Zero, *to* the level of perception, of interpretation of the sensory. Notice that what is Plus is not exactly *in* the object, what is Minus is not exactly *in* the object, so much as it is fundamentally *in me*, as it were, projected upon the object (validly or invalidly, as we might say) because of the kind of animal that I am. So I will organize the world into objects desirable

or undesirable not as much according to ‘what things are’ as according to what kind of thing that *I* am. Yet even here I am not entirely unrelated to the ‘things themselves’ of the world in their subjective constitution, because if I choose things as good to eat (Plus), and they are actually incompatible with my body, I will suffer malnourishment (as dramatically happened to Viktor Yushchenko in the 2004 Ukraine presidential election); or, if the thing in question is deadly poisonous for an organism of my type, I will die. Again it is a mistake that we make. We taste something, for example, and think it tastes great. So we take more, and we’re shortly dead.

So there’s a lot of room for error in the animal situation of interpretation within perception on the basis of sensation. When we organize the environment into what is to be sought, what avoided, and what can be safely ignored, we organize it because, among the sensory data that we got (not because of any projections of ours, but because of the kind of body that we have and the kind of energy that impacts that body) there are already operative relations that suggest, as it were, *how* we should organize those environmental elements into Plus, Minus, and Zero. And when we arrange the sensory stimuli into objects thus, we are taking the elements *in their interrelationships* as signs. We have one ‘thing’ as ‘standing for’ another, the minimum – *minimum* – concept or function of sign.

‘To stand for another’ presupposes but is not a behavior. I may even be wrong about what the things stands for. The ‘standing for another’ is a relationship. What I, the animal, am aware of is not the relationship. I am aware of the thing plus that for which it stands, simultaneously, the two correlated, as I am aware of the color of the blouse and the position and the fact that it’s a woman (or perhaps a transvestite) wearing the blouse – all simultaneously. I see the related things. I do not see the relationship. How do I come to know the relationship? Only by understanding. Only by reflection. Only by distinguishing the relation from the elements or things that are related. And this only human animals can do. (It is the basis of linguistic communication, in fact; but that is not for now.)

Now if the relation of the one element or thing to the other is based on intrinsic characteristics of the thing – in the case of my two triangles: you see that the yellow one is still here, and now, by virtue of my magical power, I bring back the red one. Now the two triangles are again similar. The shape each possesses ‘in itself’ has become the basis for the relationship which is *in* neither of them, is *over and above* the things related. This ‘over and aboveness’ is the most important feature, the distinctive being, of relation, said Aristotle. The relation is *dependent* indeed upon the things that are related; but the aspects of the things upon which the relation is dependent are intrinsic to the things, whereas the relation itself is not in the things but between them. This “being-in-between” is what is meant by intersubjectivity.



Subjectivity, in this context of understanding, is precisely everything that constitutes the red triangle as distinct from the rest of the universe. And subjectivity for the yellow triangle is everything that constitutes the yellow triangle as distinct from the rest of the universe. What then is intersubjectivity? Intersubjectivity is everything that *connects* one subjectivity in the universe to another subjectivity; it is the connection *between* subjectivities.

Your parents. I hope it doesn't embarrass you to realize this, but, one day, or perhaps it was a night, your parents had sex, and you were the result. There was a causal relationship there. When your parents had sex, that particular time, they caused you to come into existence. But, right now, your parents are not having sex (let us suppose).

I see the look on some of your faces: "Don't underestimate my parents". OK, maybe they're having sex right now; but if they are having sex now, it's not the same sex that produced you. The sex that produced you is over, over and done with. Causality is not a relationship. Causality is an interaction of two bodies impacting one another. But a relation *results from* causality. And that relationship that *results from* causality is what makes you, for example, the son or the daughter – the 'offspring' – of a particular man and a particular woman (or these days, mayhap, of a particular laboratory container).

I tell you something now that I don't want to go beyond this room, because it is very embarrassing for the people involved. I swear you to secrecy. I was a Visiting Professor at the University of Helsinki, Finland. I got to be good friends with a professor on the theology faculty who was very happily married. He was a professor of moral theology and a man of the highest standards of conduct. He went to New York one time for a theology convention, and went out on the town the first night with two fellows he met at the convention and, very uncharacteristically, he got drunk. And he met a woman in the bar, and they slipped off and had sex together. He never even knew her name – like in the movies. When he returned to his own hotel, realizing what he had done, he was mortified and repentant. He sent to his wife in Helsinki a beautiful bouquet of flowers, which she experienced as such a romantic gesture that she literally threw herself at him when he came home.

He felt very guilty. But he did not tell his wife the true reason for having sent the flowers. As we say in America, "he left well enough alone".

The poor theologian never knew that his brief consort back in America had become pregnant. What a mess. Because the woman too was married. And not only was she married, she was Catholic. Not only was she Catholic and married but she was in a bad marriage. She and her husband had not had sex together for over four years. Now she's pregnant. How is she going to explain this to her husband?

She decided to get an abortion. But, as she approached the clinic, her conscience got the better of her. She could not go through with the abortion. So what to do? She frantically consulted with some close girlfriends, and soon she got an idea. Only a few days had passed, so she realized that if she quickly enough got her husband again to sleep with her, she could pass off the pregnancy on that. And this is what she did.

She persuaded her husband to have sex. It proved to be not that difficult to persuade him, as is often the case, despite, or perhaps because of, the long time since ‘the last time’ (there are helpful devices and costumes; if you study in Berlin you can find them). Then she waited a decent interval and announced to her husband: “You are not going to believe this, but I am pregnant.”

Well, he was amazed. Part of the reason the marriage had gone bad was that they had not been able to have any children. So his love for his wife came back to life; the marriage transformed from bad to great. The wife felt guilty, but she didn’t want to ruin a good thing – she too thought to “leave well enough alone”. Like the Finnish theologian, she decided for the time to “leave well enough alone”. So she thought “I won’t tell him, or maybe I’ll tell him later – way later – or perhaps never.”

So she got more and more pregnant – actually, you can’t become more and more pregnant (you’re either pregnant or you’re not), but rather closer and closer to delivery – and the time came for giving birth. Her water burst. They went to the hospital, but then complications developed, and in the course of the delivery the woman died, but they were able to save the child.

It’s a sad story, in addition to which my friend in Finland still doesn’t know. So keep this to yourselves.

Now the man in New York, the husband, was a lawyer. And he loved the new child very much, because he saw it as a symbol of his wife and their marriage and their family: it was *their* daughter, after all, a product of *their* love. There was only one pertinent difference now between the lawyer in New York and the professor of moral theology in Helsinki. (I probably don’t need to tell you that the professor in Helsinki was a Lutheran, because a Catholic moral theologian, or a Calvinist for that matter, would never get into such a mess as this.) The only difference between the two men respecting this newborn girl is that there is a *real* relationship of biological parentage between the girl and the Helsinki theologian.

Pay attention to what I mean here by ‘real’. I mean it in the sense of Aristotle’s category of relation: something intersubjective, something over and above two organisms, linking or connecting them in their otherwise separate individualities. It is something which exists in the world, beyond (over and above) subjectivity, whether or not anybody is aware of its existence; its reality is “hardcore”, not socially constructed.

Between the New York lawyer and the girl there is also a relationship, but compared to the relationship between the Helsinki theologian and the girl, the relationship of the New York lawyer and the girl is ‘unreal’. It has existence *only* through mind and society, not through biological generation by sex. The lawyer *thinks* it’s his daughter. Pope Urban VIII *thought* that the sun went around the earth. The truth of the matter does not depend upon the opinions held. In our case, the truth is that the girl is the biological daughter of the professor in Helsinki. The truth is that she is not the biological daughter of the lawyer in New York, even though she is thought to be. The thought is mistaken. Too bad.

So there are two relationships here, one lawyer to girl, and one theologian to girl; but the one is mind-independent, the other is mind-dependent. Now pay attention to this, to what is a very strange thing about relation. Relation, precisely because it’s not *in* anything, need not be *real* in order to be *objectively a relation* (this relationship between the girl and the lawyer is not in the girl, it is not in the lawyer; this relationship between the girl and the professor in Helsinki is not in the professor, it is not in the girl – in fact, so little is this relation *in* either that *neither* even knows of its existence, despite its ‘reality’; even the girl, the theologian’s daughter, believes that the lawyer is her father. She thinks it a little odd, the way he looks, but things happen, you know – mutations, genetic combinations, who knows?). This strange feature of relations whereby it makes no difference whether the relationship comes from the mind or from the material realities of the world is a very important feature of relation, probably the single most decisive consequence of the being proper and unique to relation as *esse ad*. But no one – before Poincaré, at least – ever thought about it according to its singularity, according to the way in which it makes semiosis possible. It’s what enables you to tell lies – a rather important capacity, and one that is often thought about. It’s also what enables one organism to deceive other organisms – a very important capacity. But no one before Poincaré ever thought to point out that this peculiarity of relation is a *singularity*, and the reason why semiosis is possible in the first place.

So you notice now that, for intersubjectivity in Aristotle’s original sense, there have to be two things actually existing independent of human thought. The things related, in short, have really to exist, “really” in the hardcore sense. There can’t be a similarity between the red triangle, now that it no longer exists, and the yellow triangle, which still does exist. You can’t have an intersubjective reality between what exists and what does not exist, because a thing exists subjectively when it exists in itself as distinct from the rest of the universe. So the most important thing about intersubjectivity is that it can only be between subjects. It is *intersubjective*. Subjects have to exist as part of the physical universe in order for there to be anything *between* them. And, as in the case of your parents,

to show you that the causality is not the relationship, you have only to realize that you continue to be the daughter or the son of your parents even after the sex by which they caused you has long ceased, even when your parents die. So you have, relatively speaking, an independence of your parents. You are a “substance” in your own right, just as they were.

This relative independence is true also respecting the universe as a whole. You never have anything more than a relative independence respecting your environment. For example, suppose that you are training to high-jump. What’s the world record for high jumping? Supposing you get a very powerful, muscularly legged male child who sets out to beat the world’s record. As he trains, he proves able to jump higher and higher and soon, to the amazement of all, the child is able to jump miles into the air. And then one day the child reaches a fatal level of accomplishment. He leaps fully fourteen miles into the air, and explodes, because human existence depends upon a certain range of pressure maintained upon the body from without, and that pressure decreases as you go up from the earth’s surface.

