

## **Semiosis and ‘meaning as use’: The indispensability and insufficiency of subjectivity in the action of signs**

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**Abstract.** Thematic development of semiotics proves to be a transformative event for intellectual culture, manifesting itself to begin with in its reshaping of the usage of many philosophical terms in their reflection of mainstream modern philosophy as its influence has sedimented down the level of ordinary language, i.e., today’s common speech. Central among these terms are *subject* and *object* as modern usage has established their sense, a sense which proves incompatible with the understanding of things that is emerging from the cenoscopic analysis of the being and action of signs. In particular also the term ‘relation’, surely among the most widely used and least analysed terms of philosophy today, proves upon semiotic analysis to require a whole new understanding of the subjectivity/objectivity and object/thing distinctions as they have come to be more or less “settled” in modern usage. This essay explores the implications for such usage consequent upon the postmodern development of semiotics as the “doctrine” or “cenoscopic science” of signs.

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Modern philosophy began in the work of Descartes with a rejection of Latin Scholasticism, “lest in a too absorbed study of these works we should become infected with their errors” (Descartes 1628: 6). No one among the moderns followed Descartes’ advice more completely than did Ludwig Wittgenstein (26 April 1889–29 April 1951), as if to incarnate the difference between philosophy and scholarship.

His early work (1921, 1922) said one thing, his later work (c.1931–1950) quite another (“let the dictionary be our guide to reality”, according to Hallett 1967: 165; and cf. 158 re semiotics); and it was the later work that centrally inspired the “linguistic turn” of late modern philosophy, the work in which Wittgenstein famously postulated (PI, Par. 43) that “for a *large* class of cases – though not for all – ... the meaning of a word is its use in the language”.

Subsequent ‘analytic philosophy’ took up this theme with a vengeance, even to the point of forgetting the qualification “not for all”. Subsequent developments in semiotics, however (Todorov 1977; Deely 2006, 2012a), revealed that the doctrine of signs undermined the very foundations of linguistic philosophy as the Analytic tradition had come to conceive it. Analysis of semiosis shows decisively that “use in a language”, considered as a social system of habituated communication, is never the sufficient condition of meaning distinctive of anthroposemiosis, as it is perhaps in zoösemiosis (and hence within the zoösemiotic component of anthroposemiosis).

## 1. Rediscovering a sense for some basic terms

I have made the case many times<sup>1</sup> that the medieval discovery of the sign’s triadic character, which Peirce – the first of the postmoderns, by rejecting Descartes’ rejection of the past as philosophy’s laboratory – famously resumed from the late Latins (Beuchot, Deely 1995) in launching the contemporary development of semiotics (as we have seen it since the 1960s overtake and assimilate to itself the originally dominant approach to signs from Saussure to Barthes called ‘semiology’), requires a kind of reversal of the terms ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ as they have come to be established in common usage today through the influence of the mainstream modern philosophical development. For this mainstream modern development reduced ‘subjectivity’ to psychological subjectivity, and ‘objectivity’ to the supposed state of “things as they are” apart from any ‘subjective influence’ (the a priori forms of Kantian rationality would not count as ‘subjective’ in the private sense, since they impart to the sensory manifold whatever it comes to have of universal and necessary features).

For semiotics, however, an object is not necessarily opposed to a subject, for nothing prevents what exists subjectively from coming to exist *also* objectively; and to exist as an object is nothing else than – is synonymous with – existing as something *signified*, as something terminating a relation founded in (provenating from) some finite mind. To be signified and to be an object are exactly the same thing. But this is a feature of reality that remains quite concealed in the common use of the

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<sup>1</sup> For a full systematic treatment of the subject/object distinction now, see Deely 2009a, but also Deely 2009b, 2010a, 2011.

term 'object', which tends to equate (and hence to confuse) 'objects' with 'things' existing in the world,<sup>2</sup> whether the 'lifeworld' (as modern idealisms understand the term) or the physical world (as modern realisms understand the term).

### 1.1. The difference between objects and things

There is, however, this great difference between an object as such and a thing existing or able to exist apart from being known or desired: absent a relation to a finite knower, *there is no object* fully actual *as object* (in contrast to 'thing').<sup>3</sup> No such constraint attaches to the notion of thing: a thing is what it is, irrespective of any awareness of it. Not so an object. Even when an object happens also to exist subjectively, as a thing, even then, if awareness of it ceases, so does it cease to be an object; and when there is an awareness of it, the 'thing' then becomes an object just to the extent that the awareness reaches, no further. This is because what constitutes any and every object as an object actually is that it provides the terminus for a relation which has its foundation in some psychological quality or "state" (cognitive or cathectic: see Deely 2015) that belongs to the subjectivity of the knower.

But while the "founding quality" upon which the relation depends for its being exists as part of the knower's subjectivity – part, that is to say, of that entire complex of characters which separate the knower as an individual from and within the rest of the universe – that is never and cannot be true of the *relation itself*. For the relation itself exists precisely *suprasubjectively*, as *connecting* the knower with, not *separating* the knower from, what is *other than itself* in its "isolated" or subjective being. If the "other than the knower" which is known – the object – exists in the physical surroundings, then the relation of knowing terminates at an object which is *also* a thing, and can rightly be characterized as an *intersubjective* relation. This characterization, however, need not and is hardly ever (if ever) completely the case, for while an object

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Owens 1992: 75: "'Thing' is meant to indicate in the widest possible way what an object is".

<sup>3</sup> Let me try at this point to obviate a misunderstanding which a reader of this text might be inclined to fall into. When I say that there are no objects as such outside of apprehensive relations and that all objects as such are significates, I am far from saying that *only* objects are significates. There is no question of psychologism here, in the pernicious sense which seeks to restrict semiosis to human awareness, or even to the broader biological realm of awareness in animal life. Objects in the full sense make their entry with apprehension, to be sure, but significates are present and at play in nature long before fully actual objects in this strict and narrow sense that I am focusing upon here. Keep in mind that just as objects can also be things, so things can also be significates before the advent of *known* things ("objects" in the fullest sense). I am grateful to my colleague and friend Vincent Colapietro for calling the pitfall of psychologism to my attention in the text as originally read at a 2006 Bari conference.

of awareness (and affection) is *always* other than the subjective being of the knower, an object is *far from always* identical with something existing in the physical surroundings independently of the knowing.

