An introduction to and commentary on Luis J. Prieto's "A semiology: Problems and routes"

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Abstract. The following notes are a commentary on Luis J. Prieto's text "A semiology: Problems and routes", an English translation of "*Une sémiologie: problems et parcours*". The notes begin by introducing the different versions under which "A semiology…" was originally published, and then explain some problems faced when working on the English translation. After that, the introduction provides a historical and theoretical contextualization of the original text, focusing on Prieto's disagreement with Cesare Luporini's views on (scientific) knowledge from a materialist (Marxist-Leninist) perspective. The notes then move on to Prieto's own theory and examine the interrelations between knowledge, practice and subjectivity as they are treated in "A semiology…" and in related texts written by Prieto around the same time. Finally, the notes close with a brief observation of how Prieto's theory could be developed and what its shortcomings are, especially regarding contemporary semiotic theory.

Keywords: history of semiotics; history of linguistics; materialist linguistics; subjectivity; choice; arbitrariness

1. On the translation

"A semiology: Problems and routes" (originally titled "*Une sémiologie: problèmes et parcours*") was first published in *Degrés* 49/50: j1–j12 in 1987. An Italian translation by Patrizia Molo was published in 1989 in the book *Saggi di semiotica I* (Prieto 1989: 9–22). A further Spanish translation of the Italian text was made available by Silvia Tabachnik in the journal *Estudios* 2: 22–31 of the *Centro de Estudios Avanzados* at Córdoba University in Argentina (Prieto 1993). The Italian translation was titled "*Una semiologia: problemi e risultati*", and the title of the

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Spanish translation, since it was made from the Italian text, reads "*Una semiología: problemas y resultados*". An alternative title for the English version published in this journal could thus have been "A semiology: Problems and results". However, it seemed to me that keeping the French title and translating the word '*parcours*' as 'routes' would be better for connoting the heuristic power Prieto's proposal might bear when looked at in the light of contemporary semiotics.

An important difference between the Italian and Spanish translations and the original French text is that the latter included a bibliographical note in which Prieto presented the main articles containing the major developments of the central ideas of his theory. This note was absent from the Italian version, and thus from the Spanish version as well. The English version in this journal includes the note. There are other differences between the Italian and the French versions, since the Italian version was revised by Prieto in order to be published in his *Saggi*. For instance, the bullet points that the reader will find in the English text are absent from the French version, but they appear in the Italian and Spanish ones; I decided to keep them in the English text for the sake of clarity. In composing the English translation, I took all existent versions into account and, whenever it seemed necessary, I indicated the main divergences among them. The original French article appears as entry no 71 in Georges Redard's bibliography of Prieto, published in the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 45 (Redard 1991). The Spanish translation is listed as "ad 71" in Daniele Gambarara's supplements to the Prieto bibliography published in the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 50 (Gambarara 1997). The Italian translation does not have an entry of its own, since it appeared as part of a book and not as a separate article.

An important remark regarding terminology is that I have kept 'pertinence' as the English translation of the, almost, homophonous French term. The term, or rather the concept, was introduced to French linguistics by André Martinet as a translation of the German '*relevant*' found in the works of Trubetzkoy (see Sourdot 2000: 96). Interestingly, one of the few publications of Prieto in English is, precisely, the entry 'Relevance' for Sebeok *et al.*'s *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (Prieto 1986). I nevertheless decided to maintain 'pertinence' rather than 'relevance' in English if only to connote the linguistic, and structuralist, filiation of Prieto's work, and to differentiate it from other uses of 'relevance' in neighbouring theories about language and pragmatics.

Another important remark needs to be made regarding the term 'knowledge'. In French, Prieto used the word '*connaissance*' (in Spanish, '*conocimiento*', and in Italian, '*conoscenza*'). The way in which the term is used throughout the text makes 'knowledge' the most suitable translation; however, the noun '*connaissance*' in French was used by Prieto in a particular manner. The noun '*connaissance*' can

be treated in French (as an Italian and in Spanish) as a countable noun, whereas 'knowledges' deviates from the English norm. I decided to render all instances of both '*connaissance*' and '*connaissances*' simply as 'knowledge', to render the text less strange to readers of English. Related to this, Prieto also alternates between the indefinite article (i.e. '*une connaissance*', 'a knowledge') when referring to a specific knowledge being construed, and the definite article (i.e. '*la connaissance*', 'the knowledge') when referring to knowledge in general. I also evened that usage out, expecting that the reader might still recognize the specific meaning of 'knowledge' depending on the context where it appears. A previous translation of "A semiology…", that includes the term 'knowledges' and preserves the French articles in their English form as 'a' and 'the' respectively, was included in my doctoral dissertation (Chávez Barreto 2022: 82–92).

People who have engaged with Prieto's work have often noted certain traits of his writing style. He often phrased his ideas in rather convoluted ways. This convolutedness often came from repetition of terms, and from long parenthetic sentences that were intended to restrict the meaning of a given term. In the English translation, I decided to modify Prieto's style as much as possible (yet still aiming to maintain his overall tone), and to render it closer to English academic style in the hope of making it easier to follow for readers of English (for, indeed, the academic norms in French, Spanish and Italian are quite different from the ones of English).

The absence of Prieto in English-speaking semiotics is noticeable. He is, certainly, not unknown, but the unavailability of English translations of his works helps explain the scarcity of attention he has been given outside French- and Italian-speaking semiotics. Articles on Prieto in English do exist, and two important complements to the notes presented here are, undoubtedly, the overview of his theory written by Martin Krampen and published in the *Semiotica* issue dedicated to Prieto after his death (Krampen 1998), and Jeanne Martinet's presentation of Prieto's semiology in *The Semiotic Web 1989* (Martinet 1990). Besides these two texts, Fadda 2024 presents another view on the topics treated in the following commentary – especially concerning the role of materiality and subjectivity in Prieto's theory. Fadda's article, although published in Italian, is without a doubt an important complement to this commentary. Additionally, I published an overview of Prieto's intellectual biography in my doctoral dissertation (see Chávez Barreto 2022: 40–75) that can also be of help to readers interested in Prieto's intellectual *parcours*.

2. Commentary on "A semiology: Problems and routes"

"A semiology…" opens with Prieto's definition of his semiology as a 'theory of the *raison d'être* of knowledge of material reality'. This semiology, says Prieto, begins from the principle that valid knowledge is not only *true*, but also *pertinent*, observing that *pertinence* is, at least from such a point of view, a logically prior criterion for validity: "[…] the question of whether knowledge is true or not is only posed regarding knowledge that has already been deemed pertinent". The inclusion of pertinence as a criterion of validity is Prieto's way of dealing with the problem of how true knowledge is nevertheless dependent on the socio-historical context. In other words: how can we attain true knowledge if knowledge is influenced by socio-historical conditions? This is the thread guiding the whole argumentation put forward in "A semiology…", and thus, it is important to reconstruct the context in which Prieto first formulated the problem and sketched a solution. In fact, that solution can be traced back to a brief article Prieto published four years before "A semiology…".