You feel fairly comfortable in this room. You don’t realize that there are more or less fourteen and a half pounds per square inch of atmospheric pressure holding your body together, which pressure if too far reduced would cause you to explode. Similarly, if you dive into the ocean, the pressure on your body from without increases, and will kill you if you dive too deeply. So you are always dependent in existence upon other things which you are not, a fact which gave Aristotle such a problem in his attempts to state what relation is as a distinct category of being, because if we define relation as what must be taken into account when we explain something, then *everything* becomes relations! Well, to explain you, a substance, we have to take into account your parents. But you are not a relation. Your parents are not a relation. They, like you, are substances. Yet you are all three reciprocally required to be taken into account for a full explanation of any one of you. So Aristotle realized that if relation is simply what must be taken into account in explaining something, then even substances and inherent accidents are relations. There is no relation as a *distinct* category in that case, but only as an *aspect* of *every* category, including substance – which defeats the purpose of the categories as an attempt to clarify the *diverse* aspects or ways of being (*esse*) as what is common to all ‘realities’.

We need, then, he was finally able to realize, to define relation simply as that which depends for its existence upon substances and subjective characteristics of substances, but does so over and above them, does so as obtaining *between* them here and now.

Now, in experience, the animal is aware of many different things. Pay attention to this fact. When there is something in the environment of which I have no

awareness, it exists and I exist. When I become aware of its existence, it acquires a relationship to me which it did not have. That relationship to me transforms what, before I had any awareness of it was simply a thing, into now being also an object, an object *as well as* a thing.

What exists subjectively before I have any awareness of it is the paradigm case of a thing: being a subject (of existence) whether or not it is known so to be. Now nothing prevents – the point fatal to his philosophy that eluded Kant – what exists as a subjective thing from also existing as known. What’s the difference between a thing simply existing, and that same thing existing as known? The *only necessary* difference is a relation to me, or, more generally, to some cognitive organism, some animal. That ‘relation to me’, then, makes for the difference between a *thing* and an *object*. But how, exactly?

So pay attention. An object is anything that exists in my awareness; anything that I am aware of is an object. Only some objects are things. And not all things are objects (unless you’re one of these people, like God, who is aware of everything without exception.) Are there things of which you are not aware? Yes? Then name one! It’s not so easy to talk about things of which you have no awareness! You can only talk about things *insofar as* you *are* aware of them. And the things that you don’t know but that you have some indirect awareness of, like the cause of Aids, or the cure for Aids, will *become* objects, fully, as well as things, only once they become directly known. Because that is what makes the difference between an object and a thing.

This idea of object is very important for semiotics, indeed, fundamental. (There are some semioticians, I am going to tell you, very important sociologically speaking, but theoretically speaking almost insignificant, because they have no clue as to the difference between a sign and an object.)

Yet so far we have things and we have objects, but yet no signs. Well yes we do have signs. You notice already those primitive connections of one thing standing for another? Now, in experience, the higher animals learn from experience. Their ‘interpretation of the world’ is not all just built-in. They *learn* from experience. They *learn* what things to be afraid of, often things first deemed Zero. Their categories of Plus, Minus, and Zero are not absolutely rigid, not matters of “instinct” (that black-box term best abandoned). They’re able to shift things from Plus to Minus, and from Minus to Zero, and from Zero to Plus or Minus, and so on. And even you, as a human being, have had someone you thought was your friend (+) who turned out to be an enemy (–), someone you were attracted to (+) turn out to be a crashing bore (Ø), and so on. So what you classified as Plus turned out to be Minus, say, and when you learned that – if you survived – you shifted the thing from the Plus into the Minus category. So the Plus, Minus, Zero are not static categories, and they are basically categories of interaction,

because they are classifying things according to their importance for me, their relation to me; the classification is based not just on any relation to me, but on the *objective* relation to me – which may or may not be “real” in the hardcore sense. The classification is a classification of objects directly, and things only indirectly.

Along one day comes a human animal. What is the difference between this animal and the other animals that are not human? A friend of mine at a conference commented to me, apropos of our friend Thomas Sebeok who is here only in spirit and as a kind of ghost: “Tom would be horrified to hear many of these uses of the word ‘language’.” I chuckled to myself, because the remark was true. Tom was the first one in my experience, certainly the one from whom I got the point, to remark that there is a difference between *communication* and *language*. I never forget the conference in Toronto. Tom was speaking, and there was an audience of about two hundred, and Tom said “You know, when people hear the word ‘language’ or use the word ‘language’ they always think of *communication*. And this is a great mistake which completely prevents them from understanding what language is, because language has *nothing* to do with communication.” And the audience jolted.

So the question period came, and the first questioner, a man, somewhat belligerent, addressed Sebeok: “You said that language has nothing to do with communication.” Tom said “Yes. That’s what I said. You heard me well.” “Why did you say that?”, demanded the questioner. “Because it doesn’t”, Tom replied. “Next?”

I then watched this insight as Tom developed it over the next two or three years, a development which culminated in a meeting of the New York Academy of Sciences where Tom Sebeok, almost single-handedly, virtually brought to an end the funding in the United States for research into “animal language”. He felt this was his moral obligation as a semiotician, because all this money that was being spent on animal language experiments was unavailable for serious scientific research.

At an earlier meeting of the Semiotic Society of America, Tom had taken on the subject of animal language, opening thus: “I am going to show you in this talk” – the talk was going to last twenty minutes – “that all of the people who are involved in animal language experiments are either charlatans or fools.” What in the world was he getting at?

Be careful here. Wherever there are relationships there is communication, and there are relationships everywhere in nature. You don’t have to be a cognitive being to communicate. Rocks communicate. Stars communicate. Plants communicate. Plants and animals communicate. Animals and animals communicate. Communication is about as universal a phenomenon as you can get. And

this communication that I am talking about – most of it, until you get into the animal world, a point we are working up to – is all intersubjectivity. It’s all relationships in the sense of Aristotle’s distinct category, patterns of relationships, networks and nests of relationships among really existing things. Not among objects. Among really existing things.

Back to our living world. Why? Because it’s easier to manage. There’s only a few million living species. Every single species of animal has species-specific distinctive characters. And among these are species-specific ways of communicating. Every species has common ways of communicating, and ways of communicating that, if you’re not a member of that species, you can’t communicate in that way. If you’re a spider and you want to spin a web out of your own body, you go ahead. If you’re a human being and want to do the same, you’re out of luck.

So a species-specific modality of communication, if you want to, you could call the “language” of that species. If you want to call that “language” in an extended sense, you could and many do. What is the species-specific modality of communication for human beings? It’s not language. It’s *linguistic communication*. And there is a profound difference. At the present time, as far as I know, this distinction is understood only within semiotics – the difference between language and linguistic communication. And not everywhere within semiotics. And what most people mean when they say “language” should rather be termed “linguistic communication”, if it is “human language” that they are talking about.

What’s the difference? When the animal organizes the aspects of the environment that it becomes aware of into an object world for interaction, what does it do? It creates a series of other-representations, called “ideas” or “images” or “icons”, etc.<sup>5</sup> It produces these representations within itself. They are part of its subjectivity. These representations constitute what Tom Sebeok follows Jakob von Uexküll in calling an *Innenwelt*. And what is an *Innenwelt*? An *Innenwelt* is the sum total of the powers that an animal has to form these other-representations plus all the representations that it has actually formed. What distinguishes the representations formed within an *Innenwelt*, however, is that the whole and sole purpose of the representations within the *Innenwelt* is to give rise to relations to things *outside and other than* the *Innenwelt*. So everything that exists as known, everything that exists objectively – pay attention to this – everything that exists objectively exists dependently upon the *Innenwelt*, but it is not part of the *Innenwelt*, it is *at the terminus* of the relations that are created by and founded

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5. Historically, there is quite a range of names for the other-representations of animal life whereby the surroundings are interpreted: see, for example, Deely 1993a.

on the representations within *Innenwelt*. (Of course, in the awareness of human animals, but only there, a complete turning back of thought upon itself is possible which makes even of the *Innenwelt* and its other-representations *objects* in a secondary fashion; but that is another point.) Thus, when I or anyone else first came to this place,<sup>6</sup> we did not know where is the Conference Hall. You walk in through the front gate and you look around. And I asked somebody, after two days, “Where is the conference hall?” “On the other side of the church”, he told me. I said “Well let’s go take a look at it.” He said “Well you can’t. It’s locked up.” So I took their word for it that it was on the other side of the church. What had happened now was that there was a difference in my interior other-representations. Yet the monastery, too, definitely “outside” of me even though within my *Umwelt*, was changed as well, for I had an idea of where the conference room was, and perceived my external surroundings accordingly.

Pay attention. What I was looking for was not an idea in my mind. I was looking for the conference room. The conference room, it turned out, was right where my friend said it was. He was not mistaken, he was not a liar, he was not leading me into an assassination trap: here was the conference room. Now this little former monastery was that much more familiar to me. What is the difference between the monastery when it was familiar to me and the monastery when it was not familiar to me? As far as the monastery is concerned, none. But as far as I am concerned, plenty. I now have a cognitive map of the monastery. My *Innenwelt* now includes the conference room of this monastery as part of it; it didn’t before, even though it was part of the *Umwelt*. So what this cognitive map enables me to orientate myself in relation to is not within me, it is outside of me, it’s in a public world or space; because all of you know where the conference room is, or you wouldn’t be here now.

So we have the difference between *Innenwelt*, which consists of representations that are subjective and private, and *Umwelt*, which consists of *represented*s, objects, “things” which are objective and public and include something of the subjectivities of the physical environment. The human animal now uniquely begins to realize, becomes aware, that these objects of which I have experience – not all of them reduce, at least not in all aspects, to their relationship to me. This is the idea that the medieval Arab commentators on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas after them called *ens primum cognitum*. The first notion of being. That is to say that the first notion of being is that the world of my experience includes more than what I am aware of, includes more than a relationship to me. And then, the human being on the basis of this clue for understanding (which is perceptual, notice, not merely sensory in the way that sensation provides clues for

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6. The St. Kyrik monastery complex in mountains near the city of Plovdiv, Bulgaria.



perceptual interpretatons) begins to say “Aha! Which objects or aspects of the objects I am experiencing exist only through cognitive and social relationships, and which have a being independent of me?”