### 1.2. The characteristic of objects to be communicable

Often the objects of which we are aware have no existence at all apart from the knowing itself, as when we say, falsely, that Hamlet can be well described as happy-go-lucky; and often, even when the object to which we turn our consideration had an existence apart from the knowing, it does so no longer, as when we say controversially that had Napoleon married the Polish Countess Marie Walewska instead of the Austrian Habsburg Archduchess Marie Louise there would have been no Waterloo. The characteristic of objects is not that they always exist in the physical environment but that they are always *as* objects public in principle, even when they exist for the awareness of but a single individual. Objects can be shared, as any two things can be related to a common third. Thus, when two people “understand one another”, the objective content of their understanding is a “common third”; and when one person seeks to acquaint another with some idea in mind, the deed is accomplished, if at all, not by some neural transplant of some feature of the subjective constitution of the first person into the other. (Such a transplant would leave the first quite blank on the matter at issue anyway!). The deed is accomplished, rather, by the object of the first’s consideration being brought into the cognizance of the consideration of the second. For this, linguistic usage is often useful and sometimes essential, but never constitutive.

To be communicated, as we well know, and as any teacher can well attest, the *object communicated* need by no means have a physical presence to the communicants even when and if it has a physical presence elsewhere, for it need not have or have ever had a physical presence at all in the subjective sense of being an individual physically existing in order to be communicated as an object.

## 2. The public character of objects in contrast with the subjectivity of things

So how is it that every object, “real” or “unreal”, exists in a public condition in principle (which is the real meaning of ‘objectivity’ in contrast to ‘subjectivity’)? For while what is subjectively existing may come *also* to exist objectively, this is not required (any more – *pace* Kant – than it is precluded) by subjectivity as such. The reason is that an object necessarily, while a subjectively existing thing only contingently, exists as the terminus of cognitive and cathectic relations. Since an object can also exist

as *more* than the terminus of an apprehensive relation, but *as such* cannot be *other* than such a terminus, we have the reason why an object is always public in principle, even though the ideas and feelings *on the basis of which* objects are presented apprehensively are themselves part and parcel of our subjectivity as knowers, as cognitive organisms and animals in the environment.

### 2.1. Signs, strictly and loosely in the common sense

Peirce and Poinot, in exactly the same way, distinguished<sup>4</sup> between signs in the strict sense, which are triadic relations, and signs in the common or loose sense, which are rather that one of the three elements united in the sign relation which occupies the foreground role of representing what is other than itself to the one for whom the sign is here and now functioning existentially. To the foreground element Peirce gave the technical name 'representamen',<sup>5</sup> but Poinot himself gave to it no special name, other than to make it unmistakably clear in the context of his usage that the sign in the loose or common sense is a *sign-vehicle* rather than a sign strictly, the *sign strictly* being, for Poinot as for Peirce (though even more clearly in Poinot's treatment), as for semiotics today generally, a triadic relation in its suprasubjective character *as a relation*.

### 2.2. Intersubjectivity as a special case of suprasubjectivity

Notice the difference between characterizing a relation as "intersubjective", on the one hand, and as "suprasubjective", on the other hand.<sup>6</sup> Every relation as such exists over and above subjectivity, as what connects or links the individual subject in (or 'on') which the relation is based to what is other than that individual in its private reality. Not every relation is apprehensive (cognitive or affective), but every relation which is *intersubjective* is so by linking two existing individuals or aspects thereof. The relation as a relation exists, in such circumstances, not *in* but *between* the two subjects. However, when only one of the two related has a physical existence here

<sup>4</sup> Poinot and Peirce on signs in the strict sense or formally as relations vs. signs in the common or loose sense as representamens or foreground elements (sign-vehicles) under a semiotic relation: Poinot 1632[1985]: Book I, Question 3, 154/20–39; Peirce 1904: CP 8.332. See further, under **SIGN** in the Index to Deely 2001: 993, the subentry "strict sense ...".

<sup>5</sup> See Benedict 1985. Detailed listing of Peirce's sign definitions and their relation to this notion of representamen is being developed from a presentation I gave at the 2014 July 16–19 "Charles S. Peirce International Centennial Congress Invigorating Philosophy for the 21st Century" at the Lowell, MA University of Massachusetts; but this is still a work-in-progress.

<sup>6</sup> See Deely 2014, and Chapter 8 in Deely 2010b: "Re-evaluating the relative"; also Deely et al. 2005: 223–242.

and now (always true for the knower as knowing, obviously, and the real point of the “*cogito ergo sum*” formula – though missed by the author of the formula!), if the relation is *not* apprehensive, then not only *cannot* it be intersubjectively, but it *can be only prospectively*. The only relations that can actually obtain between an existent subject and a nonexistent object are cognitive and cathectic (or affective) relations, as we have noted. But when a relation obtains between a knower and an object that is either physically absent here and now, or simply nonexistent anywhere in the physical environment, while the object cognized or cathected exists indeed as terminating suprasubjectively the apprehensive relation of the knower, that object has at the moment *no further being*, no subjectivity beyond its objectivity, no ‘subjective surplus’ to its being as object – at least, not any accessible to the one apprehending.

### 3. How a philosophical doctrine of relation unlocks the puzzle

The key to understanding this situation proper to objects lies in seeing precisely the connection with being a fundament or being a terminus, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the being of the relation itself which is thus founded and thus terminating.

Imagine first a triangle, A, let us call it, existing physically all alone. Now imagine that alongside it though some distance away another triangle B comes into physical existence. A and B at that moment become similar on the basis of their shape, whether or not anyone apprehends them.