2.1. The pertinence of knowledge:
"Materialismo e scelte del soggetto", 4 March 1983

In 1983, "*Materialismo e scelte del soggetto*" ('Materialism and the subject's choices', Prieto 1983) appeared in the weekly journal *Rinascita*, one of the organs of the Italian Communist Party. This text, from 4 March 1983, was a somewhat critical examination of a set of ideas found in *Dialettica e materialismo*, a 1975 book written by Cesare Luporini (1909–1993). Luporini was, and still is, considered one of the most prominent Italian Marxists. He was both a philosopher and a politician. Regarding philosophy, he studied first in Florence and later in Freiburg where he attended some of Martin Heidegger's lectures. Luporini's philosophical work before WWII was focused on existentialism, but afterwards it switched to Marxism – although he worked on Italian literature for some years before that. As a Marxist, Luporini maintained an important rapport with Louis Althusser and was one of the main promoters of his works in Italy – and yet he voiced some criticism towards "structuralism", and towards semiotics (see Luporini 1975: XV–XVII). Regarding his political endeavours, he was a senator for the Italian Communist Party from 1958 to 1963. He often published in *Rinascita*, but in 1945 he cofounded *Società*, a journal that in the beginning was not officially affiliated with the Italian Communist Party, yet remained a venue for communist Italian intellectuals.

2.1.1. The terms under discussion:
truth, essence, knowledge and materialism

Luporini's *Dialettica e materialismo* was a collection of articles published between 1954 and 1972, some of which originally appeared in *Rinascita*. The article at which Prieto addresses his criticism is "*Verità e libertà*" (Luporini 1975: 77–109, originally published in 1970 in *Società*). In that text, Luporini approaches the problem of knowledge and ideology within the (philosophical) framework of historical materialism. The main idea Prieto extracts from the text, with the aim of showing that Luporini seemingly contradicts himself, or at least arrives at an aporia of sorts, is the following:

> The thesis of materialism, reduced to its essential terms, is that the physical world exists independently of every human (past, present and future) and that science describes it in its independence, just as it is, even if with mental instruments and categories that are historically and socially conditioned and produced. (Luporini 1975: 79)[2]

Prieto notices Luporini's own admission that science, as depicted by materialism,[3] deals with categories "that are historically and socially conditioned and produced". For Prieto, the problem is the following: if, for belonging to a given category,[4] an object must be recognized as bearing certain features, then an object that is recognized as a member of a category does not have all of its features recognized, but only those that count for it to be considered as a member of the category. If a category retains only some aspects of the objects it includes, then, from its inclusion in the category, the object is not described "as it is", but only, and by necessity, described in a certain respect. Thus, Prieto (1983) asks, if science deals with categories, how can science at the same time describe things "as they are"? Let us trace how the discussion unravels before trying to break it down.

The text by Luporini includes an answer, if an unsatisfactory one, to Prieto's question. Luporini's own argumentation, at least in the first place, mainly deals with the problem of truth as something expressed in discourse by a proposition. In

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[2]   All translations are mine unless otherwise stated, I. C.

Here is the original passage: "*La tesi del materialismo, ristretta ai suoi termini essenziali, è che il mondo fisico esiste indipendentemente da tutti gli uomini (passati, presenti e futuri) e che la scienza lo descrive in tale sua indipendenza, così come è, anche se con strumenti mentali e categorie che sono storicamente e socialmente condizionati e prodotti.*"

[3]   Throughout both Prieto's and Luporini's texts, it is the term 'materialism' that is used, not so much 'Marxism'. Importantly, with 'materialism' they refer not only to Marx, but also to Lenin, and, in the case of Luporini, to Gramsci, and other Marxist thinkers.

[4]   'Category' in this context is synonymous with Prieto's more often used term 'class'.

Luporini's view, at first moment the problem is reduced to that of the *adequation* of the proposition's content to the object to which it refers – a view that Luporini traces to Aristotle, and then, importantly, to Aquinas. From Aquinas' commentary to *Metaphysics* Luporini (1975: 80) borrows the following example:

> The extent [...] of the [...] truth [of a proposition], as Saint Thomas would say, is the object itself. "It is not because we regard you as white that you really are white, but on the contrary, because you are white, we think to be speaking truthfully if we say you are white". [5]

After revising some objections to this position, Luporini states that the real problem materialism aims to solve is reconciling the existence of a subject of knowledge and an "objective" reality that exists, and *is*, independently of the knowledge construed by such subject. Consequently, the problem lies in explaining the link as such that ties a proposition to its content. There follows a long discussion on a Marxist conception of knowledge, especially regarding the mental and sensible aspects of cognition, and how the two aspects are to be integrated into a materialist theory of knowledge that assumes that knowing reality in its materiality, *as it is*, is the main task of scientific knowledge. Luporini, somewhat surprisingly, invokes the concept of 'essence'. The relevant passage is the following:

> The proposition "This person is a true friend" is equivalent to "*This person is a true friend* is a true judgement". But in this reduction the sense of its real use is lost. Such modes of expression answer the question of whether *a given thing* corresponds, or not, to a given essence. Thus, there is also here the question of correspondence, or *adequation*, but in a different sense from the one we have seen. Is the problem of *essence* avoidable? (Luporini 1975: 100)[6]

To make matters more complex, Luporini draws a distinction between 'essence' and 'logical class', noticing that a logical class is not the same as an 'essence', and that only the latter necessarily has a *real* correlate. Interestingly enough, he brings an example from biology: the notion of 'species', says Luporini, assures us

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[5]   "*La misura* […] *della* […] *verità* [of a proposition], *come dirà san Tommaso, è l'oggetto stesso. 'Non perché noi ti reputiamo bianco tu sei banco davvero, ma all'incontro, perché tu sei bianco, pensiamo il vero noi che ti diciamo bianco*".