Take two examples. One is a fairly standard example of a so-called “natural sign”, a concept which needs a lot of analysis, but anyway, at least seems familiar and intuitively somewhat clear: a cloud is a sign of rain. When certain kinds of clouds gather – not any clouds, but some clouds – they say to you “Better watch out! I’m gonna start crying.”; and other clouds, they don’t say that to you, you don’t worry about them at all. Why?

Because you’ve had experience. And in your experience clouds are among the objects, and your experience has shown that these clouds risk to get you wet while those clouds don’t. When you become aware of the kinds of clouds that are likely to accompany water falling from the sky, those clouds become for you a sign of rain. The cloud, which is not rain, stands for something which is rain, namely, water falling from the sky. So the cloud, in itself only dyadically linked to rain, through experience as a ‘third factor or element’ triadically becomes a sign of rain to or for some organisms, not just for human organisms, either, not by a long shot.

We are trying to understand what a sign is. We have no vested interest in protecting some particular ‘model’. If a given model needs to be modified or changed or even abandoned, so be it.<sup>7</sup> (I get so tired of the ‘contest’ between the Saussurean and the Peircean model of sign; I hope this Bulgarian school will become a spearhead for overcoming this almost juvenile ‘contest’.) What’s important about any given proposal is not whose model it is; what’s important

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7. Cf. Peirce 1907: EP 2.402–03: “Now how would you define *sign*, Reader? I do not ask how the word is ordinarily used. I want such a definition as a zoologist would give of a fish, or a chemist of a fatty body, or of an aromatic body, – an analysis of the essential nature of a sign, if the word is to be used as applicable to everything which the most general science of semiotic must regard as its business to study . . . aiming, however, let me repeat, less at what the definition conventionally does mean, than at what it were best, in reason, that it should mean.”

Or again Peirce 1904: 8.332: “If the question were simply what we *do* mean by a sign, it might soon be resolved. But that is not the point. We are in the situation of a zoölogist who wants to know what ought to be the meaning of “fish” in order to make fishes one of the great classes of vertebrates. It appears to me that the essential function of a sign is to render inefficient relations efficient, – not to set them into action, but to establish a habit or general rule whereby they will act on occasion . . . A sign therefore is an object which is in relation to its object on the one hand and to an interpretant on the other, in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relation to the object, corresponding to its own relation to the object.”

about it is whether it enables us to understand the phenomenon of signification. That is the whole and sole reason why Peirce always insisted that the sign was triadic; a brilliant insight, though by no means original with Peirce, who mainly gleaned it from the Latin teachers of Poinot, the Conimbricenses.

Back to the clouds. They are simply things. When they enter into my experience they become something more than things, they become *also* objects, but objects which are also things. As I get some familiarity with the clouds they become further signs of rain. So they acquire something in my experience. It's not the clouds that are the sign; in nature they are simply (along with other factors, indeed) the cause. The clouds, in order to become signs, have first to become objects; and then the objects turn into signs. As soon as we become aware of any object, almost immediately, it begins to acquire relations to other objects in our experience, where the one makes us think of the other – the object begins to bloom, if you like, or to dissolve into, signs, so much so that Peirce will say that the universe is “perfused with signs, if it does not consist exclusively of signs”. It's almost impossible to find a pure object. The closest you can come to a pure object is when you run into something that you have never had any experience of before, and you first see it or hear it or whatever, and comes to your mind the question “What is this?”. I am sure you have had the experience of being in some strange house late at night and occurs some strange sound. You are startled, and worry that it might be some invader. You check out the house to see if there is anyone there, and finding nothing you say “Ah. It was nothing. It was just a sound.” Then, as you are returning to the living room with a sigh of relief, the intruder steps out from behind a door and kills you. You misread the sign. You thought it was only an object. Too bad!

The human being, then, is distinguished among the animals because it is aware of the difference between objects and things. In ancient philosophy this was expressed in terms of the many debates about the difference between appearance and reality. Things are not what they seem, at least not always. For the animal, nonlinguistic animal, the objects *are* the reality. That is that. For the human animal, the objects are what appears, but the reality it knows to be something that *includes* what appears but is *more* than, sometimes even quite different from, sometimes even contrary to, “what appears”. The human being, the human mind, why is it able to make this distinction? Because it is able to distinguish between the object in relation to me and that same object in relation to itself. And that idea of an object in relation to itself is the idea prospectively of a thing. And the human being can be wrong about what it thinks to be a thing. Our ancestors burned witches – my ancestors, at least; in Bulgaria did they ever burn witches? Why don't we burn witches today? Because our ancestors got 'em all. We don't have to. There are some who think that it was a mistake to burn

witches, because there never were witches. But that of course depends upon how we define “witch”.

You know what a witch is, in official Church parlance? A witch is a person, usually a woman, who has entered into a pact with the Devil. In exchange for receiving from the Devil supernatural powers, the person agrees to turn away from God and to worship the Devil. That’s what a witch is.

Now are there such people? It doesn’t matter for my purposes whether there are or not. If there are, then witches are also things. If there are not, then witches are pure objects. Where is the boundary between Bulgaria and Romania, and how does that boundary exist? You know, if you photograph the earth from a satellite no boundary shows up between Bulgaria and Romania. Why not? Because the boundary between Bulgaria and Romania is not a physical reality (although *signs* of that boundary may be, of course!). It is an objective reality that exists only through human social interaction and agreements. The land mass of Bulgaria does show up in the satellite photograph. So objects of experience include things that exist physically and things that don’t; every object is public, but not everything public is physical. Everything public is objective, but not everything objective is physical.

The striking point about semiotics, one of the great discoveries that almost everybody can understand (because we do have, after all, back in the history of thought, first Nominalists and then Behaviorists), is that without relationships there can be no signs. In other words, signs are not *things*. To be a sign, a thing needs two further factors at play beyond its being a thing. To be a thing, something need only to exist. To be a sign, that same thing needs first to exist objectively, and it needs to do so secondly in relation to something other than itself. If it doesn’t have a relation to something other than itself, the object is not a sign. So a thing cannot be a sign without being in a certain relationship, and a thing is not a sign except as represents another than itself to or for some third. That’s why the sign relationship is triadic. It’s not a question of a model; it’s a question of a requirement of being a sign.

So sign relationships as such differ from the relationship of intersubjectivity as Aristotle first fully identified it. Sign relations *can be* intersubjective. If I try to explain something to you, and you understand me enough that you can truly agree or disagree, something intersubjective has been created between us, because we are both as subjects real. Intersubjectivity as such, however, can but does not have to be a triadic relation. A sign does require a triadic relation. Intersubjectivity in the physical world, in what the Latins called *ens reale* and in the Greek sense of τὸ ὄν that concerned Aristotle’s categories, is normally a dyadic relationship. It may indeed involve more than two terms; but the dyadicity concerns what holds for it in principle. But the sign relationship *must* be triadic;

that's what distinguishes it. At the same time, the sign relation has in common with other relationships two things, which we must consider in turn: the first is that every relation is 100 % invisible; the second is that every relation is dependent upon but one hundred percent irreducible to subjectivity.

Take point one, that the sign relation, being a relation, is one hundred percent invisible. It cannot be detected *as such* by the senses. The senses can detect only the related things. Now if the sign consists in relationships of the triadic type, then, since triadic relations share the characteristic of all relations – that they are not directly sensible or capable as such of being detected by sense – it follows that only an animal which is able to know the difference or to distinguish between the things related which can be seen and touched, and the relationship itself which can neither be seen nor touched even though it depends upon what can be seen and touched, only the animal capable of dealing with relations 'in themselves', can know that there are signs. The other animals will only *make use* of signs.

In the beginning, did God create Adam and Eve? It doesn't make any difference to the hardcore reality, in the sense that whatever be the "literal" or figurative truth of the biblical story, here we are, just as the earth goes around the sun and not conversely, whatever the Koran or any other book says! Early philosophy defined the human being as 'the rational animal', not meaning that every human being was actually rational, but only that every human being as such was *capable* of rationality. This definition was the accepted definition for a long time, until Descartes. Descartes substituted for the rational animal the 'thinking thing'. The *animal rationale* was replaced by the *res cogitans*.

Now along comes semiotics. I argued to you in my first lecture and at great length in some recent books that semiotics is the essence of postmodernity. Why? Because it is the first theory of the world that has come along since the days of Descartes and Kant after him which enables us not only to know the difference between objects and things but also to understand what things are in themselves, which is precluded in the modern representation of human knowledge. Taking Maritain's point with which I began, that 'all animals make use of signs but only human animals know that there are signs', because just as sensation is necessary to but distinct within perception, so perception is necessary to but distinct within understanding: now parallelly, to use signs sensation and perception are both necessary and sufficient, but to know that there are signs requires further understanding in its difference from sense perception. That's what distinguishes the human.

We have then a definition to replace the *res cogitans*, the postmodern definition of the human being: the *semiotic animal*.

What is semiotics? Semiotics is the knowledge that develops from the study of the action of signs. First the human being becomes aware that there are

signs in the being proper to the triadic relationship. Not all human beings are actually aware of this, but all human beings are *capable* of becoming so aware, are capable of that awareness “in principle”. The mentally retarded may have a problem; but the normal human being is capable to but does not always in fact think of signs as triadic relations. Most human beings think of signs as a particular class of objects. (I’ve tried this with groups of students and professors. Take a look around the room, I ask them, and classify what you see. Well, there’s a loudspeaker, there’s a light, there’s a podium, there’s a sign . . .).

But once you realize that it is these shifting triadic relationships that constitutes the sign, and that what we call ‘a sign’ happens to be some perceptible phenomenon occupying for the moment the ‘standing for’ position in a triadic relation linking ‘what is stood for’ to ‘what is standing for’ to ‘whom or whatever it is so standing’, you realize that *anything* can function as a sign – and sooner or later will. The whole world of objects dissolves into a world of sign relationships – and even before the “dissolution” (or rather *blooming*), as we remarked in connection with the weblike character of sensation above, that whole world of objects depends invisibly on sign relations. If semiotics is the knowledge that is developed from the study of the action of signs, from the knowledge ‘that there are signs’ pursued, let us say, by the analysis of their distinctive ways of acting, then the human being *is*, uniquely, the semiotic animal, the only animal capable of developing semiotics. Every animal is semiotic, but only human beings are semiotic.