Ockham and the mainstream moderns (Bertrand Russell, to his credit, was an exception in that lineage<sup>7</sup>) would say that this relation of similarity comes into existence only when some knower compares the two.<sup>8</sup> Relations, on this view, have *no* awareness-independent status: *all* relations, regardless of circumstances, are awareness-dependent.

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<sup>7</sup> However, in appreciating the uniqueness of relations as a mode of being, Russell, so to say, over-appreciated it, and sometimes treated relations as things in the fundamental sense of individuals, thus glossing over the dependency in being of relation on a subjective characteristic of an individual for fundament, even as that characteristic in turn depends on the individual to the subjectivity of which it contributes: cf. the “different but related senses” of the term ‘thing’ enumerated by Owens (1992: 74, 78) as (1) existing as an individual (strong sense), (2) existing in an individual (weak sense), vs. (3) existing as contextualizing an individual (weakest sense, what Aquinas termed [c.1245/6: *Super Sent.*, lib. 1 d. 26 q. 2 a. 2 ad 2; see Aquinas 1980] “*ens minimum*”).

<sup>8</sup> The first to demonstrate the unity of the mainstream moderns in reducing relations to awareness only was perhaps Weinberg 1965.

Aristotle, Aquinas, Poinot, and Peirce would say that the similarity is intersubjectively there in the environment, over and above the *things* which are similar, even though dependent upon those things in their subjective features as part of their distinct individuality, their subjectivity. Poinot in particular would further clarify that, while any given relation can be awareness-independent only when it obtains between two physically existent subjects, that same relation can continue to exist awareness-dependently when one or both of the existent subjects has ceased to exist! This indifference of the positive being of relation as suprasubjective in every case to being or not being intersubjective as well, thus, is precisely what makes the action of signs possible in the first place, because it is what makes relations singularly transcendent to the distinction between what exists independently of and what exists dependently upon the awareness of some finite mind.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, even when intersubjective, relations as such are even more basically supra-subjective, because intersubjectivity is, as it were, but a subdetermination or “modalization” of suprasubjectivity which occurs *sometimes*, while suprasubjectivity is *coterminus always* with relation, whether the relation be awareness-dependent or awareness-independent – that is, purely objective or not necessarily objective at all. Whence even a relation which was one time real as obtaining in the physical environment (like that between mother and son both alive, but which now continues only in memory, as the son was by an accident removed from the environment) was at first intersubjective only (at the earliest stage of pregnancy) then became objective as well (once the pregnancy became known, and after birth), but is now (upon the child's death) only objective. Yet in *all* these sets of circumstances the relation is supra-subjective, irreducible to the subjectivity of the mother grieving her son, her son still an object of awareness though no longer a subject of interaction.

On such a view as this last, substantial to semiotics, as it has turned out (signs having been found to consist strictly speaking in relations as such, albeit triadic in character and not merely dyadic as relations can obtain in awareness-independent being), a *relation* of similarity in the case of simultaneous existents (simultaneous *relata*, as we might say) related by similarity (or whatever characteristic!) is an *intersubjective* reality. The intersubjectivity in question obtains in the physical world as *able* to be apprehended but not necessarily *actually* apprehended (and never apprehended as such by perception, but only in the understanding,<sup>10</sup> which is the

<sup>9</sup> In order to treat of signs, thus, “*loquimur hic de relatione secundum esse* [relation as supra-subjective always], *non de relatione praedicamentale* [relation as intersubjective only], *quia loquimur de signo in communi, prout includit tam signum naturale quam ad placitum, in quo involvitur etiam signum, quod est aliquid rationis* [which has reality in awareness only]”. – Poinot 1632[1985]: 118/1–7.

<sup>10</sup> The argument adumbrated in Deely 1982: 117, is spelled out in Deely 2000 and 2010a; but most specifically in Deely's “Uninstantiability” (forthcoming).

fundamental reason why, as together with Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio I have explored at length, human beings alone among the lifeforms are *semiotic* animals<sup>11</sup>). When the similarity *is* apprehended, the relation exists *objectively as well* as in the physical order; but in the given case, even when it is not apprehended, the relation exists as part of the physical reality of the universe – as Emily, the daughter from the famous affair between the Finnish theologian and the New York lawyer’s wife (of which affair both Emily and the lawyer were ignorant, even as the Finnish theologian was ignorant of the existence of Emily, product of a drunken one-night stand of whose female participant the theologian never even learned the name), is *objectively* the daughter of the New York lawyer but *physically and “really”* (i.e., in the order of what is the case independently of awareness) the offspring of the Finnish theologian.

### 3.1. The heart of the matter

But here is the key point. The shape of A before B began was intrinsic to A as a subjective characteristic, and remained subjectively the same when B came into existence; yet when B came into existence the shape of A, unchanged as subjective, *also* became the fundament of a relation of similarity to B: being a shape depends only

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<sup>11</sup> That life depends upon semiosis is a generally accepted thesis in semiotics today. The animal *umwelt* in particular is product of the semiosis whereby, depending upon the animal’s bodily type, the physical environment becomes partially objectified in awareness and then organized on the basis of the animal’s perception into the desirable (+), undesirable (–), and irrelevant (0). This partial reorganization within animal awareness of aspects of the physical environment to make for the animal a “meaningful world” of objects is the process on the side of *Innenwelt* called by Poinot ‘*phantasiari*’, in contrast with the process of ‘*sentire*’ or basic animal awareness of the surroundings that arises directly from the interaction of the animal’s body with the surrounding bodies of the physical environment. Thus *sentire* provides the animal with the awareness of what it needs to organize according to fulfillment of its specific needs for survival, while *phantasiari* provides the interpretation of that basic awareness which organizes the *umwelt*. In the case of human animals a further cognitive level intervenes, ‘*intelligere*’, wherein relations in their difference from related objects and things can be directly objectified; and it is this ability to consider objects that cannot be directly instantiated within the *umwelt*, the world of objects directly perceptible to sense, that Sebeok (1986) came to characterize in a 1984 lecture as “language in the root sense”, language as constitutive of the primary modelling system giving rise to linguistic communication as the secondary modelling system enabling the development of culture as the tertiary – not secondary – modelling system. For an overview of Sebeok’s argument on this point see Deely 2012b. The upshot is that while all animals are *semiotic* as dependent upon the action of signs, only human animals are *semiotic* as able to become aware of that action in its formal constitution through relations irreducibly triadic, yet alike with even dyadic relations in being uninstantiable to *sentire* and *phantasiari* in their contrast with *intelligere*. Among the alloanimals, thus, human animals differ in kind.