[6]   "*La proposizione "Tizio è un vero amico" equivale all'altra "Tizio è un vero amico è un giudizio vero". Ma in questa riduzione si perde il senso del loro uso reale. Quei modi di espressione rispondono alla domanda se la* data cosa *corrisponde, o no, a una certa essenza. Vi è anche qui, dunque, una questione di corrispondenza o di* adequatio*, ma in senso del tutto diverso dal già visto. È evitabile il problema delle* essenze?"

that 'essences' do have real correlates (and the reader is thus led to believe that Luporini's 'essence' might be something akin to a "natural kind"). Prieto makes the notion of 'essence' the main target of his criticism, and in his own article cites the following passage from Luporini 1975: 100,

> If I judge you are "white", and my judgement is a true one, that means that you belong, at least in this moment, to the class of white things. But if you were to lose this property, would you stop being *what you are* [Prieto's emphasis], a human? As, instead, you would stop being a human if you were to lose other properties that are, because of that, *essential* to being a human? It is enough to be able to pose this question to notice that the problem of essence is not simply identical to […] that of logical classes.[7]

Prieto notices that it could be the case that there are properties "essential" to being white, and if those are lost, then whatever is judged as 'white' would stop being white.[8] In any case, from Prieto's point of view, what clarifies, to some extent, Luporini's position is the following: if an object is recognized as white, and it is thus claimed that the object *is* white, the claim is true by virtue of something borne by the object itself, yet the claim does not state anything about other properties that the object might possess, even if those other properties, taken as a whole, would constitute what the object *is*. Thus, per Luporini, only essences, but not logical classes, have a correlate in reality. Yet the problem remains. The main issue faced by the usage of 'essence' is, once more, that if science uses categories that are historically and socially determined, how could it ever deal with what objects *are* in themselves, i.e. with essences? Prieto (1983) writes:

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[7]   "*Se io ti giudico "bianco", e il mio giudizio è vero, ciò significa che tu appertieni, almeno in questo momento, alla clase delle chose bianche. Ma se tu perdi questa proprietà cessi di essere* quello che sei [emphasis by Prieto]*, un uomo? Come, invece, cessi di essere un uomo se perdi certe altre proprietà che sono perciò* essenziali *all'esser uomo? Basta porre questa domanda per scorgere che il problema delle essenze non è semplicemente identico a [...] quello delle classi logiche.*"

[8]   This example, linking being 'white' with being 'human', is meant, by Luporini, to be a reference to Aquinas' example quoted earlier in the text, and Aquinas himself is commenting on Aristotle, as noted by Fadda (2024). Yet a contemporary reader, and probably also a reader in the 1970s and 1980s, it seems to me, could in all likelihood not help but interpret the example as politically charged. As of today, and especially in countries of the Global South, it is easy to interpret 'white' in the context of humans that are 'white', not as a physical property of a material object, i.e. a human body, but rather as a category that is completely dependent upon social formations – see, e.g. Hugo Ceron-Anaya, Patricia de Santana Pinho and Ana Ramos-Zayas' (2022) introduction to a special issue of *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* on 'whiteness' in Latin America. People might be white in the sense of having light skin colour, yet not "white" as they do not belong to a given social class. Prieto used a different version of this example in some of his writings, only replacing 'human' with 'sheet of paper'.

> If the categories with which science describes the physical world, namely the essences, do nothing else than reflect something found, as such, in the object itself, what does it mean to say that such categories are historically and socially conditioned? If they intrinsically depend upon the object, they should not have any link with a historical and social context.[9]

The answer often advanced by materialism, says Prieto, is that to describe things "as they are", to describe their "essence", is but an aim science keeps approaching, without necessarily reaching it. Indeed, Luporini writes: "[…] the objectivity of science is grounded upon the practical intersubjectivity of human relations inasmuch as science contains in itself a movement towards the discovery of real objectivity, and thus it is oriented towards it"[10] (Luporini 1975: 99), and, perhaps even more importantly for Prieto, Lenin (1972: 152–153) writes:

> From the standpoint of modern materialism, i.e. Marxism, the *limits* of approximation of our knowledge to objective, absolute truth are historically conditional, but the existence of such truth is *unconditional*, and the fact that we are approaching nearer to it is also unconditional.

We bring up Lenin because Prieto himself states that the solution he offers to Luporini's seeming paradox, "does not contradict the principle, cherished by Lenin, that science is 'perpetually approaching' its aim",[11] and Luporini (1975: 95) himself mentions Lenin's position. In any case, what is important to notice now is that Prieto interprets this view about the perpetual rapprochement of science to its aim, as implying two things: (1) science deals, on an ideal plane, with categories that would be independent from their social and historical context (inasmuch as it describes things *as they are*), yet (2) the actual practice of science would inevitably use categories that are necessarily linked to the society wherein they are produced. Thus, according to Prieto (1983),

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9   "*Se le categorie con cui la scienza descrive il mondo fisico, ossia le essenze, non fanno che riflettere qualcosa che si trova già in quanto tale nell'oggetto stesso, cosa si vuol dire quando si afferma che tali categorie sono storicamente e socialmente condizionate? Dal momento infatti che esse sono internamente dipendenti dall'oggetto esse non dovrebbero mantenere nessun legame col contesto storico sociale.*"

10   "*[…] la obiettività della scienza è fondata sulla intersoggettività pratica dei rapporti umani solo in quanto quest'ultima racchiude necessariamente in sé già il movimento verso la scoperta della obiettività del reale ed è, per così dire, orientata su di essa.*"

11   "*[…] non contraddice il principio, caro a Lenin, del 'perpetuo avvicinarsi' della scienza al suo scopo*" (Prieto 1983).

> […] the historicity of science, and of knowledge in general, is thus reduced by materialism to a purely negative trait: knowledge would be a historical fact simply because it would be impossible for it not to be so.[12]

Yet this view, according to Prieto, leaves aside some observations already found in Marx regarding the relationship between knowledge and practice, in which Marx conceives of the historicity of knowledge in other terms than simply a negative trait:

> […] materialism acknowledges a link between knowledge and practice in the moment of sensation (a point where, in my opinion, there is no knowledge yet), and in the moment of the "proof of truth" when knowledge is applied. No role is given to practice in the moment located in between those two, because – I think – the notion of essence is treated as an obstacle. Said moment is the proper moment of knowledge: the moment where categories and their correlative concepts are established. This is nothing else, indeed, than to reflect something that is already found in the object itself.[13] (Prieto 1983)

It can then be claimed that Prieto accuses "materialism" (not Marx, and not Luporini in particular, rather 'materialism' is used, as a quite broad term) of missing the crucial moment and the crucial role of practice when considering the relationships it entertains with knowledge. For Prieto, it is the moment when categories and concepts are established that should be taken into account when examining the relationships between knowledge and practice. What Prieto means by 'categories and concepts' is, basically, the 'extension' and 'intension' of a class, i.e. a 'category' would be a set of objects belonging to a class, and a 'concept', a set of features that an object must bear to be recognized as a member of a category. To the extent that a category has an intension, or comprehension, knowledge consists precisely in establishing the concept that amounts to a category's intension. In other words, knowledge consists in construing the concept that a class realizes. The construing of such a concept always entails a given practice: this is precisely the cornerstone of Prieto's semiology.