This brings us to our second point, the irreducibility of the sign relation as such to subjectivity – any subjectivity,<sup>8</sup> but now including intersubjectivity. In Aristotle’s category of relation only instances of intersubjectivity fall, because for ‘real’ relations, that is to say, relations obtaining in the order of mind-independent being, both the subject on some aspect of which the relation is founded (the shape, let us say, of our yellow triangle) and the subject on some aspect of which the relation is terminated (the shape, let us say, of our red triangle) must physically exist subjectively in order for the relation to exist intersubjectively, “in between” the subjects. That is why all relations categorial in Aristotle’s sense are in principle dyadic: they always require two subjects of actual existence in order for the relation to obtain here and now between them, “intersubjectively”.

But notice a peculiarity of the situation of relation even in this case where relation is necessarily intersubjective in order to be: the shape of the yellow triangle is foundation, ‘fundament’, or ‘basis’ for the relation of similarity to the

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8. See “Ne Suffit Jamais un Corps pour Faire un Signe” (“A Body Is Never Enough To Complete Semiosis”; Deely 2002b).

shape of the red triangle as terminus or anchor of the relation only so long as the red triangle continues to exist. Destroy the red triangle, and the yellow triangle is no longer *similar* to it in the intersubjective sense required for relations in Aristotle's category of relation. Yet the yellow triangle still has its shape as an inherent accident, an intrinsic characteristic, an essential identifying feature of its subjectivity. The shape of the yellow triangle as shape is not affected subjectively by the disappearance or, rather, cessation, of the relation of similarity. Yet that same shape is no longer *fundament* of a relation either. As subjective characteristic simply of the yellow triangle, the shape of the yellow triangle is unaffected by the existence or non-existence of the red triangle. Yet that self-same subjective characteristic functions in the former case *also as fundament* and in the latter case *no longer as fundament*. The existence of the fundament as fundament, though not the fundament as subjective characteristic simply, then, we see depends upon, 'is a creature of', the relation itself as distinct from, as 'over and above', the subjectivity of the yellow triangle *tout court*.

Reverse the situation. Let both the yellow and the red triangle exist under their common intersubjective relation of similarity; but this time let the yellow triangle be destroyed. Now it is the shape of the red triangle that is subjectively unaffected by this destruction; it remains subjective and intrinsic to the red triangle. Yet that self-same shape is no longer *terminus* of an intersubjective relation of similarity.

So we see that what is true of the fundament of a relation is true also of the terminus: being a fundament or being a terminus is a mode of subjectivity that depends upon the existence of a relation, even though that subjective characteristic itself which (given the relation) functions *either* as fundament *or* as terminus for the relation does not, as subjective characteristic, depend upon the existence of the relation.

Now recall that, even when the red triangle was first destroyed, the yellow triangle remained *in your memory* as similar to the red triangle. It remained that way also for me, and for everyone else in this room. Ah, but we all have minds. The yellow triangle does not. So what remains 'similar' for us does not remain similar for the yellow triangle.

All this is because the subjective states of cognitive beings which found relations to objects are not only subjective characteristics but subjective characteristics which cannot exist *except* by provenating relations to objects. Remember that every object as such is the terminus of a relation, but not every terminus of a relation has subjective being *in addition to* its objective being. (The same of course can hold for the objective fundament of a relation, though that is beside our point here.) If the object is a thing which preceded the knowing in existence, then indeed it is also a subject. But if the object is only an object,

even if it once existed subjectively as well objectively (or ‘as known’), then it has here and now no being *except as*, no being *other than* the modal being, the modality of, terminus of a relation. This is the case of the red triangle after its destruction, whether by magic or by any other means, once all of us here had become aware of its existence along with the existence of the yellow triangle, once we had recognized their similarity. That similarity when we first recognized it was both intersubjective *and* interobjective. In order for the relation to be intersubjectively, both triangles had to exist as subjects, subjectively. But the *interobjective* relation of the similarity of the yellow to the red triangle involved our cognition as a third term, and that cognition continues to lend (from the being of the objective relation) to the terminus its being as terminus even though that ‘terminating being’ is now *purely* terminated, a *pure* terminus, having no subjectivity ‘outside’ the relationship in the order of *ens reale*.

So we see, finally, why intersubjectivity is not enough, even when it may happen to be involved in a sign relation: because what is essential to every relation as relation is not that it be between really existing subjects, but only that it be in every case irreducible to subjectivity, whether pure physical subjectivity or subjectivity which as such has been objectified, made object, apprehended. Intersubjectivity is required for a relation in Aristotle’s category of relation, but is not required as such for every relation, and a-fortiori not for a sign relation. The objective term of the sign relation, the significate or ‘thing stood for’, may no longer or may even never have been subjectively real at all – even though, through sensation, perception and understanding always do involve termini that are subjective as well as objective or known, always do involve (hardcore) “real” relations.

A sign relation may make known what is real or what is unreal, being or non-being, indifferently, but in either case it does so by means of a triadic relationship. That relationship, like every relation including dyadic ones, is invisible directly to sense and suprasubjective, whether or not it further involves the dyadic characteristic of intersubjectivity. Intersubjective or not, every relation, be it on the given occasion in the order of *ens reale* or *ens rationis*, obtains as relation suprasubjectively. That is why all objects as objects are public in principle, and why the action of signs is presupposed to there being objects at all. For an object is always a signified, whether or not it is also a thing. And only a semiotic animal can – *can*, I say, not necessarily *will* (and certainly will not in every case) – sort out the differences.

## Chapter 10

### The Amazing History of Sign

There are two senses in which this title could be understood. I have come to think that the mark of the presence of semiosis is the influence of the future upon the present. Wherever there is an influence of the future, there you have an action of signs. As a result of thinking in this way, I have come to think that semiosis is actually, so to speak, the logically proper name for what has heretofore been called more simply *evolution*. And on that understanding, the action of signs is coextensive with the universe itself – semiosis being by no means the whole story, but a *vis a prospecto* action along with (by no means supplantive of!) the traditional *vis a tergo* forces of genetic mutation, natural selection, and chance interactions at the level of Secondness.

Thus it would be semiosis, not “chance” alone, but semiosis as seizing upon chance in a kind of “degenerate Thirdness”, probably (almost certainly) intermittent rather than constant, that is responsible for the trajectory of transition of the universe from the time of the original explosion termed “big bang” through the formation of the stars and the galaxies and the planetary systems presupposed for the eventual emergence of life, a transition through stages of development both gradual and saltational (and it is there in particular that I would look for the evidence of flashes, as it were, of the semiosis which the emergence of life would turn into a conflagration), resulting, very late, in the emergence of the human being which, as they say, is “the sign’s way of getting to know itself”: an trajectory of transformations over-all “*vis a prospecto*” if ever there was one – from “big bang” to semiotic animal!

So in one way the amazing history of the sign may involve the history of the universe itself – in fact *does* involve the history of the universe itself, if this *vis a prospecto* understanding of semiosis has any merit. (It’s one of those times, you know, when it would be nice to have been elected Pope, because then one could know for sure which views were correct!) But, maybe I’m wrong.

The other way of understanding the amazing history of sign is actually the way that I intended in the title of this lecture (indeed it was only in listening to the discussion of shopping malls in one of the other Early Fall School sessions that this other way that I’ve just described occurred to me): to present the amazing history of sign in terms of the actual *human becoming conscious* of the sign as such, the sign in its own right, the sign as a semiotic animal is not only capable of coming to see it but actually has. You may recall that I mentioned



to you in my lecture on “What Difference Does It Make, What Is a Sign?” that synchronicity is the default mode of human understanding. Well, it is necessarily so, because, after all, there was a time for each of us, not so remote, when we didn’t exist (indeed, the time is likely to come again, though not quite the same, not quite as if we never were!). There was a time when we began to be conscious, aware, and the world around us was the world of the here and now. And that’s the point of view of synchronicity. It was almost natural for the human being, in the earliest speculations that we have, to think that the world as we look around and see it here and now is the way that the world always was and will be. Exactly the view of Aristotle, exactly the view of most of the ancient thinkers. Only very slowly, very gradually, did the human mind come to realize that the world of the here and now is actually the embodiment of a huge extent of past time wherein time has made a difference to the interactions of what is. And to realize that, in a certain way, in the world of the here and now, the past is not only preserved, but it is constantly being molded by the future, the anticipations of the future expressed in the activities of the beings that are existing here and now, both the ones that are alive and the ones that are not or never have been alive. So the beings that are now, but in a special way no doubt the ones that are alive here and now, not only preserve the past, but they also mediate and reshape the past in terms of the future. It’s a very strange process.

Yesterday we talked about subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and the fact that the animal is related to the physical environment through its sensations as a plant through its roots. But through its perceptions, the animal is related to *more* than the physical environment. In sensation, the physical environment partially, a very small part, but partially, becomes objectified – that is to say, acquires a relation to the knower whereby the surroundings incipiently are “known”, whereby the animal organism begins to start to commence to become “aware” of “what is around it”. But then, in perceptions, these sensations, this incipient awareness of the physical environment, becomes actively interpreted and structured to constitute an objective world. And that objective world simply *is* the reality for the animal. It has no interest in the difference between physical environment as such or in itself, on the other hand, and the objective world wherein its needs and desires and chances of survival are established, on the one hand. No. The animal’s interest is the objective world and only the objective world.

The human being, for good or ill, in addition to sensation and perception, has a capacity for understanding. Understanding awakens precisely by realizing that the objective world includes the order of what the early scientists and philosophers called “reality” – that is, the order of things that exists independently of

our opinions of them,<sup>1</sup> precisely what is for the animal but a “meaningless surplusage” (to borrow a phrase from Peirce). But the problem is for the human being that once we have become aware of this idea of “things as they are”, or “reality”, it becomes difficult to retain an understanding of the *difference* between objects and things. Thus, just as the brute animal thinks exclusively in terms of objects, so the human animal tends to the opposite extreme to think of only things. And thus “realism” in philosophy, like the drive of modern science,<sup>2</sup> has always been to understand the world of *things*.

In fact, human animals tend naively to think of the physical universe, the physical environment, as something that is *the same* regardless of the type of creature that is inhabiting it, whereas now through semiotics we realize that there is a physical environment indeed which is “the same” for all the types of organisms, but this physical environment is in principle different from the actual world of experience of organisms, including human organisms, whose predilection for “things” does not change the fact that their experience is first of all framed by an objective world, an Umwelt, and not by the surroundings merely as physical. So we have in semiotics – thanks especially to von Uexküll and Sebeok – the notion of the objective world, which differs in principle from the physical environment – although through the roots of sensation the objective world always and necessarily *includes a part* of the physical environment.