upon subjectivity, but being a fundament presupposes a relation. And when B came into being, its subjective shape *also* became the *terminus* of a relation based on the shape of A as founding (as fundament for) the relation of similarity, which *relation itself* is to be found *neither* in A *nor* in B, but *between* A and B, i.e., *over and above, suprasubjective respecting*, both A and B; and conversely, when B came to be, *its* subjective shape *also* founded a relation of similarity terminating at the shape of A. *Notice therefore*: the being of a *fundament as such* and the being of a *terminus as such*, even though they both consist in the case before us in a subjective aspect of A and of B, owe their being *as* fundament and *as* terminus *not* to the subjectivity of A and B *but to the suprasubjectivity*, the actuality as such (also intersubjective in this case), of the *relation itself*.

### 3.2. Consequences for the doctrine of signs

The consequence for semiotics of the fundament and terminus both as such deriving something of their formal status from the relation itself, and only indirectly from any subjective dimension of being fundament or terminus may have in their own right, is profound. Medieval semiotics – the original florescence of semiotic consciousness, launched by Augustine's novel proposal of sign in general and culminating in Peirce's demonstration that the formal being of every sign is an irreducibly triadic relation as suprasubjective – made its first advance by recognizing that not the subjectivity of a material structure made it be a sign (or 'representamen'), but only the relation that material being exhibited to something other than itself in someone's awareness. Whence it could be seen that psychological realities, ideas and feelings, similarly performed the essential sign-function of making present in awareness something that, as other-representations, they themselves were not, namely, their objects.

In recognizing that ideas and feelings – psychological states, cognitive (ideas) and cathectic (feelings) – could not exist save by giving rise to relations to objects, the moderns after Brentano saw in this the characteristic they called 'intentionality', a characteristic which Brentano's student, Edmund Husserl, made the basis for a new variant of mainstream modern philosophy, namely, phenomenology.<sup>12</sup> This development was idealistic as Husserl himself came to conceive it,<sup>13</sup> but in itself the recognition of the intentionality (the "of" or "aboutness" of psychological states) is a realization both neutral and incompetent respecting the resolution of the root of the modern controversy between idealism and realism in philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Brentano 1874; Husserl 1900–1901; Deely 1978.

<sup>13</sup> See esp. Husserl 1931; Spiegelberg 1965; Deely 1978, 2001: 581.

<sup>14</sup> See Deely 2007.

But the Latins in the line from Aquinas to Poinsoot after Augustine had something the moderns characteristically lacked (by reason of the moderns' following rather, in this particular, the views of William of Ockham, as Weinberg demonstrated), namely, an understanding of the uniqueness of relation among the Aristotelian categories of mind-independent being stemming from the irreducibly suprasubjective character of relation. So the Latins were able to discern in the phenomenon of intentionality something much more profound, to wit, the identity of the objective as such with the terminus of a relation as such, and hence the public character of every object in principle whether that object *also* existed *or not* in the physical surroundings. Hence Poinsoot in particular, addressing thematically the issue of *sign*-relations, found himself in a position to see as true for all relations, but decisive particularly for relations of semiosis, the fact that *suprasubjectivity* in every case, but *intersubjectivity* only in some cases, distinguishes the being of relations;<sup>15</sup> and that objectivity as such – existing as signified, let us say: existing in the being of a significate as such, that linguistic label which the modern dictionary makers reveal their modern philosophical heritage by resisting – depends in every case upon the unique being of relation among the other Aristotelian categories of the ways in which being can exist independently of human opinion, belief, and desire, each of which categories, with the sole exception of relation itself,<sup>16</sup> either *consists in* subjectivity (the case of substance, quantity, quality, action, and passion) or *presupposes* relation (the case of where, when, posture, and vestition or '*habitus*').<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Objects are significates

The word 'significate' may be resisted by makers of modern English dictionaries, but it is inevitable once the doctrine of signs reaches a more public maturity. For significate is the *proper name* for what heretofore confusedly has been generally called 'object'. Psychological states differ from physiological and inorganic physical states in that the latter two only contingently, but the former necessarily, give rise to relations as suprasubjective structures of being. While a quantity or physical quality can give rise to a relation under one set of circumstances and lose that relation under another set, a psychological state *cannot be* without giving rise to a relation. Thus a psychological state – cognitive or cathectic – never occurs merely subjectively, but always also fundamentally (as a foundation or fundament) respecting an actual relation. And just as this relation itself is what imparts to the subjective idea or feeling its

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Poinsoot's *Tractatus de Signis* 1632[1985]: Book I, Question 1, esp. 118/1–18, in light of the Second Preamble, Article 1, 93/17–96/36.

<sup>16</sup> See the diagram of the full Aristotelian scheme of categories in Deely 2001: 77.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed analysis of Aristotle's categories in terms of this point, the singularity of relation, can be found in Deely 2001: 72–78; Deely 2010a.

character as fundament, so necessarily does this same relation impart the status of *terminus* to something objectively other than the subjectivity of the knower, whether that objectivity has *also* a subjectivity of its own *or not* (i.e., whether the relation is intersubjective as well as suprasubjective or only suprasubjective). This last is the case of *pure objectivity*, of a significate which has no being outside the sign relation for which it provides the objective term, contrasting with its representamen and its interpretant alike (as the other two terms essential) in formation of the semiotic triad in which signification as a full actuality always consists in unifying via relation.