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[12]   "*La storicità della scienza e in generale della conoscenza viene così ridotta dal materialismo a una proprietà puramente negativa: la conoscenza sarebbe un fatto storico sociale semplicemente perché essa non riesce a non serlo.*"

[13]   "*[…] il materialismo riconosce un legame tra la conoscenza e la pratica nel momento della sensazione (che è a mio avviso un momento nel quale non c'è ancora conoscenza), e nel momento della 'prova di verità' che costituisce l'applicazione della conoscenza. Ma, principalmente perché —come credo— la nozione di 'essenza' si è elevata a ostacolo, nessun ruolo viene assegnato alla pratica, al momento che si colloca tra quegli altri due, quello appunto della conoscenza: il momento cioè dello stabilimento delle categorie e dei concetti ad esse correlativi. Non si tratterebbe infatti che di riflettere al meglio su qualcosa che si trovebbe già nell'oggetto stesso.*"

2.2. Against essences, towards practices

The solution Prieto proposes to the problem of 'essence' is thus simply to get rid of essences altogether. What knowledge "reflects" from an object has nothing to do with its "essence" but with the features of the object that become pertinent in relation to a given practice. Because the object is *used* in some specific way, some specific features *must* be borne by it; and the limit to recognizing what the object *is* rather lies in the fact that *knowing* only takes into consideration what is deemed as pertinent, by *knowing* itself, in praxis. Thus, Prieto's solution does not contradict Lenin's principle: material reality might as well remain, in itself, never reachable by scientific knowledge, but not because science deals with essences. In "A semiology…" Prieto writes:[14]

> The fact that knowledge is "partial" does not constitute a defect that comes from the limitations of the intelligence that has construed such knowledge; quite the contrary: the very foundation of knowledge is to consider from an object only what counts for the subject's interests, or, to put it in other words, to retain from the object what makes it realize, or not, a *concept* that is pertinent for the subject. (Page 301)[15]

Prieto introduces Praguean phonology as an antecedent of his semiology, stating that what it does is, precisely, to explain the establishment of categories, phonemes, by considering their role in a given practice, to wit, communication. No essence is involved in the establishing of those categories. The features making up the intension of a category, i.e. the concept a phoneme *is*, are its *pertinent* features. They are, to be sure, features really borne by an object, e.g. a sound, and it is thus true that the object bears the given features, but they are also *pertinent*, in that they are features that count for recognizing the category to which the object belongs, or the concept that the object realizes.

A classic example of Prieto's that might make his position clearer is found in *Pertinence et pratique* (Prieto 1975: 85 fn11) where he discusses the different phonological status of the sounds [s] and [z] in French and in Spanish. French

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[14] The page numbers of the quotations in English correspond to the translation found in this volume. The footnotes at the end of the quotes include a reference to the original French-language article from 1987. The comparison of the French text and my translation will allow the reader to see how much my translation *adapted* Prieto's text to English academic norm.

[15] "*Le fait d'être 'partielle' ne constitue nullement pour une connaissance une sorte de tare consécutive à la limitation de l'intelligence qui l'a construite : au contraire, c'est le fondement même de la connaissance que de ne prendre en considération, dans l'objet, que ce qui compte pour l'interet de sujet, c'est-à-dire de ne retenir de l'objet que ce qui fait qu'il réalise ou non le concept petinent pour le sujet*" (Prieto 1987: j3).

recognizes the two sounds as two different phonemes, thus, 'voice' becomes a relevant dimension to be considered in the sounds, and the features 'voiceless' and 'voiced' are pertinent. It follows, that the French phoneme /s/ can only be realized by [s], and /z/ only by [z]. In Spanish, however, there is no such distinction: there is only one sibilant, for which the dimension 'voice' is not relevant. The sounds [s] and [z] in Spanish both belong to only one phoneme (and the distribution of the sounds can be more or less predicted: voiced sibilants will more likely occur before a voiced consonant, e.g. ['*razgo*'] 'feature'). In this way, the categories through which material reality is known, do relate to the material properties of objects, but do not *reflect* any kind of essence; instead, they only reflect, in a certain way, whatever is pertinent for a given practice in which the object(s) is (or are) made to intervene (e.g. speaking or understanding Spanish or French).

2.3. Arbitrariness, practice and pertinence:
"In principle, first we choose the aim, then we look for the means"[16]

In the final lines of "*Materialismo e scelte del soggetto*" Prieto grounds his epistemological position on a more semiological principle, in the Saussurean sense. He writes:

> […] the truth of knowledge about the physical world depends exclusively on its relation to the object [...]. Knowledge of the physical world, then, cannot be true or false according to the society that construes such knowledge. Nevertheless, knowledge that, in a "perpetual rapprochement", tends to be construed is above all *pertinent*, and the pertinence of knowledge does not depend on the object, but on the practice in which an object is made to intervene. Now, it is evident that the practices chosen by one society are not necessarily the same practices chosen by another society and, consequently, knowledge that is pertinent in one society can be non-pertinent in another society. (Prieto 1983)[17]

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[16]   In the original, "*En principio, primero elegimos los fines y después buscamos los medios*", from an interview with Prieto that appeared in the Mexican newspaper *Sábado* in 1979.

[17]   "[…] *la verità di una conoscenza del mondo fisico dipende esclusivamente dal suo rapporto con l'oggetto* […]. *Una conoscenza del mondo fisico non potrebbe quindi essere vera o falsa, secondo la società nella quale essa è stata costruita. Una conoscenza, però, che in un 'perpetuo avvicinarsi' si tende a costruire è anzitutto una conoscenza pertinente, e la pertinenza di una conoscenza non dipende dall'oggetto, bensì dalla pratica nella quale lo si fa intervenire. Ora, è evidente che le pratiche scelte in una società non sono necessariamente le stesse che vengono scelte in un'altra e, di conseguenza, una conoscenza che è pertinente in una società può non esserlo in un'altra.*"

To the extent knowledge is a social fact, a certain aspect of it would be linked to the interests of a society, and of the subjects therein. In Prieto, this entails that knowledge is *arbitrary*, arguably, in Saussure's sense of the term (Prieto 1975).[18] On the one hand, knowledge involves a choice or a decision to consider one, and not another, aspect of the object being known. On the other hand, such a choice depends on the interests of the society, and ultimately of the subject that *knows* the object in order to either *use* it, or *produce* it. Thus, two objects can be known in different ways in different societies, and it is possible that both ways yield true knowledge. Truthfulness of such knowledge will depend on the object itself, but the pertinence of the knowledge might highlight different aspects of it.