And then we come to the reason why semiotics, in a certain way, is confounding to the (modern) scientific point of view. Because the scientific point of view is ordered to *reality*, whereas the semiotic point of view is oriented toward the understanding that ‘reality’ is more than the *reality* as originally aimed at by science. Example. What distinguishes the action of signs from the action of things? If I want to run into a tree with my car (Now of course you say right away: Why would you want to run into a tree with your car? – Never mind. Supposing I do.), in order to do that, what do I need? I need to have a car, and there has to be a tree. If I have a tree but no car, and I want to run my car into the tree, I’m out of luck. And if I have a car, but I’m out in a desert with no trees, again I’m out of luck; I’m going to have to go in search of the tree to run my car into. But you have a sign and it tells you – I don’t know what it would say in Bulgarian, but in America we have a sign which says – “Bridge Out”, meaning “not working”. But when you see such a sign, there is room to ask: “Is the bridge really out?” You don’t know. Even “Is there really a bridge?” You don’t know. You *assume*.

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1. See *Intentionality and Semiotics* (Deely 2007a), along with *What Distinguishes Human Understanding?* (Deely 2002).

2. See “Semiotic as Framework and Direction” (Deely 1984).

I don't know if you've ever traveled around on a motorcycle. It's a wonderful experience. There's no such thing as traffic jams. The motorcycle, unlike the car, is always or almost always free to go on even when the cars can't. I remember one time outside Chicago I came to a fork in the road with a sign on the left fork saying "Bridge out", and I said "Ha! Not for me." So I took the road, and I came shortly to this huge canyon with no way to get across other than to play Evel Knievel and fly across in a daring motorcycle jump. I said to myself "The bridge really *is* out", and I turned around and went back to the other fork.

So we face the fundamental problem of the action of signs: Signs are indifferent to reality in the physical sense of reality. I use the example of the burning of witches. Most people today don't believe that there are such things as witches. Maybe they're right. But for a long time people *did* believe in the reality of witches. Maybe they were right. We think we don't burn witches because we're more enlightened; but it's possible that the reason we don't burn witches is that our ancestors got them all! Semiotics essentially raises and deals with (it doesn't just raise) the problem of *fallibilism*, the problem of how we can be wrong or right. Because the sign not only points to reality in the scientific sense, it points to reality in the *objective* sense. And the objective sense of reality includes also what is, from the point of view of physical reality, unreality. The sign points not only to being but also to nonbeing.

Now, the human being is an animal. How long has the human animal existed on the face of the earth? We don't know. A conservative statement is a million years. Supposing the human being has existed a million years, or a million and a half. The civilizations of which we have records go back only eight to ten thousand years; and the record of philosophy, which begins with the waking up of the human animal to the difference between things and objects as a focus on things only goes back to about three thousand years or less, about two thousand seven hundred years.

Nor does the awareness of the human animal begin with the awareness of sign as foreground. The human animal begins with the awareness of "reality". So it thinks. The awareness of the human being as human begins with the realization that there is such a thing as mind-independent being. And then all of philosophy and all of science up through the modern period has been to try to grasp and to understand this. But, along the way, a curious thing happened. In the modern period, on the one hand, in the seventeenth century, we began the long journey of science in the modern sense – "ideoscopic knowledge", as I have come to say, following C. S. Peirce, because we have this basic difference between knowledge that we can acquire simply by using our bodies (cenoscopic knowledge), and knowledge (ideoscopic knowledge) that we can acquire only by using instruments that extend our senses and mathematizations that enable

us to learn such things as the fact that the stars are the same as the sun, or that the sun is ninety-three million miles from the earth, that the things that we see depend upon structures that we don't see that reflect light in a certain way, and so on.

When did the human being, as far as our records go, first show any awareness of signs? In the ancient world, the sign was only thought of – this is actually quite incredible – in terms of natural phenomena. To us, it is not at all easy to realize that no one in the ancient world thought of human language as a system of signs. The twentieth century, in fact, was the first century wherein the sign became an object of reflection on a large scale for a community of inquirers. If you go back over the history of philosophy (I can tell you this truthfully because I've done it), generally speaking, the notion of sign is restricted to the reflections of more or less isolated individuals – such as proved to be John Poinset in publishing his ignored *Tractatus de Signis* in 1632! You don't have even the beginnings of a community of inquirers investigating the sign much before the later sixteenth century in Iberia. But that's precisely the community of inquirers that becomes obliterated early in the seventeenth century with the beginning of modern science, the most determined turning along the "Way of Things" ever before attempted by the human animal. We'll come back to this point.

Now we know that we had two pioneers who set our intellectual culture on the way of signs in the twentieth century: Ferdinand de Saussure (26 November 1857–1913 February 22) and Charles Sanders Peirce (September 10, 1839–1914 April 19). Though Peirce was almost eighteen years older, their death was less than two months apart; and Saussure was much more typically modern in his approach than was Peirce, also much more reflective of what I call this "default mode" of human understanding, synchronicity. For Saussure, it never seems to have occurred that human language was *anything but* a system of signs. Not only did he see "language" as a system of signs, but he considered it 'transparently evident' that human language is the single most important thing in human life because it mediates everything that we do and every thing that we understand. So, when Saussure tried to formulate what he saw, he looked around him and saw that there is not what he called "science of signs", there is no doctrine of signs; so he thought and concluded hastily that the sign had never been studied before.<sup>3</sup> *Why* did he think that the sign had never been studied? Because he was ignorant in this matter of what had actually occurred in human culture before

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3. This is easily the most dramatic point of difference between semiology as stemming from Saussure and the semiotics that will stem from Peirce: Peirce well knew that the doctrine of signs had been a focus, albeit not the main focus, of many later Latins;

modernity. Now that's not surprising, and that's not particularly blameworthy either, because *everybody* is born ignorant of what went on before them. And then when we go to school and we become educated into society and culture and our ignorance *begins* to be overcome, very frequently a disaster of sorts befalls, and the education that we get almost deliberately causes our ignorance to be deepened and made quasi-permanent respecting what went before us.<sup>4</sup> Each society, each system, religious or not, seems to try to teach its people that its way is the only way. We had the greatest example in later modern times with the system of Soviet Communism. Exactly like that: everybody was turned into a spy on everybody else so no one would dare think anything possible except what we the authorities want them to think.

So, Saussure, like every other human being, started out ignorant of the past, and he lived at a time – the dawn of the twentieth century – when there was a huge ignorance of, in particular, medieval philosophy, or philosophy in the Latin Age, as it should more properly be known. When, in the lifetime of Descartes, medieval philosophizing had led to the case of Giordano Bruno (1548–1600; burned alive for heresy 17 February), to the case of Marco Antonio de Dominis (1560/1566?–1624 September 8; exhumed and burned dead for heresy December 24), and to the case, most famously, of Galileo (1564–1642; condemned to lifetime arrest for “vehement suspicion of heresy” 1633 June 22): all of these cases were tremendously discrediting for the Latin tradition of thought. And Descartes, along with the others of his time, looked on in horror, particularly at the case of Galileo, and thought “if *this* is where medieval philosophy leads, then we need to start over. And what are we to *say* of the history of philosophy except that it is clearly the history of human blunders and human errors, while we have the chance to start over with a new method and get things right.” Now Descartes thought that he had found the method; Descartes really seemed to think that if you read his *Meditations on First Philosophy* and understood them it would prove impossible for you not to agree with him completely. And he thought that, in this way, his *Meditations on First Philosophy* were going to sweep the schools and become the total new foundation for building aright the edifice of human knowledge.

Well, he didn't succeed in that regard; but the most successful aspect of the Cartesian heritage proved to be in the conviction which is *still* deep in philosophy today (especially in the English speaking world, and so far as the English

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yet even Peirce remained ignorant of the initiation of semiotics with Augustine. See Deely 2009.

4. But few have gone farther in this unfortunate reverse process than those late moderns who identified themselves as “Analytic philosophers”.

speaking world has influenced philosophy), namely, that the study of the history of philosophy is a complete waste of time. Now as far as we know, Saussure grew up in a climate where the ignorance of philosophy (in the modern sense) was cultivated. And, as far as we know, he himself had neither motivation nor reason to explore the history of philosophy. He was a professional linguist, and he got his idea for developing a science of signs which, as he said correctly, had “a place marked out in advance”, had “a right to existence”, from the peculiarly late modern notion that human language is the fullest example of a sign-system.

Saussure saw that the central type of sign in human experience and human life is language. And so he created a model of sign on the basis of human language, and he proposed that we would take this model, the “linguistic model”, as the *general* model; and even when we came to *natural* phenomena we would be able to study them, he opined – not semiotically, but *semiologically* – only by assimilating them to the linguistic sign as model. And what is the most outstanding characteristic of the linguistic sign if not its arbitrariness, that is to say, the structural *lack of necessity* for the sign being the way that it is. It is true in human existence that even when a natural phenomenon enters human experience, it comes to participate in this freedom, this ‘arbitrariness’ that Saussure spoke of. You know the famous example of the earthquake that happened in Lisbon in the fifteenth century that practically destroyed the city and occurred exactly at a time on Sunday morning when most of Lisbon was in church. And the churches collapsed in the earthquake, killing thousands of people, while oddly enough the red light district of the prostitutes was not affected by the earthquake. And so the theologians had a terrible time figuring out ‘the meaning’ of this earthquake, the “higher”, theological meaning of this earthquake.

But it is important to note that the earthquake also brings into human experience not only imaginary relations supposedly expressing (however obscurely, not to say ambiguously) the will of God, but also brings into human experience real relations which can enable us to know much more about why do earthquakes occur. We know today much more about why earthquakes occur than they did at the time of the Lisbon earthquake. We have learned it by incorporating through human experience aided by scientific instruments and methods more and more not mind-dependent relations but mind-independent relations now objectified, which give us an understanding of the nature and causes of earthquakes – which turn out to have nothing to do with a divine punishment, or at least not in any direct way, such as the theologians of that time imagined.