#### 4.1. Passions of the soul as grounds of objectivity

Just as it is not the eyes that see but the animal who sees by means of the eyes, so it is not a mental representation which perceives or understands but the animal who perceives or (if it be a semiotic animal) understands. Now what are these mental representations by means of which the animal apprehends objects? In contrast to the objects which, *as* objects, are *self*-representations, the subjective but psychological states are *other*-representations. They are, according to late Latin tradition, *formal signs*, but this designation remained ambiguous as between Ockham, say, and Poincot, and has not fared well since – largely because representations as “formal signs” belong to that large class of *signs loosely so called* or “representamens”, rather than to the class of signs strictly speaking, that is to say, triadic relations enabling all apprehension of objects, whether partly “real” or purely objective.

In this case older turns out to be better, and although the introduction of the distinction between instrumental and formal signs (around the 14th or 15th centuries), as between sign vehicles which are material substances and sign vehicles which are rather psychological states, did serve to advance the development of the original semiotic consciousness, the original designation of these representative states subjective to the knower as *passiones animae*, “passions of the soul”, may serve us better than the later *signa formalia* designation. Indeed, this earlier designation goes back among the Latins to at least AD 511-13 (Boethius), and, unlike the notion *signum* or “sign in general”, which effectively originated with Augustine AD 397,<sup>18</sup> truly traces back to Aristotle (c. 330 BC), and the later substitution or imposition upon this notion of the designation “*signa formalia*” was in essence but the attempt to bring this notion of the “passions of the soul” under the umbrella of the doctrine of signs.

Modern philosophy cut all this off. Not only, beginning especially (but not exclusively) with Descartes did modern philosophy turn from the Way of Signs to the

<sup>18</sup> A surprising fact, and one of the most interesting though but recently recognized facts of philosophy's ancient and medieval history. For the Greek period of philosophy before Augustine, see esp. Manetti 1987, 1993, 2013; Eco et al. 1984 and 1986. On the development after Augustine up to the 17th century, see Deely 2009c.

Way of Ideas, but it did so *without the principal modern founders even realizing that the Way of Signs had been opened up*. Such ignorance was not the case with the notion or doctrine of the passions of the soul. Yet this notion as intrinsically oriented to the Way of Signs, this notion as it had come to be interpreted among the late Latins, was simply “passed over without comment” by Descartes, through his ignorance of its implications as developed in the 15th–16th century discussion of *signa formalia*. Familiar at least with the earlier medieval notion of *passiones animarum*, as also, presumably, of its Aristotelian origins, Descartes said in Article 1 of *The Passions of the Soul*:

...what the Ancients have taught concerning the passions of the soul, is so little, and for the most part so little credible that I cannot hope to draw nigh truth, but by keeping aloof off from those roads which they followed. Wherefore I shall here be forced to write in such a sort, as if I treated of a matter never before handled.<sup>19</sup>

And he proceeded to handle the passions of the soul in his thoroughly subjectivistic way whereby the mind was cut off within itself from its surrounding environment, as has been effectively summarized in the metaphor of the “*problema pontis*”, or “problem of finding a bridge” between the external world of things and the internal world of mental representations, “ideas” construed as self-representations.

#### 4.2. Passions of the soul as inseparable from relations

Now in this regard the ancient discussion of relative being turns out to be crucial. Everyone agreed that there are in the world individuals, subjects of existence, and that these individuals perforce have distinguishing characteristics or “accidents”, as Aristotle termed them. But Aristotle, Aquinas, and Poinset, in an unbroken tradition picked up again by Charles Sanders Peirce, considered that subjects of existence with their subjective characteristics were not the whole of reality, *ens reale* (awareness-independent being, the being of the physical universe as such): for in that very awareness-independent order there also obtained, as we saw above – resultant from but not reducible to the subjectivities interacting – *relations* as such not subjective (though dependent upon the subjective) but *intersubjective*. Aquinas suggested this

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<sup>19</sup> Descartes’ *Les passions de l’ame* was first published in French simultaneously by Henry Le Gras in Paris and Louys Elzevier in Amsterdam in 1649; an anonymous English translation appeared in London in 1650 (printed for A.C. and sold by J. Martin and J. Ridley) as *The Passions of the Soul*. The quotation from the latter was retrieved from [http://beta.cgu.edu/philosophy/descartes/Passions\\_Letters.html](http://beta.cgu.edu/philosophy/descartes/Passions_Letters.html). There is also a contemporary English translation by Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989).

point, for example, in his *Summa theologiae* (1266[1980]: 1.28c), but Poinsoot first thematically seized upon the point that *intersubjectivity* was not the whole story of purely relative being, but only the beginning of the story in *ens reale*. For once animals had entered upon the scene of the physical environment, with them came relations that were *awareness-dependent* alongside the awareness-independent relations belonging to the “category” of relation in Aristotle’s sense of category: a classification of a way that being can exist independently of thought, action, or belief.

### 4.3. Objects for animals

Animals, in order to orientate themselves in their environment, have to add to the physically related things of the environment relations which specifically *further* relate those things to themselves as objects, for example, in order to track prey, avoid becoming prey, or even simply to “find their way home”. Animals do not simply live in a physical environment, they live in an *objective world* of interpreted things – an *umwelt*, as Jakob von Uexküll called it for animals in general; a ‘lifeworld’, as Husserl would come to say for the case of humans. Thus Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944) was the first thinker thematically to analyse this situation of the difference between the physical environment in itself and that part of the same environment as “lived in” and assign a name to the latter. And ‘umwelt’ was the name he gave to that objective world of the animal as it includes something of, yet differs from, the mere physical surroundings.