An example that might serve to illustrate our last point is the following one. Imagine a black metal lighter that is completely filled with lighter fluid. Now, if I want to light my cigarette by using that lighter, it will be pertinent that the lighter has enough lighter fluid to allow me to light my cigarette; the colour of the lighter might be deemed non-pertinent. However, if I want to get a black lighter as a present for my friend, then it is the colour that becomes pertinent – and later on, possibly, my friend will deal with the pertinence of lighter fluid. Now, it can be *true* that the lighter is black and that it is filled with lighter fluid, this is something completely dependent upon the lighter as an object independent of knowledge – but whether one *knows* the lighter to be black or to have enough fuel will depend on what one wants to do with it. The *pertinence* of either one of the features of the lighter depends on the subject of knowledge.

Importantly, Prieto's view on knowledge, and the importance of its pertinence, developed from his "epistemological", or rather cognitive, reading of Praguian phonology. Section 2 of "A semiology…" introduces this reading:

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18   Interestingly, contemporary semiotics has not yet said its final word in the debate over the arbitrariness of signs. For Gunther Kress, for instance, Prieto's argument, or something quite similar, is taken as a proof that signs *cannot be* arbitrary: "[…] signs are always motivated […] by the producer's interest, and by the characteristics of the object. It is 'interest' which determines the characteristics that are to be selected and to be represented. The relation of signifier and signified, in all human semiotic systems, is always motivated, and is never arbitrary" (Kress 1993: 173). Yet, in support of arbitrariness, Kalevi Kull has written that "motivation is not the *opposite* of arbitrarity [sic], but one of its most important *features*. An arbitrary choice, or free choice, may include more motivation or less motivation in some direction, but so long as the motivation is not a necessity, and so long as there is still the capacity to behave against the motivation, the choice is free, it is still a choice" (Kull 2023: 86). When it comes to Saussure specifically, it would be very difficult to list all the works that have been written about arbitrariness; however, Joseph 2022: 20–26 and Joseph 2015 provide good overviews of this concept in Saussure, and of why it is not opposed, as Kull notes, to motivation.

> The features of the sound that are pertinent in relation to meaning are the features that must be taken into account in order to understand others and to make oneself understood, that is to say, in order to execute the practice of communication by using the sounds as means. Thus, the pertinence of the manner in which a speaker knows a sound is explained by phonologists via a *practice* within which they make the sounds to play the role of means. The semiology presented here generalizes this explanation to all knowledge of material reality: the historically and socially conditioned interests of a subject are manifested through practices that, by being executed, serve the interests of the subject. From this it follows that pertinence, which is always linked to the interests of the subject, and which is borne, from the point of view of the subject, by the way in which they know a given material object, always depends upon a practice in which the subject makes said material object to play a specific role. (Pages 301–302)[19]

In phonology, then, pertinence links sounds to linguistic units that express something. In Prieto's view, pertinence is what characterizes the relationship between sound and meaning.[20] If a sound is linked to a meaning, then the features by virtue of which such a link is established are pertinent. Crucially, this implies that pertinence relates a set of objects in a given universe of discourse, or plane (e.g. the universe of discourse of the sounds that should be produced when speaking French) with another set of objects in another universe of discourse (e.g. the universe of discourse of the meaning that can be expressed using French as a language of communication).

Pertinence is thus linked to communication as a practice. But since Prieto assumes that communication is only a specific practice, and thus the phonological model would be one specific case of a more general process of *knowing*, he turns to considering practices in general. This is the actual "generalization" of phonology effected by Prieto: he does not assume that all practices follow the phonological model; rather, that the phonological has some traits that makes it follow, *mutatis*

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[19] "*Ce qui compte dans le son par rapport au signifié, ce n'est cependant rien d'autre que ce qu'il faut prendre en considération dans le son pour pouvoir comprendre et se faire comprendre, c'est-à-dire, pour exercer, en l'utilisant comme moyen, la pratique constituée par la communication. En définitive, donc, la pertinence de la façon dont le sujet parlant connaît le son est expliquée par les phonologues par une* pratique *dans laquelle il lui fait jouer le rôle de moyen. Or, la sémiologie présentée ici généralise cette explication à toute connaissance d'un objet matériel : les intérêts historiquement et socialement conditionnés du sujet se manifestent au travers de pratiques dont l'exercice est susceptible de les servir ; de ce fait la pertinence, liée aux intérêts du sujet, que possède pour lui la façon dont il connaît un objet matériel, dépend toujours d'une pratique dans laquelle il lui fait jouer un rôle.*" (Prieto 1987: j4).

[20] Or, to be more precise, between sounds and signifiers on the one side; meanings and signifieds on the other; and between the signifier and signified proper.

mutandis, a scheme realized by every practice. This leads him to identify three roles an object can play in a practice: (1) the role of means, (2) the role of goal, and (3) the role of "raw material".[21] The role of means and the role of raw material should, in principle, always be fulfilled by a material object. The goal of a practice, however, can be either another material object or an object of thought, but we will not deal with this problem. For now, let us consider the relations between the means and goals of a practice.

2.4. Means, goals and raw material: the enchainment of practices

First of all, an important issue to consider is that, for Prieto, practices are enchained. This idea is expressed in Section 2 of "A semiology…". Let us take the second paragraph of that section and explain it carefully with the aid of an example,[22] and by commenting upon each sentence of Prieto's text.

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[21]   In French, Prieto writes '*matière première*'. I have however decided to translate it as 'raw material', and not as 'prime matter' to avoid the seemingly unnecessary Aristotelian connotations of the latter term. This came as a suggestion from Claire Forel.

[22]   The example is borrowed from an interview (Prieto 1979). The original passage reads: "[…] *yo creo que el fin de una práctica es siempre el medio de otra. Estoy absolutamente convencido. Yo busco una sierra para hacerme una biblioteca: biblioteca fin, sierra medio. Pero este fin que es la biblioteca va a ser medio para otra cosa, para ordenar mis libros: biblioteca medio, mis libros en orden fin. Y los libros en orden, a su vez, van a ser medio con respecto a trabajar eficazmente en mis artículos. Y así, si seguimos la cadena hay dos posibilidades: o bien se llega al infinito —una cadena infinita—, o bien se llega a algún fin que a su vez no es medio; y eso, dígase lo que se diga, es un fin último que pertenece a nuestra realidad subjetiva, que yo llamo —como una etiqueta provisoria— placer. O, si ustedes quieren, yo creo que nosotros tendemos siempre a producir un sí mismo perteneciente a una clase y a evitar los* sí mismos *pertenecientes a otras.*" ('I believe that the aim of a practice is always the means of another one. I am totally convinced of that. I look for a saw to make myself a bookshelf: bookshelf aim, saw means. But this aim is the means for something else, to organize my books: bookshelf means, organized books aim. And the organized books, in their turn are the means for me working efficiently in my articles. In this way, if we follow the chain, there are two possibilities, either one continues to infinity – in an infinite chain – or we arrive to some aim that is not a means, and that, regardless of what one might say, is a final aim that belongs to our subjective reality, which I call – provisionally – pleasure. Or, if you prefer, I believe we tend to produce a *oneself* that belongs to a given class, and to avoid the *oneselves* that belong to other classes.') As an interesting piece of trivia, Fadda (personal communication, I. C.) rightly pointed out to me that Prieto used to carve wood and produce small wooden figurines in an *atelier* he had set up in his Geneva apartment. Several older colleagues, and students, of Prieto have indeed mentioned that in different conversations when talking about the non-academic side of Luis Prieto.