Now, it was the characteristic of modern philosophy to challenge precisely the knowability of mind-independent being. Who was the greatest of the modern philosophers? Of course Immanuel Kant – K-a-n-t. And how do you pronounce “Kant”? Exactly the way that you pronounce in American English (real English;

not that British stuff) “can’t”: cant. Because you *can’t* know the world; you *can’t* know the soul; you *can’t* know God: you can’t know *anything* outside or beyond the mind-dependent enclosure of human representations. There is a real world; there is indeed a “reality” that is mind-independent, Kant averred. But what does it consist in? It consists in nothing, so to say, at least nothing we can *know* but a pure resistance to us and our ideas (a pure Secondness, as Peirce might say, wholly and absolutely cut off from Thirdness – the realm constitutive of signs!). Even Peirce spoke this way, because Peirce, in his early years, was inordinately influenced by Kant. He had to be: he grew up on Kant, and knew the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he claims, by memory. Yet in the end Peirce rejected Kant’s thesis of the unknowable as pure “nonsense”, “meaningless surplusage”. As indeed it is.

For if the semiotic point of view is correct – yes, the sign consists in relations; yes, in human experience relations are not necessarily tied to reality; yes, relations are something over and above subjectivity; yes, relations create a public sphere in which there is room for the exercise of human freedom; but also yes, in this public sphere created by relations of sign there are *not only* relations of human freedom but there are *also* relations which can lead us to an understanding of nature: the sign stands neither in the world of nature nor in the world of culture exclusively, but in the interweaving and the intersection of these together in the world of human experience which is an objective world in which science and philosophy in their respective ways can then precisely *sort out* what belongs to the mind and what belongs to nature.

But in modern philosophy the mind can’t sort out what belongs to nature because the mind *can’t know* nature. In ancient thought and in medieval thought the philosophers claimed to distinguish, the way Thomas Aquinas put it, “being as first known”: that is, the distinctive object attained by species-specifically human understanding of the world, which consists precisely in the human animal awakening to the fact that the public world, the objective world, consists of two types of being, *ens reale*, mind-independent being, and *ens rationis*, mind-dependent being.

What would be an example of a mind-dependent being? The President of a country. The Rector of a university. Or a Professor, for that matter. Even more extreme is the example of Hamlet, or Sherlock Holmes, by contrast with Henry VIII or Napoleon, say.

What would be an example of a mind-independent being? The fact that the earth revolves around the sun. The fact that you go to the doctor for a physical examination and the doctor finds nothing, telling you that you are in perfect health, while in reality there is a cancer in your stomach which the doctor missed: that is an example of mind-independent reality, a reality indifferent to the opinion of the doctor that you are in good health. Now had the doctor

discovered the cancer, then he could deal with the problem of what, if anything, to do about it. But the fact that we now know that there is cancer, that we now can do something about some cancers, and that we have every reason to believe in future we will be able to do more, shows you that there is a growing knowledge, a growing awareness, a growing understanding in human experience of being which is what it is independently of the human opinion.

And, at the same time – I don't know if I should bring this up with this group – let me ask you. Have you ever fled from the police? Have you ever had the police after you? If you have, then you know that the very best way to escape the police is to go where their authority ceases, to get across that boundary before they can lay hands on you. This is something very real to the person sought by the police, as indeed to the police themselves. For when you make it across that boundary and the powers of the police suddenly vanish (unless you are unlucky and are pursued by a corrupt policeman who refuses to recognize that his powers ceased at the boundary in question; but this case only serves to show very clearly the difference between physical being and objective being).

The powers of the policeman, of course, are physical as well as objective, and the boundaries of one are not simply those of the other. He has a gun; he has a club; he has his hands; he has training with which to subdue you physically. These all belong to the order of physical reality. The fact that his powers cease at the frontier is a purely objective reality, one which he may or may not respect. The frontier belongs to an objective order, indeed; but, when the policeman reaches or crosses it, though he no longer has authority, yet his gun does not evaporate, his arms don't fall off. No. He is still physically capable of catching you and subduing you. You see very clearly in such a case the difference between physical reality and objective reality, and objective reality is the order that is created above all by the action of signs.

Now. Saussure's notion of the sign was clearly not an adequate notion of the sign, not if the sign works in the world of nature as well as in the world of culture. And it's a very curious thing. If you take the modern view, beginning roughly with Descartes and extending down just about to our own time (and many of us are still one hundred percent "modern"), in modern consciousness there is no thematic conception of sign until Saussure, and there are two ways of looking at Saussure's conception. One way of looking at it is as one hundred percent modern, in that what modern philosophy created was idealism, and idealism was not just an awareness of the role of the mind in the social construction of reality, but more than this: idealism was the claim that actually the mind knows nothing except what the mind itself makes. This was the position of Kant, and this is also the position that is built into Saussure's original model of the sign. So Saussure's sign was exactly an expression of modernity, in being open to



construal as a version of mainstream philosophical idealism. That's one way of understanding semiology.

The other way, and the better way of understanding semiology, is this: take what is true of the sign in the Saussurean sense, but incorporate it into a larger model. But then you no longer have semiology, you have semiotics. Semiotics studies exactly the way in which the sign transcends and brings nature and culture together in human experience. So it is the action of signs which makes possible the investigation of nature, which we characteristically call science. It is also the sign which makes possible the reality of culture as something distinct from nature, which was such a strong focus in modern philosophy, and indeed led to the development of sciences social as well as natural.<sup>5</sup>

But where – and this is the curious thing, part of the amazing history of the sign – if you look back over the whole record of human thought, beginning from Thales (c.625–c.545 BC), let us say, all the way down to Eco (AD1932–), you find that from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC up to Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD – a pretty long stretch of time – there is (and this is incredible) no general notion of sign. The only notion of sign that there is is the notion of natural sign, the σημεῖον: what does it mean?

Semeion we commonly translate as “sign”, but I warn you that this is a mistranslation. Semeion does not mean “sign”; semeion means what after Augustine we call “natural signs”. A woman has milk in her breasts. What does this prove? That she has had a child recently. Or you see a woman pregnant. What does this tell you? That unless something goes wrong she's going to bring forth a child. You see smoke off in the distance, what does this tell you? That something is burning. It is not human opinion that puts milk in a woman's breast; it is not human opinion that puts a child in the woman's womb; it's not human opinion that makes something burn (even if an arsonist started the fire). These are examples of the semeion, these are what Augustine – as others of the early times – will call the natural signs. So what is the notion of the semeion, the notion of sign in the ancient world? The notion of sign is strictly a sensible phenomenon of nature which tells us about something other than itself. The smoke is not the burning, but it tells us about the burning. So you notice that the sign always consists in a relationship. Not a behavior, a relationship. Something is behaving, yes, which *reveals* the relationship; but the sign consists in the relationship: no relation, no sign. Smoke seen is merely an object, unless we grasp its relation to something burning, in which case it is an object which is *also* a sign.

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5. See “The Semiotic Foundations of the Human Sciences from Augustine to Peirce” (Deely 2005); cf. also “Semiotics of Community” (Deely 2003d).

Well then. Along comes Augustine. Hard to believe. If you don't find this hard to believe, I don't know how you could not find it hard to believe. Augustine was the first human being on record who thought of language as a system of signs. Before Augustine no one thought of language as a system of signs. The first time that I heard this claim was in 1983. I was team-teaching a course at Indiana University with Umberto Eco. Umberto had the opening lectures, and in them he said to the audience that there was no general notion of sign before Augustine. Unbelievable, because if you read the translations of ancient writers, you find the notion of sign everywhere. What's happening? What's happening is that the notion of sign has become so familiar (by the time that new ancient translations begin in the Renaissance) that everybody uses the term and reads it backwards into the ancient texts.

So on the one hand I found Eco's statement unbelievable. On the other hand, since it was Eco, who tends to know what he is talking about, it was believable. So it was an anomaly. And when I investigated for myself, years later, I found out that Eco was indeed correct. And I found, interestingly enough, in a particular author named Markus<sup>6</sup> writing in the nineteen-fifties, an expert on Augustine who knew nothing about semiotics, had no connection with semiotics, no part of Eco's group, who had already reported this anomalous fact concerning Augustine; and he himself said he could hardly believe it.

So, with Augustine, language for the first time is conceived thematically in terms of sign. What has Augustine done by introducing this point of view?<sup>7</sup> He said, in effect, that so far you have considered sign to be a sensible event of nature which makes us think of something other than itself. Simply cross out, put 'under erasure', the 'event of nature' and say a sign is 'a sensible event that makes us think of something other than itself'. And now you see that the whole world of culture, and human language above all, this too is a system of signs. So we have not only natural signs, clouds telling us of rain, smoke telling us of fire, milk in the breasts telling us of pregnancy, and so on. (Of course you may wonder, if Augustine was a saint, and a priest, and a bishop, how he knew about milk in women's breasts; but he had a prehistory, and this is how he knew.)

You can say, then, that, with Augustine, the sign is conceived for the first time as a genus, to which the phenomena of culture and nature are alike species. The ancient Greeks would have on the side of culture the onomata, names (ονοματᾶ); and on the side of nature signs, semeia (σημεία). For the first time the onomata and the semeia are conceived alike as species to which the sign is superordinate as genus. Now Augustine, a very learned man, was yet ignorant

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6. See Markus 1957.

7. See Deely 2009a.

of one thing: Greek. And as a result of his ignorance on this particular he was unaware of the fact that with this generic notion of *signum* he had introduced something entirely new into philosophical thought. So semiotics at its initiation was, so to say, the first Latin initiative in philosophy. This is an important, indeed crucial, but to now universally overlooked fact of history bearing on the development of intellectual culture. The distortive effect of the universal failure to take this decisive fact into account has been incalculable, but fortunately the days of the distortive effect are now numbered.

Usually medieval philosophy has been studied and presented among the later moderns as picking up again of the threads of the Greek heritage, and a developing that heritage over again in the translations of Aristotle in the twelfth century, then supplemented by the translations of Plato in the fifteenth century, moving thence into modern thought. It never occurred to anyone that, with the notion of sign, you have something in medieval philosophy, in Latin philosophy, that *does not exist* prior to Augustine.

You could say, correctly, that Augustine marks the beginning of semiotic consciousness, not simply the first figure of world historical importance in philosophy who was ignorant of Greek. With Augustine for the first time the human being becomes explicitly aware, thematically aware, that the signs have a being which somehow transcends the division of nature and culture, the divide between φύσις and νόμος considered so strong throughout the Greek era of ancient philosophy. At the same time, Augustine is still thinking of the sign in terms of something which can be detected by the senses, so he proposes as his general definition: *Signum est quod praeter species quas ingerit sensibus, aliquid aliud facit in cognitionem venire* – a sign is anything which, besides the impression it makes upon the outer sense, brings something other than itself into awareness.