In Poinsoot’s tradition, the only thinker to pick up on this fundamental concept, traces of which influenced Heidegger as well, was Josef Pieper (1952; see Deely 2004). But the semiotic roots, so to speak, of the “objective world”, the *umwelt*, are first traced in the remarkable “First Preamble. Article 3” of John Poinsoot’s *Tractatus de Signis* of 1632 (esp. 66/47–68/34; see Poinsoot 1985), where he demonstrates that purely objective relations, known in his time as *entia rationis*, despite their misleading name as “belonging to reason”, are formed unwittingly but essentially and necessarily by ‘alloanimals’<sup>20</sup> (‘brute animals’, in medieval designation for animals able to perceive but not to grasp relations in their difference from related things, and hence not able to use linguistic communication as such in the species-specifically human sense) no less than by so-called ‘rational animals’, or what we have come to call ‘semiotic animals’, namely, ourselves.

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Alloanimals’ is a term called to my attention by Myrdene Anderson as used in the work of Count 1973 (and others) to mean all the animals besides the human animals. This of course is exactly the sense of the Latin ‘brute animals’ (*animalia bruta*), but jettisons the unhelpful pejorative connotations that attach to the adjective ‘brute’ in modern linguistic usage.

This demonstration proves a fundamental breakthrough for our understanding of signs, and for our understanding of the extent of semiosis.<sup>21</sup> It provides nothing less than the first theoretical outlining of what we have come today to call, adopting the apt designation provided by the tireless work in this area of our late friend Thomas Sebeok, “zoösemiotics” (e.g. Sebeok 1963). For objects exist fully and formally as such only as terminating suprasubjective relations of apprehension, as we have seen; whence the presence of such relations in the life of all animals already guarantees Todorov’s point that “[as] long as one questions oneself only on verbal language, one remains within a science (or a philosophy) of language” (Todorov 1977: 40); but once one begins to entertain the notion of semiotics as the doctrine of signs, among the first questions to be faced is “the place of linguistic signs among signs in general” (Todorov 1977: 40). For once words have been conceived at the level of signs “they occupy only one place among others”, whence the independent status of “linguistic analysis”, be it scientifically or philosophically conceived, is irremediably compromised. No longer is language the safe haven philosophers have sought since the 1970s in making what they have called ‘the linguistic turn’ (see Rorty 1972), for we see that semiotics has done to late modern philosophy’s Citadel of Language what the storm Katrina did to New Orleans in the summer of 2005.

#### 4.4. Why objects need not be real to be known

Now awareness-dependent (or purely objective) relations are no more subjective than are awareness-independent or so-called (by contrast) “real” (“mind-independent”) relations. Moreover, the entire being of *all* relations, of *any* relation, is to relate an existing subject to something other than itself, something which it itself is not: some other *thing*, in the case of categorial or real relations in the order of physical being; some other *object* in the case of apprehensive relations, and – here again is the key, of which Poincaré was the first thematically to take notice – *nothing in the suprasubjective being of relation itself determines whether it will be intersubjective or not*,

<sup>21</sup> Here I am concerned only with the first step in which semiotics went beyond the semiology from Saussure to Barthes: the demonstration of a semiosis beyond linguistically based anthroposemiosis in the broader biological world of animals other than human. The further steps semiotics made, rapidly after 1963, in demonstrating also a semiosis among plants (phytosemiosis), leading to the umbrella conception of *biosemiosis* extending to plants and animals along with humans, and then (I first introduced the concept and term ‘physiosesemiosis’ in my talk “The Grand Vision”, presented at the Charles Sanders Peirce Sesquicentennial International Congress held at Harvard University 5–10 September 1989; see Deely 1994: 183–200 for the published version) to the controversial argument that even in organic nature prior to and independent of life the action of signs was at work, I am far from denying but simply not treating directly in the present essay.

*but only the circumstances* under which the relation is formed here and now. Thus, I can say "It is raining now", and my hearers (if they be English speakers) will have brought before their minds exactly the same objective reality when it is actually raining and when it is not actually raining. In the former case, the relation will be real as well as objective, like the relation between Emily and the Finnish theologian from our point of view (in contrast with the point of view of the New York lawyer, and in contrast with the point of view of the Finnish theologian himself – as we alone know the full story!); while in the latter case, the relation will be no less objective yet it will not be real. The relation is unchanged. The terminus of the relation, the *objective* reality, is unchanged. Only the subjective surrounding circumstances are changed, and yet these are enough to make the relation in one case "real" (awareness-independent), in the other case "unreal" (purely objective), and the terminus of the relation in one case more than a terminus merely (a subjective dimension having been added to its objectivity), while in the other case merely a terminus (which is all that objectivity as such, and in order to be public in principle, requires).

#### 4.5. How ideas and feelings differ from objects

Ideas and feelings are not awareness-dependent beings in the Aristotelian categorial sense, even though they require minds in order to be, for it is not the awareness of them that makes them be, but rather *their* being that shapes and forms awareness. As such, they are qualities in the Aristotelian categorial scheme, and so subjective. But what distinguishes them as subjective is that they are never merely and wholly that, but also always *fundaments* supporting relations, even when the circumstances required for these relations to be intersubjective are not fulfilled. Whence, since, as we have seen, it is *the actuality of the relation* itself which makes a given subjective quality to be a fundament and *that* maintains a terminus opposed to (correlative with but "other than") the fundament, the *objects* of such relations constitute a suprasubjective world not only to the extent that their termini incorporate something of the physical surroundings (which they always do insofar as sensation prescissively considered is involved) but equally to the extent that their objective content is not verified or perhaps even verifiable as such in the physical universe as "real", i.e., subjectively existing, whether prior or subsequent to and independent of awareness.