> The interest a subject has in the means of a practice presupposes an interest in the goal of that same practice — and thus, the interest in the goal is logically previous to the interest in the means.[23] (Page 302)

Let us imagine an academic who would like to build a bookshelf. In order to build a bookshelf, the academic looks, say, for a saw and some wooden planks. The saw would be the means, the bookshelf, the goal, and the wooden planks, the raw material. Now, if the academic is *interested* in the saw (the means), it is because they are first interested in building the bookshelf (the goal).

> The pertinence that, for the subject, is borne by the concept determining the goal of the practice as a goal (in other words, the concept that the object to be produced must realize so that the goal is attained) is thus also logically previous to the practice that seeks to produce this goal and, therefore, the pertinence of the concept cannot depend upon the practice. Yet, this does not contradict the generalization made by the semiology presented in this text, of Praguian phonology.[24] (Page 302)

The bookshelf, as a goal, is defined by a set of features. These features are pertinent to the extent that the bookshelf must *realize* them so it can count as a bookshelf, and, especially, as the bookshelf that is aimed to be produced. Now, pertinence always links two universes of discourse, and thus the pertinence of the features borne by the bookshelf must come from somewhere. That pertinence cannot come from the same practice by means of which the bookshelf will be produced because such pertinence precedes the practice, and because that practice derives its pertinence precisely from the bookshelf: it is the bookshelf as the goal that makes the features of the means (the saw) and the raw material (the wooden planks) pertinent.

> Indeed, the concept that determines the goal of a practice is a concept that must be realized by an object so that this same object can be made to play the role of means or raw material in another practice. Thus, even if the pertinence of the concept that determines the object intended to be produced by the subject via executing

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[23] "*L'intérêt du sujet pour le moyen d'une pratique présuppose l'intérêt, logiquement antérieur, pour le but de cette même pratique.*" (Prieto 1987: j5).

[24] "*La pertinence que possède pour le sujet le concept qui détermine le but en tant que tel, c'est-à-dire le concept que l'objet à produire doit réaliser pour que ce but soit atteint, est donc logiquement antérieure à la pratique visant à le produire et ne saurait par conséquent en dépendre. Cela, cependant, ne contredit nullement la généralisation, faite par la sémiologie présentée ici, des conclusions de la phonologie pragoise*" (Prieto 1987: j5).

> a practice does not depend on that particular practice, it does depend, in every case, upon a practice.[25] (Page 302)

In Prieto's example, the academic takes an interest in building a bookshelf so they can have their books neatly organized. This would be another practice for which 'neatly organized books' is a goal, and the bookshelf is a means. The pertinence of the bookshelf's pertinent features is derived from this second practice. One is thus led to think that, for Prieto, a given practice immediately provides pertinence for the means. But if the means was produced, then it was the goal of another practice (and a practice always involves pertinence). This seems to be the case:

> One must additionally point out that, according to what has been said, although the object playing the role of goal in a particular practice has already been known in a given manner that does not derive its pertinence from the fact that it is made to play such role in this particular practice, the object is necessarily also known in another manner for which the pertinence cannot be explained without taking into account the practice in question.[26] (Page 302–303)

The features of the bookshelf do not derive their pertinence from the practice of building it. The practice of building a bookshelf does imply a way of *knowing* the bookshelf (as a goal, i.e. as something that can be produced by *using* the saw and the wooden planks), but the pertinence of the bookshelf's features come from the practice in which the bookshelf is a means. Prieto thus writes:

> A given means can be used to achieve a goal only to the extent that such means belongs to the extension of a given concept, to wit, the concept that constitutes the utility of the means in question. Thus, if a determinate means is chosen by the subject to produce an object that realizes a given concept, it is because the subject recognizes that such an object realizes the concept constituted by the utility of the

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[25] "*En effet, avant de faire jouer à un objet le rôle de but dans une pratique, on lui fait toujours jouer, dans une autre pratique, le rôle de moyen ou de matière première. Or, c'est le concept dont la pertinence résulte du rôle que l'on fait jouer à l'objet en question dans cette autre pratique qui le détermine en tant que but de la première, c'est-à-dire en tant qu'objet à produire grâce à l'exercice de celle-ci. Donc, même si la pertinence du concept qui détermine l'objet qu'on se propose de produire en exerçant une pratique ne dépend pas de cette pratique, elle dépend en tout cas d'une pratique.*" (Prieto 1987: j5).

[26] "*Il faut signaler par ailleurs que, même si, d'après ce que nous venons de voir, l'objet auquel on fait jouer le rôle de but dans une pratique est déjà connu d'une façon dont la pertinence ne dépend pas du fait qu'on lui fait jouer ce rôle dans cette pratique, il est nécessairement connu aussi d'une autre façon, dont la pertinence ne peut, en revanche, s'expliquer qu'en tenant compte de la pratique en question*" (Prieto 1987: j5).

> means in question – a concept whose pertinence, evidently, depends upon the practice in which such means is used.[27] (Page 303)

In the example, an academic would like to build a bookshelf, so that their books be neatly organized, so they can more effectively work on their articles. The chain might go on, and, for Prieto, it ultimately resolves into the academic aiming to produce a version of themselves that is pleasant, a point we will return to later (see also footnote 22). The important thing to mention is that pertinence is derived "backwards". It is the practice 'to work more effectively on their articles' that gives pertinence to the practice 'neatly organized books', and this last practice is what gives pertinence to the practice 'building a bookshelf'.