You see already the minimal concept of sign, as ‘one thing *standing for* another’? Not a behavior, a relation. *Manifested* through a behavior, but a relation – but a relation now not considered as specifically tied to φύσις.

The medieval philosophers, then, after Augustine, beginning around the time of Roger Bacon and Thomas Aquinas,<sup>8</sup> began to have some problems with Augustine’s definition. Wait a minute, they said. Think of the ideas in our minds. What they spoke of were the “passions of the soul”, the *passiones animae*.<sup>9</sup>

8. See Deely 2004a.

9. This is a little over-simplified, in that the *passiones animae* strictly speaking consisted in sensations, whereas ideas by contrast are rather *actiones animae* producing on the side of the organism qualitative foundations for relations interpretive of what is sensed and organizing the physical environment as sensed into a world of objects – an Umwelt – based first of all on what attracts the animal (+), what repels (–),

The passions of the soul are of two kinds. They are cognitive, so-called ideas, and they are cathectic, so-called emotions. The medievals tended to focus on the cognitive element of subjectivity. Ideas are not entities, but aspects of the activity of a substance as giving rise to relations that create the objective world. It is ridiculous to speak of ideas as “entities”. The *entities* are the substances, the individual units of that nature which is “one or many, but of the many each is one” – in this case, specifically, the substances aware of their surroundings: these are among the “ones” or “substances”. Similarly, you have in the ‘passions of the soul’ the emotions. These too make present to us something other than themselves. When you hate someone, or when you love someone, or even when you are indifferent to a person, the emotion in question relates you to something other than yourself. This is exactly the way signs function in Augustine’s general proposal, yet without being material objects impressing the senses.

So the later medievals proposed a new terminology to speak of signs as *either* ‘formal’ (the psychological states) *or* ‘instrumental’ (material objects when functioning in the manner described by Augustine, to wit, not only making an impression upon sense but further bringing into awareness something more than the object directly sensed). It is a strange terminology. I haven’t been able to find out why they chose this particular terminology.<sup>10</sup> But the instrumental sign would be a particular thing which makes an impression on the senses – Augustine’s sign. And then the formal sign would be what we would call the psychological states, the interior states, on the basis of which we relate to the outside world. But these Latins at this stage were still thinking of signs primarily in terms of particular kinds of things, individuals (now, however, not at all necessarily substances in the proper sense) among other individuals. For this very reason, as would become clear in the 16<sup>th</sup> century work of Pedro da Fonseca, Augustine’s proposal risked in advance the problem of nominalism as Ockham would come to pose it.

What is nominalism? Well, for one thing Nominalism can be described as the phenomenon or fact that very many people in a large percent of the time don’t know what they are talking about. That’s one basic meaning of nominalism! It’s when people talk blather – speech whose content upon analysis is found to be empty. (Even in this conference there have been such papers.) Empty words

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and what leaves the animal at the moment indifferent (()). But often enough the expression “*passiones animae*” is used loosely and generically to cover all three levels – the passive level of *sentire*, together with the two active levels of *phantasiari* and *intelligere*) – in naming the bases or “*fundamenta*” within the animal organism on the basis of which it is cognitively and cathectically connected to its surroundings as objectified.

10. Winfried Nöth has proposed a hypothesis, and he may be correct: see 1990 and 2000.

*flatus vocis*. But technically, within philosophy, nominalism is the doctrine that there are no relations independent of the mind.<sup>11</sup>

What justification was there for a general notion of sign as able to manifest itself here in nature and here in culture? What justification is there for a notion of being which is capable of moving back and forth between the two, like a shuttlecock, weaving the fabric of experience – back and forth, back and forth, between nature and culture? This question, the *ratio quia*, didn't even occur to Augustine. So how do we know that his notion of sign was not a nominalism?<sup>12</sup>

And later on, in the fourteenth century, Ockham will say that that is exactly what *signum* is, a nominalism in the technical sense: there is actually no proper notion of sign “in general”. It gets to be a very tangled history.<sup>13</sup> Suffice it to summarize by saying that the first time that Augustine's general notion is vindicated is exactly the short period between the Conimbricenses (1606), whose work Peirce was familiar with, and Poinsoot, who was also a student of the Conimbricenses. Poinsoot made the move to stop to think of signs as particular kinds of thing, whether emotions, ideas, sensible marks, sounds, whatever, and begin to realize that it is the *relation itself* imperceptible to sense which constitutes the sign in its being as sign, whatever *vehicle* – externally material or internally psychological – carries the signification. And this realization was brought to print in a treatise published one year before the condemnation of Galileo, a treatise then lost to the subsequent history of philosophy. The first time the treatise in question surfaces in a language outside of Latin is around 1927 in the writings of Jacques Maritain.<sup>14</sup>

So, over the whole modern period, the original semiotic consciousness, which began with Augustine and received systematic vindication in Poinsoot's *Tractatus* (demonstrating how and why the relation constitutive of the being of sign is irreducibly triadic), disappears, or perhaps I should say is forced underground.<sup>15</sup> And look how long it took for even that original semiotic consciousness to

11. See “Nominalism vs Realism”, Chap. 5 of Deely 2008: 29–46.

12. And there is the truly curious tale of Augustine's failure to make the connection between the *verbum vocis seu exterior* and the *verbum mentis seu interior* in his theorizing about sign, a failure indeed, dramatically contrasting the difference between “what an author intends” and “what is implied by an author's words”: see “Appendix D: The disconnect in Augustine between *verbum vocis* and *verbum mentis*”, in Deely 2009: 237–246.

13. See “The Thicket” in Deely 2001: 394–410.

14. See “Semiotics in the Thought of Jacques Maritain” (Deely 1986b) for details of the initial recovery.

15. Exactly why Sebeok terms the moderns who deal in spite of themselves with problems proper to semiotics “cryptosemioticians”.

achieve self-consciousness: twelve centuries! Well, we had before that a million and half years, so perhaps the original gestation period for a semiotic consciousness was not so long. But twelve centuries from the first idea of sign in general to the understanding of how sign in general is possible; and then the modern oblivion.

When the sign as an object to be investigated is revived in the work of Saussure it is revived initially in a one-hundred-percent idealist mode – that is to say, a modern mode “epistemological” mode – as a “thoroughly modern Millie”. Yet, at the same time, with Charles Peirce – and it is no coincidence in this regard that he is the *only one* of the moderns who goes back and reads the Latins – the sign is revived as an object to be investigated that receives far less notice than does the proposal of Saussure, and it is likely or more than likely that this comparative inattention Peirce’s proposal receives is mainly due to the fact that semiotics, as Peirce proposes it, in sharp contrast to the semiology proposed by Saussure, is *incompatible* with the whole modern epistemological stance that semiology takes as its footstool.

When Peirce (re)reads the later Latins, what does he discover? He discovers the semiotic consciousness at which they finally arrived, and he makes it the beginning point of his own thought, no longer modern but rather definitively postmodern: semiotics, a thought trespassing the *ne plus ultra* laid down by epistemology after Kant. Peirce launches the *semiotic* consciousness in the contemporary world, incongenial to modernity, in sharp contrast with because of broader scope than what *semiology* was able to propose. Peirce’s launching is not initially anywhere near as successful as Saussure’s proposal of sign, and I have suggested as the reason that Peirce’s proposal is not tying in with the by-now mainstream modern preconceptions and prejudices; but, as my friend in Oulu University said, “slow by slow” we all come to speak of semiotics, not semiology. And, moreover, another giant figure, our late friend Thomas Sebeok, at this point intervenes (c.1963), and it is Sebeok who shapes the later twentieth century to transcend the small-minded opposition of Saussurean ‘semiology’ to Peircean ‘semiotics’. It is not a true opposition, but it is something that the understanding of the sign has to move beyond.

First, the animal discovers the world of objects. Then, the human animal discovers, within the world of objects, also the world of things. Then the human animal further discovers – and this is what is hard to come to recognize – signs are not a particular kind of object; signs are presupposed to objects existing – to objects being objects – in the first place.<sup>16</sup> Without signs there could be no

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16. See Deely 2001a, 2004b, the latter performed in abbreviated form on YouTube under “Semiotic Sign”, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxV3ompeJ-Y>.

objects. And without objects there could be no understanding of things. So what is most fundamental is the last thing to be discovered. It becomes possible, after Poinot, to introduce a new definition of sign: not simply the minimalist “one thing standing for another”, but now further *that which all objects presuppose*.

But the one who finally shapes this interest in semiotics as a newly discovered field of inquiry, everywhere around the globe (at least in countries where there exist institutions of higher education and intellectual culture), is Thomas Sebeok (1920–2001), an absolutely amazing man who, in his lifetime, was himself a visitor everywhere around the globe. He is the single most important figure in the later twentieth century development of semiotics, survived today by the most famous, the most popular, easily most celebrated figure from semiotics, Umberto Eco (1932–). Yet, as Peirece, looking back, now stands out as the most important figure for semiotics in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so does Sebeok stand out as the most important figure for semiotic development as it actually occurred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It was in recognition of Sebeok’s mentoring role that, in 2000, for the twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America which Sebeok founded in 1975 and to mark the century’s final year, we chose for the meeting’s theme “Sebeok’s Century”. When Sebeok heard that this was to be our theme, his reply was: “Why not Millenium?” He was a modest man; but “century” still fit better than “millenium”, because the twentieth century was the first century wherein a consciousness of the sign was something more than isolated in individuals, the first century wherein the sign gathered a veritable “community of inquirers”. The twentieth century was the century wherein a general understanding was achieved that the sign actually is never something visible, audible or tangible; the sign is rather the relationship itself which makes what is visible, what is audible, what is tangible sometimes to work within experience as “standing for another than itself”, thus weaving within and making of experience a web or network of signs – the “semiotic web”, in Sebeok’s felicitous expression – that we now realize it to be. So, “Sebeok’s Century” names both a particular volume of proceedings and the fact that it was Thomas Sebeok who, more than any other figure, put aside ideology, put aside small-mindedness, put aside partisan interest, and said “Let us really investigate the sign for what it is: an *intersection* of nature and culture; and let us indeed include all of Saussure’s achievements, while yet recognizing that it is not at all possible for the Saussurean model to provide a general science of signs. Semiotics can’t be done on that model, but on the model of triadic relation it can indeed be.”