Again, this fundamental insight found nascent expression in the Latin line which culminated in Poinso's *Tractatus de Signis* as the first systematic demonstration of the being of all signs as unified in the reality of irreducibly triadic relations. Poinso (1632[1985]: Book II, Question 5, 270/37–271/9) brings to our attention this distinction between objects and things semiotically understood when he incorporates Cajetan's insight (1507) into the doctrine of signs itself:

... the conclusion hangs from that distinguished doctrine in Cajetan's *Commentary on the Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, art. 3, that the differences of things *as things* are quite other than the differences of things *as objects* and in the being of an object; and things that differ in kind or more than in kind in the one line, can differ in the other line not at all or not in the same way. And so, seeing that the rationale of a sign pertains to the rationale of the knowable [the line of thing as object], because it substitutes for the object, it will well be the case that in the rationale of object an awareness-independent natural sign and a stipulated awareness-dependent sign are univocal signs [are signs in a shared sense]; just as an awareness-independent being and an awareness-dependent being assume one rationale in their being as object, since indeed they terminate the same [cognitive] power ... and can be attained by the same habit .... Therefore in the being of an object specifying, stipulated and natural signs coincide univocally.

We see then that the “passions of the soul”, what we would call today “psychological states”, have a decisive role in semiosis. They are within us the subjective ground of our objective world, even as our physical surroundings are the subjective ground of intersubjective relations some of which are objectively incorporated into our objective world as sign relations, the sign relations upon which science and philosophy depend in their difference from fiction. Yet fiction, too, depends upon these sign relations in order to achieve its credibility, as Umberto Eco (1976: 7) summarized in his famous maxim: semiotics studies “everything which can be used in order to lie”.

But these “passions of the soul”, subjectively present as part of that which separates and constitutes us each as distinct individuals, unlike the shape of our nose or the colour of our skin, do not provenate<sup>22</sup> or give rise to relations only contingently

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<sup>22</sup> This term from the Latin Age has not yet made its way into English dictionaries. The English verb-form ‘provenate’ is a neologism introduced into semiotics from the 1632[1985] Latin *Treatise on Signs* of John Poinset. This verb as an English form derives from the Latin infinitive ‘*provenire*’, to come or issue forth, appear, arise, be produced; its closest relative in modern English is the noun-form ‘provenance’ (“where something originated or was nurtured in its early existence”). Hence, a relation *provenates* from its fundament only *contingently* in *ens reale* (i.e., in the order of being as existing independently of awareness) restrictively conceived, but *necessarily* when the fundament is a psychological state (cognitive or cathectic) of an animal. Thus, as psychological states cannot be without being ‘of’ or ‘about’ something other than themselves, so as qualities they belong to subjectivity indeed, but specifically as that subjectivity is entangled inescapably with suprasubjectivity; *and the relations consequent upon such qualities do not depend upon a subjectively existing terminus in order to arise as relations*. In this case, the relation *provenates* – i.e., issues forth from or ‘on the foundation of’ the psychological quality – *necessarily*, regardless of any subjectivity on the side of its terminus. For just as terminus as terminus and fundament as fundament equally depend upon the suprasubjective being of relation *alike* when the terminus *also* has a subjective dimension *and* when it does *not* have such a dimension, so when a quality which (besides being subjectively



or dyadically, but necessarily and triadically. Whence these relations also unite or connect us to one another, and in general to everything that we are not in apprehension — not only to other persons and physical realities, but to purely objective and “ideal” realities as well, some of which, no doubt, in the course of time, will become “real” in their own turn, while others will never and some could never exist beyond objectivity.

## 5. In conclusion

Things exist in themselves. But objects, even when they are also things, and whether or not they are also things, only exist as signifieds, the significates of semiosis. The term ‘object’ has been around for centuries. Indeed, in the Latin Age, though the thing/object distinction was never fully thematized, it was well on its way to a full thematization, as we find most notably in the opening pages of Poinso’s 1632 *Treatise on Signs*<sup>23</sup> where he distinguishes objects as self-representations from

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inherent) is a fundament *necessarily* and not just contingently gives rise to an actual relation, that relation *in turn*, while making the fundament a fundament (as formally distinct even though materially identical with the subjective state as inherent accident founding the relation), cannot be except as *also* making a terminus, even though that terminus is only contingently and not necessarily or even not at all *further* given subjectively as an instantiation in its own right of the subjective dimension of *ens reale*. Relations which arise contingently, the only kind considered in Aristotle’s circumscription of relation as an irreducible categorial mode of *τὸ ὄν*, in other words, do *necessarily* have a terminus which is *also* a subjective accident; *but the necessity in the case directly bears only on the question of the relation’s intersubjectivity*, not on its presupposed and more basic *suprasubjectivity*, without which latter “feature” it could not be a relation at all, but with which it may, or may not, depending solely upon circumstances, be intersubjective *as well* as suprasubjective. This is the “singularity” of relation which makes semiosis, the action of signs, possible in the first place, because it is the ground of the prior possibility of the modality of being which has semiosis as its consequent, and which also provides (in anthroposemiosis) the ground of the prior possibility of that conformity between ‘thought’ and ‘thing’ in which truth consists (not to mention the alternative generic possibility of deception and specifically anthroposemiosis possibility of a lie). Thus the term ‘provenate’ has been introduced as an English verb precisely in order to clarify the theoretical ground upon which signs depend as a distinct subject of inquiry among the phenomena of nature and culture. Cf. Deely 2010b: xiii–xiv.

<sup>23</sup> Poinso 1632[1985]: Book I, Question 1, 116/14–117/19: “*In nostra ergo definitione ad rationem signi in communi duo concurrunt: Primum est ratio manifestativi seu repraesentativi. Secundum ordo ad alterum, scilicet ad rem, quae repraesentatur, quae debet esse diversa a signo, nihil enim est signum sui nec significat se, et ad potentiam, cui manifestat et repraesentat rem a se distinctam.*”

*Et quidem manifestativum ut sic constat non dicere relationem, tum quia potest salvari in ordine ad se et sine respectu ad alterum, ut ... quando obiectum repraesentat se, ut videatur, etc.*

signs as other-representations, and both from things as existing independently of awareness.