2.5. Causes, effects and the subject's body

In Section 4 of "A semiology…" Prieto approaches practices in terms of causes and effects. In a practice, the means is the cause of the aim, and thus, the aim is the effect of the means. However, the means, says Prieto, is a proper means only if it undergoes a *transformation*, and to the extent this transformation is an effect, it must have a cause: the cause of something becoming a means is *always* a transformation of the subject's body. There is thus the following enchainment: the transformation of the subject's body *causes* the transformation of an object into a practice's means, which *causes* the aim of the practice. And in the other direction: the aim of a practice *is an effect of* the practice's means which *is an effect of* a transformation of the subject's body. Importantly, this entails that, for Prieto, the body of the subject is *the* first means. Let us explain this.

Prieto makes a distinction between 'natural transformations' and 'non-natural transformations'. A natural transformation is defined as a change that follows *naturally* from the moment an object bears some specific features, and it interacts with another object bearing some other specific features, e.g. sugar dissolving in water would be an instance of a natural transformation. A non-natural transformation is a *decision*. Let us go back to the bookshelf example. Suppose the wooden planks that play the role of raw material need to be cut, and in order to do so, the academic must grab the saw and put it into motion. The practice here would be 'cutting the wooden planks into pieces of a given size', the means would

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[27]   "*Un moyen peut en effet servir pour atteindre un but dans la mesure seulement où celui-ci appartient à l'extension d'un certain concept, celui que constitue l'utilité du moyen en question. Si, donc, un moyen déterminé est choisi par le sujet pour produire un objet réalisant un certain concept, c'est parce que le sujet reconnaît que cet objet réalise aussi le concept constitué par l'utilité du moyen en question, concept dont la pertinence dépend évidemment de la pratique dans laquelle on utilise ce moyen*" (Prieto 1987: j5).

be the saw, and the goal would be the cut wooden planks. In order for the saw properly to become the means of such practice, it must undergo a non-natural transformation – namely, to be put into motion – so it can properly become the *cause* of the goal. Yet the saw's being put into motion is an effect of a cause; to wit, the academic is grabbing the saw and moving it. This last cause, says Prieto, is not an effect but a decision, one might add, an act of *will*. The saw would not cut the wooden planks *spontaneously*, i.e. there is not the same causal link, in this context at least, between the sugar dissolving in water and the wooden planks being cut. In the former case some features of the sugar and some features of the water make dissolution unavoidable; in the latter case, an *agent*, in a broad sense, is needed. To the extent that grabbing the saw and using it for cutting the wooden planks is an act of will, a decision (because there is always the option of not grabbing the saw), the body of the subject executing a practice can be a cause '*without having been an effect*'.

The crux of the matter seems to be the opposition between natural and non-natural transformations. What defines a non-natural transformation is the fact that it does not happen unless there is an intention for it to happen. Crucially, there can only be an intention, and thus a decision, if the subject is aware of the fact that it can rule over its own body, and this supposes that the subject is conscious of its own *numeric* identity.[28] Prieto makes a more detailed presentation of these ideas in an article from 1985, "*Decisión y sujeto*", but we do not have enough space here completely to unpack the ideas presented by Prieto in that article. Let us simply notice that Section 5 of "A semiology…" concludes by stating that "[h]aving begun from the problem of the *raison d'être* of phonemes, the semiology here presented arrives at a theory of the subject", and "*Decisión y sujeto*" constitutes one approximation to such a theory.

2.6. Choice, identity and subject: a return to essence?

We have seen that the centrality of practices in Prieto's theory is used as an alternative to Luporini's (and, at least in some measure, Lenin's) position that scientific knowledge deals with essences. Certainly, Prieto's insistence on practices goes beyond scientific knowledge, and although he does claim that scientific knowledge always involves, even if only potentially, a certain practice, his main claim is that all knowledge is inseparable from practices because it is constituted therein.

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[28] Prieto often used the terms 'specific identity' and 'numeric identity', which correspond, respectively, to the more often used concepts of 'type' and 'token' (see Prieto 1985: 88, fn2).

Thus, the centrality of practices leads Prieto into tackling the problem of subjectivity, since a practice can only be a subject's practice and a subject is only so to the extent that it can execute practices. But there is one more side to Prieto's theory of the subject: the constitution of the subject as such depends, as we have seen, on the discovery of its own numeric identity, and this discovery is corroborated in the execution of practices. One practice that Prieto takes as central is the one by means of which the subject keeps itself biologically alive, i.e. the *material practice* of eating. On the other hand, the subject's recognition of its own status as a subject can only be made in relation to another subject, that is to say, in relation to another portion of material reality that is recognized as also endowed with a faculty of choice (Prieto 1985: 104–105) and thus as able to recognize and legitimize the subject as such. This entails that for Prieto a subject is always social; it can only exist within a community of subjects that legitimize its own *being a subject*. Thus, the recognition of the subject's numeric identity has a biological aspect to it, but it also has a symbolic aspect. The distinction between material practices (like building a bookshelf) and symbolic practices (like transmitting a message) corresponds to the two aspects of subjectivity: the subject keeps itself alive by executing material practices that Prieto calls "biological survival"; but since a subject is not only material, the execution of symbolic practices that legitimize a subject as such within a community of subjects are practices of "symbolic survival" (Prieto 1985: 97, 102).

This could entail that subjectivity as such could be thought of as a practice, but this is a conclusion that Prieto seems to reject in "*Decisión y Sujeto*". Subjectivity, it would seem, can only be a goal. The question of whether subjectivity as such is a practice is only indirectly tackled by Prieto when he examines the enchainment of practices and asks if such enchainment has endpoints. In principle, since the body of the subject is the first means, the enchainment of practices does have an endpoint in one direction; but is there a final goal? For Prieto, the answer is to be looked for in determining if the two aspects of subjectivity, 'biological survival' and 'symbolic survival', are in a relation analogous to the one existing between a means and a goal. He favours the hypothesis that 'biological survival' and 'symbolic survival' are simply two endpoints of practices but neither of them is a means for producing the other; thus subjectivity is only a goal. The problem would seem to be that Prieto operates with too rigid a notion of what a 'subject' is: for Prieto, it would seem, subjectivity, the recognition of the body as a numerically determined thing, is discovered only once, both in a biological and in a symbolic sense, and the subject, in principle, remains a subject after its discovery. Indeed, for Prieto, the discovery of one's own numeric identity is a process of apprehending material reality that does not pass through the

establishment of a class (Prieto 1985: 86), that is to say, the body of the subject as a first means would not constitute the realization of a concept and, being a mental object, *consciousness of one's own numeric identity* cannot serve as the means of a practice (Prieto 1985: 96). Yet this does not prevent Prieto from claiming that, for real practices, the enchainment to which they give place has as an endpoint the production of a "self" that belongs to a given class – yet this would not contradict the fact that subjectivity proper (as consciousness of the own numeric identity) would be somewhat immovable.