And if you try to make from Saussure’s model a general science of signs, then you are not dealing with something that is postmodern but with something that is one-hundred-percent modern, indeed, ultramodern – modernity carried

to its absolute extreme, where everything becomes creation of the mind, where you can make *anything* mean *whatever* you want it to mean. And this kind of ‘semiotics’ is quite familiar in the pathological forms of ‘deconstruction’. (I say “the pathological forms”, because deconstruction in itself is a useful method on an *ad hoc* basis, but one which, if generalized, transmogrifies into a cancer.)

What do we have now? We have by the close of the twentieth century two things happening. In the Saussurean development we have an anthropomorphically restricted part of the doctrine of signs to which the idealism of modern thought has properly and directly contributed. On the other hand, we have the semiotics of Charles Peirce and Thomas Sebeok, whose main advance jointly lay in the realization that semiotic consciousness was not original with themselves but something recovered, or “retrieved”, as Heidegger might say, from the sixteenth century discussion of sign especially as it had developed over the four hundred years from the time of Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon to that of Galileo and Descartes – the original community of semiotic inquirers that was obliterated in the wake and rise of modern philosophy.

But look at the curious parallel, the symmetrical imbalance, as it were. If you speak of ancient semiotics, medieval semiotics, modern semiotics, and contemporary or postmodern semiotics, nominalistically they seem all the same. But there is a huge structural difference, because, in the ancient thought, there is only the natural sign, whereas in the modern thought there is only the cultural sign – there is no natural sign in the Saussurean perspective (late modern); there is no natural sign possible in a Kantian perspective (high modern); because, in either modern perspective, nature in the ancient sense *cannot be known*.

If “semiotics” means understanding how the action of signs is a weaving together in experience of nature and culture, then you have only medieval semiotics and postmodern semiotics. And the importance of Peirce is that he is the one who *rediscovered* the “way of signs”, but he was not the first to open that way. The first to open it, in the sense of justifying (*demonstratio propter quid*) Augustine’s original proposal, was John Poinsett, showing in 1632 how such a being as Augustine had posited was possible; or Augustine, for positing, or rather *recognizing* (*demonstratio quia*), that “being of signs” in the first place, however “nominalistically”.

So now: is there a “way of signs”, that is to say, is there a way of exploring a being which penetrates both nature and culture, weaving nature and culture together in a fabric of human experience that transcends both? Human experience is not only of nature, it is not only of culture; not only of hardcore realities, but of realities as socially constructed. There are certain human behaviors the meaning of which is pretty hard to mistake. There are extremes of both almost pure nature and almost pure culture; but most of experience is somewhere “in-between”.



Sorting out the two is not possible in a philosophy which knows not how nature can be known – modern philosophy. And neither is sorting out the two practically possible for a philosophy insisting only on the knowability of mind-independent being, while virtually ignoring the problem of reality as socially constructed (as was the case with Aristotle’s philosophy, and also its medieval development in Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham alike).<sup>17</sup> But sorting out the strands of the semiotic web becomes possible in semiotics, and just that possibility is what makes semiotics postmodern. Semiotics is not a going back to the supposed realism of the ancients or medievals, though it includes a recovery of that realism and an incorporation of it into understanding the action of signs which transcends reality (in that ancient and medieval sense of mind-independent).

So, the original notion of reality, what I call ‘hardcore’ reality, the ‘way things are’ irrespective of human opinion, semiotic reality is not opposed to, but ‘semiological reality’ is so opposed. Semiotic reality includes hardcore reality, but also understands how this reality is incorporated in *another* reality which is indeed the work of the mind, the work of society, the work of culture, like the boundaries between states, or the type of government that a people chooses to impose upon itself (and you need to be very careful about that, for if you make a mistake it can be very hard indeed to get rid of or change that government once put in place!).

The first *appearance* of semiotic consciousness, so far as our records go, then, is 397AD.<sup>18</sup> The first *reappearance* of semiotic consciousness is June 11, 1867 – Peirce’s theory of categories which are what I term the categories of semiosis, that is, the categories which explain how both nature and culture can work together in the weave of experience of the objective world. So we have not only objects and things and signs, but we have the understanding that things are posterior to objects (our experience does not begin with things; our sensation begins with things, but our experience begins with the perception of objects within which we discover things – and then there are those who, losing sight or never gaining sight of the difference in principle between objects and things, conclude that things are the whole reality, that anything else is all just a matter of conditioning, and the influence of the past, and so on and so on). And then we discover that the possibility of discovering things within objects is not simply the contrast of reality to illusion. The possibility of discovering things within objects depends upon the same ‘reality’ that the existence of objects in the

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17. See the discussion leading to the “*terra non considerata*” part of the diagram on “The Role of Mind-Dependent Relations in the Structuring of Experience” in Deely 2001: 354.

18. See the “TimeLine of Semiotic Development”, Appendix E in Deely 2009: 239–246.

first place depended upon. And what is that? It is the existence of a network of completely invisible, imperceptible, insensible things that we call relations, which, whe triadic in structure, cause one thing to stand for another and give whatever meaning there is *in* human life *to* human life, and which gives us the possibility of shaping the future, gives us the possibility of making a future different from anything that has existed in the past. And of course we may make the future better or we may make it worse. It's always a problem, for there is no guarantee, for we are always making these mistakes – we recurrently think what is real isn't real.

I grew up in a tradition of philosophical realism, which can get to be a very annoying context. I formulated a joke which my colleagues didn't find so funny (they never seem to find my jokes funny): How does a realist detect error? By finding people who disagree with him, the same way a Communist detects error.

The problem is to understand that truth is not the same thing as reality. Because there's a truth about where is the boundary between Bulgaria and Turkey. There's a truth there, but it's not simply a truth about things. There's also a truth about things: does the earth go around the sun or the sun around the earth? So truth is an achievement within human experience, within human consciousness, within human awareness; but so is error. The same circumstances that makes error possible make truth possible. The same circumstances that makes the lie possible makes a truth possible. The same circumstances that makes deception possible makes truth possible.

So we are in a condition of fallibilism, as Peirce put it. But the great thing about fallibilism is that it has the possibility, always the possibility, of the truth. And then the human destiny is to find, more and more, what really is the truth. But "the truth" is not merely something that lies out there to be found. Some of the truth lies out there to be created – such as the best organization of human society. For sure it's not communism, but I'm just as sure it's not capitalism either. What is it? I don't know; but we are trying to find out. So there many meanings of truth, but there are no meanings of truth at the bare level of things. (Well, actually in a way there is: there was the medieval doctrine of 'transcendental truth' which concerned the conformity of things to the mind of the creator; but that's another story, not perhaps for semiotics.)

So that's the amazing history of sign: that the twentieth century is the first century where semiotic consciousness was really and fully established. It's not the first time that semiotic consciousness occurred. Semiotic consciousness first occurred with Augustine. Semiotic consciousness was first vindicated with Peirce. But semiotic consciousness as a major part of intellectual culture: we owe it to Saussure and to Peirce, more to Peirce than to Saussure simply because Peirce was diachronic and not simply synchronic. And then we owe it to our

friend Sebeok, who is the main single individual why all of us are together in this room.<sup>19</sup> But what brings us together – and this is the great thing about Sebeok: this is not a conference about Sebeok, this is a conference about semiosis, this is a conference about signs. This is the path to which Sebeok always pointed: the Way of Signs. He did not want to be a personality who founded “a school”. He did not want to be talked about in the tiresome way that semiologists talk about Saussure or about Barthes, or in the tiresome way that the Peirceans talk about Peirce (which reminds me of the tiresome way in which Thomists often talk about Thomas: this is the way they talk about Peirce if you get into the wrong circles).

So we are embarked upon an enterprise, an enterprise of human understanding, a ‘postmodern’ enterprise. And why ‘postmodern’? Because this enterprise recovers the whole of the past, it recovers the possibility of a knowledge of *ens reale*; but it does so without losing the realization of modern thought that the mind constitutes much of what we call “reality”. But we do it in a way now that is aware that truth and error go hand in hand, and that it is a *constant* problem to sort out the one from the other, since their boundaries – the boundaries of what is mind-independent and what mind-dependent – existentially are far from fixed. So I leave you with the problem of why, no longer, do we burn the witches? A semiotic problem.

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19. Referring to the original occasion of these remarks, the 2002 Early Fall School of Semiotics held in August at the St. kirik monastery, Bulgaria, under the sponsorship of Sofia’s New Bulgarian University.

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*Note:* the editors of the critical edition of Ockham’s writings, in their series of Introductions, consider that they have been able to give an absolute date in fact to every work “give or take a year”. Hence I have based my dating on the editorial materials of the critical edition *Guillelmi de Ockham: Opera Philosophica et Theologica*, complete in 17 volumes (St Bonaventure, NY: Editions of the Franciscan Institute of the University of St. Bonaventure, 1974–1988). Of the 17 volumes, the *Opera Philosophica* (or OP), are numbered Volumes I through VII, published between 1974 and 1988; the *Opera Theologica* (or OT) again begin with Volume I and continue to X, published between 1967 and 1986. Accordingly, reference herein conforms to the following pattern: after the date and title of each work, I will indicate by OP or OT the respective series within which the named work or part falls, followed by the volume number, a parenthesis indicating year of publication (together with specific page numbers when the volume contains more than one work), then the editor(s) of the volume, and finally



(again in parentheses) the place of their discussion of the date of the work.

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**The designation EP** followed by volume and page numbers with a period in between abbreviates the 2-volume set of *The Essential Peirce*, a selection of those essays from the complete Peirce corpus (that is, unpublished as well as previously published) deemed most seminal and central to Peirce’s propi-ate perspective (pragmaticism or semiotic) made by the personnel of the Peirce Edition Project under the general editorship of Nathan Houser. EP 1 covers the years 1867–1893, EP 2 covers 1893–1913 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, 1998, respectively).

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- c.1902. “Minute Logic”, draft for a book complete consecutively only to Chapter 4. Published in CP in extracts scattered over six of the eight volumes, including 1.203–283, 1.575–584; 2.1–202; 4.227–323, 6.349–352; 7.279, 7.374n10, 7.362–387 except 381n19. (For fuller detail, see Burks 293–294.)
1903. Lowell Lectures, “Some Topics of Logic Bearing on Questions Now Vexed”, esp.: lect. IIIA, “Lessons from the History of Philosophy”, CP 1.15–26; draft 3 of lect. 3 entitled “Degenerate Cases”, in CP 1.521–544; lect. 8, “How To Theorize”, CP 5.590–604 (Burks p. 295); and the section published in CP 4.510–529 under the title “The Gamma Part of Existential Graphs”.
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