But the modern national languages, as far as concerns philosophy, developed their “common usage” not along the Latin line but rather along the line entailed by Descartes’ “turn to the subject”, collapsing objects into ideas as subjective psychological states, and combining this move<sup>24</sup> with Ockham’s view that relations have no formal reality save within awareness, completing the break of modern thinkers with Latin Scholasticism precipitated most notably by the condemnation of Galileo.

Thus, while the object/thing distinction developed in the protosemiotic period between Augustine (†430AD) and Poincaré (†1914) in the line of explaining how things in themselves are knowable though far from the whole of objectivity, modern thought up to Charles Peirce (†1914) placed the two terms in an opposition defined as the two opposing sides of the “*problema pontis*” with no way across.

Semiotics after Peirce turns out to have moved swiftly in the direction of restoring the earlier development, most notably in compelling a realization that the modern usage of the term ‘object’ has from the first obscured the essential dependency of objectivity upon semiosis. Once we have come to realize, however, that to say ‘object’ is to say obscurely what ‘object signified’ says plainly, and further that the ‘signified’ in the expression ‘object signified’ is actually redundant (since there is no *other* kind of object, at least not fully actualized as object, not “as such”), we see that even the term ‘object’ itself, though unlikely to go away or soon find itself in desuetude, is yet somewhat otiose.

For ‘object’ mainly says obscurely (and in ways that, over the modern centuries at least, have all but universally led to confusions all around concerning questions of noetic) what the term ‘significate’ – a term deemed “obsolete and rare” by the OED, beginning, indeed, around the time that modernity in philosophy turned its back on the Way of Signs to explore instead that cul-de-sac termed by Leibniz “the Way of Ideas”, the modern way in philosophy – says clearly and with far less likelihood of confusion. At least, this is how it seems to me now that semiotics as the doctrine of signs is coming into its own.

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*At vero manifestativum signi invenitur et cum ordine ad alterum, quia nihil seipsum significat, licet se repraesentare possit, et cum dependentia, quia signum semper est minus significato et ab ipso ut a mensura dependens.*”

This systematic contrast between *representation generically* and *signification as species thereof* (between the manifestative and the significative aspects of a sign) runs throughout Poincaré’s *Treatise*, and is perhaps most fully explained at 122/17–123/25 and 132/16–46.

<sup>24</sup> A move in which, in both respects, John Locke differed not a whit from Descartes, the two together laying the groundwork for Kant’s “critical synthesis” of modern philosophy as having rendered the world of things-in-themselves unknowable: see the summation in Deely 2013.

It is an example of Hoffmeyer's (2008: 939) "*vis a prospecto*", semiosis as an "influence of the future" — in this case an "influence of the future" bound to effect a change of usage, if Ramírez' projection of 2010 proves true:

Most readers of Deely's *Four Ages* volume encounter difficulty with his use of the terms "subject" and "object", which are the key to the book. ... The shifts in signification Deely's work effects [...] awaken us to the fact that [...] every object – given Poinot's demonstrations regarding the data of external sense, where human awareness (like that of any animal) begins – is something signified [...] that is to say, something depending for its existence, not as a thing (when it is also a thing, indeed), but as an object specifically and precisely upon the action of signs. [...] [I] suggest that Deely's new technical usage may actually become a postmodern common usage. (Ramirez 2010: 47, 79)

For when the universities finally succeed to figure out the place semiotics by right occupies within intellectual culture – to wit, as the only *inherently* transdisciplinary perspective<sup>25</sup> – this "change in common usage" projected by Ramirez seems to me inevitable. Objectivity is simply reality – synechistically conceived in Peirce's sense,<sup>26</sup> i.e., the whole of reality, not just the physical dimension or parts – *in relation* to finite mind.

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<sup>25</sup> See Deely 2012c, 2010c.

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### **Семиозис и «значение как употребление»: необходимость и недостаточность субъективности при знаковом воздействии**

Тематическое развитие семиотики оказывается трансформативным событием для интеллектуальной культуры, проявляясь в переосмыслении употребления многих философских терминов, опустившихся до уровня «обыденного языка». Среди таких терминов центральными являются «субъект» и «объект». Их употребление несовместимо с пониманием, которое выросло из ценоскопического анализа существования и функционирования знаков. Оказывается, что термин «соотношение», который несомненно относится к одним из самых распространенных и менее всего проанализированных терминов в современной философии, при его семиотическом анализе нуждается в новом понимании различения субъективности/объективности и объекта и вещи. В настоящей статье изучаются импликации подобного различения, которое основано на постмодернистском развитии семиотики как «учения о знаках» или «ценоскопической науки о знаках».

### **Semioos ja “täendus kui kasutus”: subjektiivsuse möödapääsmatus ja ebapiisavus märkide toimimises**

Semiootika temaatiline areng osutub intellektuaalse kultuuri jaoks transformatiivseks sündmuseks, mis ilmneb paljude filosoofiliste terminite kasutusviisi ümber kujundamisel, võtte arvesse seda, kuidas need peegeldavad moodsa filosoofia peavoolu, kui selle mõju on settinud “tavakeele” tasemele. Nende terminite seas on kesksed ‘subjekt’ ja ‘objekt’ nii, nagu moodsas kasutuses on kehtestunud nende tähendus, mis osutub kokkusobimatuks arusaamaga asjadest, mis võrsub märkide olemise ja toimimise tsüklilisest analüüsist. Ilmneb, et eriti termin ‘suhe’, mis kahtlemata kuulub tänapäeva filosoofias kõige laiemalt kasutatavate ja kõige vähem analüüsitud terminite hulka, osutub semiootilise analüüsi puhul vajavat tervet uut arusaama subjektiivsuse/objektiivsuse ja objekti/asja eristusest. Käesolev esse uurib sellise kasutuse implikatsioone, mis tulenevad semiootika kui ‘märgiõpetuse’ või ‘tsüklilisest märgiteaduse’ postmodernsest arengust.