Thus, there are at least two ways of interpreting Prieto's theory of the subject. A generous interpretation of it would see it as postulating a somewhat naturalized basis of subjectivity as grounded both in cognitive activities and bodily functions, while leaving room for subjectivity conceived as a practice through the tension between (social) norms and (individual) taste – in the sense of how, and by which means, goals are achieved in actual practices (Prieto 1985: 102ff.). A less generous interpretation would approach Prieto's ideas as regressing to a somewhat *essentialized* notion of subjectivity that would only consist in recognizing the body as *one*, and assuming that such *oneness* is established once and for all.[29] This interpretation would see Prieto's notion of subjectivity as intimately linked to the notion of *identity*[30] and would find in it a return to certain forms of essentialism.

2.7. Prieto and contemporary semiotics

The reader familiar with contemporary biosemiotic and zoosemiotic theories might have felt some discomfort when reading certain passages of the preceding commentary. First of all, it is clear that Prieto's treatment of subjectivity is completely anthropocentric, both in the sense that it only deals with humans, and in the sense that he does not grant subjectivity to non-human animals: in

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[29]   This interpretation would be at odds with Prieto's remarks on the different types of suicide: for Prieto, there can be a symbolic suicide, in which the faculty of choice is completely abandoned, or rather, a subject is forced to abandon it – an example he uses is that of concentration camps (Prieto 1985: 107).

[30]   Fadda (2015: 105) has noticed the centrality of the problem of identity in Prieto's work, but without a link to any problem of essences. His own views on Prieto's "symbolic practices" and what they mean for the theory of the semiotic subject in Prieto can be found in Fadda 2007. Indeed, Fadda would rather maintain a completely non-essentialist reading of Prieto's theory – at least to the extent that Fadda 2024 offers a more dynamic reading of Prieto's notion of subjectivity in connection to material reality. He explicitly writes: "To understand 'where I begin and where I end' it is not useful to separate myself from the world *once and for all*, but instead, to determine the modes of my insertion in it" (my emphasis, I. C.; orig. "*Capire 'dove inizio e dove finisco', allora, non mi serve a separare una volta per tutte me stesso dal mondo, ma invece a determinare i modi del mio inserimento in esso*" Fadda 2024: 32).

Section 5 of "A semiology…" there is a passage where he explicitly says that non-human animals do not have the capacity to choose. Secondly, it can be appreciated that the problems of subjectivity in Prieto's works do touch upon some topics dealt with by contemporary biosemiotics. In fact, some of the conclusions reached by Prieto have been also reached by biosemiotics, although the claims made by biosemiotics can only be "analogous" to Prieto's. On the one hand, if subjectivity is defined as 'consciousness of one's own numeric identity', there would probably be many nuances regarding which other organisms would count as "subjects". If, on the other hand, subjectivity was equated with the capacity to choose, some biosemioticians (e.g. Kull 2022: 555) would agree that choice probably defines life as such, but we would need to be careful not to merge conceptual contents simply because they are labelled with the same term. At least regarding the works of Kull, who has advocated for choice and arbitrariness as central terms of both biosemiotics and of a general semiotic theory, 'choice' would be merely "analogous" to Prieto's concept of 'choice' – but it would not be the same. The requirement of being conscious of one's numeric identity would certainly not be involved in Kull's notion of choice, and so, in relation to a general (semiotic) theory of subjectivity, Kull's concept of choice would probably avoid the risks of essentialism that Prieto inadvertently introduces.

If anything, the route along which Prieto's theory could be taken is one that conceives subjectivity as also constituted in practices; subjectivity as a practice and not so much as something established once and for all. Even the consciousness of one's own numeric identity would have to be not taken for granted. There is no doubt that, if Prieto's theory is to remain rooted in materialism, the numeric identity of the subject's body would need to have a role in the construction of subjectivity, but a thorough examination of what exactly are its consequences for the enchainment of practices where the subject aims to produce specific *themselves* and avoid others would be needed. Both "*Decisión y sujeto*" and "A semiology…" end with Prieto touching upon the problems of distinguishing between nature and culture, and the route that those texts open may begin precisely with reexamining – maybe even abandoning? – such a distinction.

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Una introducción y comentario a
"A semiology: problems and routes" de Luis J. Prieto

Abstract. Las siguientes notas constituyen un comentario al texto de Luis Prieto "A semiology: problems and routes", una traducción al inglés de "Une sémiologie: problèmes et parcours". Las notas comienzan por introducir las versiones previas de "A semiology…" y explican algunos de los problemas que surgieron durante la traducción al inglés. Enseguida, presentan una contextualización histórica y teórica del texto original enfocándose en el desacuerdo entre Prieto y Cesare Luporini apropósito de las ideas de este último sobre el conocimiento (científico) desde un punto de vista materialista (i.e. marxista-leninista). Después de esto, las notas se centran en la teoría semiótica de Prieto y examinan las relaciones entre conocimiento, práctica y subjetividad, tal como son tratadas en "A semiology…" —y en textos relacionados en los que Prieto trabajaba más o menos simultáneamente. Para finalizar, las notas cierran con una pequeña observación acerca de cómo la teoría de Prieto podría desarrollarse y cuáles son sus limitaciones, especialmente en relación a la semiótica contemporánea.

Sissejuhatus ja kommentaar Luis J. Prieto esseele
"Semioloogia: probleemid ja rajad"

Järgnevad tähelepanekud on kommentaariks Luis J. Prieto tekstile "Semioloogia: probleemid ja rajad" (*"A semiology: Problems and routes"*), mis on artikli "*Une sémiologie: problems et parcours*" tõlge inglise keelde. Esmalt tutvustatakse märkmetes "Semioloogia" varasemaid ilmumisversioone, seejärel selgitatakse mõningaid probleeme, mis teksti inglise keelde tõlkimisel esile kerkisid. Pärast seda asetatakse sissejuhatuses algtekst ajaloolisse ja teoreetilisse konteksti, keskendudes Prieto lahkarvamustele Cesare Luporiniga, kes vaatles (teaduslikku) teadmist materialistlikust (marksistlik-leninlikust) vaatenurgast. Edasi liigutakse märkustes Prieto enese teooria juurde ning vaadeldakse teadmise, praktika ja subjektsuse omavahelisi suhteid, nagu neid käsitletakse "Semioloogias" ja sellega seotud tekstides, mida Prieto ligikaudu sel ajal kirjutas. Kommentaarid lõpevad kokkuvõtlike tähelepanekutega selle kohta, kuidas võiks Prieto teooriat edasi arendada ning mis on selle puudujäägid, eriti arvestades kaasaegset semiootikateooriat.