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Objective reality and the physical world: relation as key to understanding semiosis

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Understanding relation in the reality of its suprasubjective character independently of awareness is the *conditio sine qua non* for achieving an understanding of semiosis. The present article takes us from Augustine's original fourth-century proposal of *signum* as a general notion transcending the boundaries of nature and culture, through the thirteenth-century realization in Roger Bacon's generation that concepts (both perceptual and intellectual) are signs formally, to John Poinot's demonstration of the irreducibly triadic character of sign relations. The suprasubjective relational essence of sign as based on the singularity of relation as being indifferent to realization in awareness is precisely what explains how one and the same sign-relation can pass from awareness-independent to awareness-dependent being, and conversely, due solely to the circumstances of its terminus. This understanding of semiosis is opposed to the Ockhamist denial of relation taken up by the mainstream moderns, as also to the misleading modern synonymy of 'object' and 'thing'. Charles Peirce's introduction of the notion of interpretant as not necessarily mental further opens the way to understanding how semiosis extends to the whole of nature. Contrary to the Saussurean notion that anthroposemiosis is the whole story of sign action, realizing that the Interpretant as third term in semiosis need not be a cognitive term opens the way to understanding how semiosis occurs in both plants ('phytosemiosis') and physical nature ('physiosemiosis'), as well as among all animals (generically 'zoösemiosis') and human animals (species-specifically 'anthroposemiosis'). Nevertheless, we will see that only in anthroposemiosis is there an awareness of relations in their difference from *relata*, underpinning Thomas Sebeok's crucial distinction between 'language' and 'linguistic communication', and Jacques Maritain's observation that while all animals use signs only human animals can come to know that there are signs by virtue of the capacity to objectify relations in their uninstantiability to sense.

Keywords: Augustine; Peirce; Poinot; relation; representamen; semiosis; sign; suprasubjectivity

What I want to talk to you about primarily, almost exclusively, is *relation*. While signs are not the only kind of relation, every sign is a relation.

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[†]This text is an extract from a much longer presentation given by Deely at the first North American conference on Biosemiotics and Culture held 3–4 May 2013 at the University of Oregon, Eugene. Online video publication can be found at media.uoregon.edu/channel/2013.05/07. The draft of the extract was achieved by Mr Stephen Sparks, my graduate assistant at the University of St. Thomas. The complete text of the full presentation, with an introduction by Prof. Donald Favareau of the University of Singapore, and followed by a question-and-answer open discussion period, can be found in *Semiotics 2013: Yearbook of the Semiotic Society of America* (2014).

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As Umberto Eco has argued, there was no general notion of sign in Greek philosophy.¹ The first general notion of sign comes from the work of Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) with his assertion (AD 397) that ‘a sign is anything that, over and above the impressions that it makes on the senses, brings something other than itself into awareness’.

Augustine’s general definition of sign transcended the boundary between nature (where alone the ancient Greeks considered signs at work) and culture (regarded by the Greeks as a realm of *symbols*² in contrast with the *signs* of nature). Augustine’s definition seemed self-evident to his readers, and it came to be universally adopted among the Latins, even becoming, in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the point of departure for a ‘theology of the sacraments’ within the Church. That there was no such notion in Greek philosophy did not occur to Augustine; nor did it occur to his Latin readership. Anything which makes an impression on the senses in such a way as to *further* bring into awareness another than itself: does it matter whether the thing making the sense-impression is a being of nature or an artifact of culture? ‘Obviously’ not. In *either* case, and *equally*, the ‘thing in question’ functions as a sign; and for that reason it transcends the nature/culture divide.

Yet if you go back into the writings of the ancients, no such generalized notion is to be found. In the English *translations* of Greek writings, we find the word ‘sign’ used where its actual restrictive usage in Greek to natural phenomena effectively disappears. If you approach the ancient philosophers mainly or exclusively via translations, you will come away thinking their usage of ‘sign’ was just as ‘general’ as was Augustine’s original Latin coinage, which it was not. For the authors of ancient Greek texts in philosophy, there were only what we would call (after Augustine) ‘natural signs’: cloud formations presaging rain, milk in a woman’s breasts telling of childbirth – natural signs. Symptoms in particular as ‘natural signs’ provided the beginnings of a ‘doctrine of signs’ in Greek medicine.³ There was also the matter of ‘divinations’, but these were ‘signs’ from the gods, not as cultural phenomena.

Augustine, then, proposes the first formal definition of sign in terms that transcend the line between nature and culture, and centuries later, in the lifetime of Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon (c.1214–1294) and others⁴ begin to say to themselves something like ‘Hold on a minute! If I think of a camel, the *idea* of a camel may be in my head, but the *camel* isn’t. So aren’t *ideas* functioning as signs just as much as material objects function as signs? Isn’t making something other than itself more essential to the being of a sign than is the making of an impression on the senses? – in which case not only material objects are signs, but also the “inner” states of our psyche?’.

Now Aquinas, in his *Commentary on the Sentences* c.1254/1256, says that angels make no use of signs because *they can’t*: not having bodies, they have no senses upon which impressions can be made by material objects. In later writings,⁵ however, Aquinas asserts that angels do make use of signs after all, that both angels and humans know things and communicate with one another through signs. Why the change? Because Aquinas came to realize that his contemporaries critical of Augustine are right to consider *other-representation*, in contrast to creating a sense-impression, as the essential being of signs. Concepts make present in awareness something other than themselves, just as do sensations in perception. So, accordingly, *all* finite beings make use of signs. As the centuries unfold, the argument extends still further to include the *sensations themselves* upon which perceptions depend: eyes see colors but simultaneously shapes and positions and movements; ears hear sounds but simultaneously become aware of some distance and direction; etc. From its origins in sensation to the farthest reaches of the awareness achieved in concepts, the awareness of finite beings depends from beginning to end upon the action of signs.

So where do relations fit in? Well, the first discussion of relation that we find in philosophy is in the work of Plato.⁶ But the first *thematically* to discuss the subject was Plato's pupil, Aristotle.⁷ Aristotle was interested in the subject of relation, however, only from the point of view of what he called *τὸ ὄν*, 'being', in the very specific sense of what the Latins call *ens reale*: what is the way it is independently of whatever human beings think, believe, or desire. That's the world of nature.

Now of course the Greeks knew about myth and fiction and lies and such. But they never *thematized* the matter. It becomes thematized in medieval thought with the distinction of *ens reale* from *ens rationis* – both equally 'objective', but the first with *also* a subjective dimension *missing* from the second. When Aristotle came to discuss relation as one of the categories or types of *τὸ ὄν*,⁸ he was only interested in establishing relation as an accident or characteristic distinct from substance – relation as found in the order of *ens reale*, i.e., awareness-independent relation.

Enter John Poinsett (1589–1644), who prior to 1985 had no particular standing at all in modern intellectual culture on the subject of relation (or anything else). At that time his work on signs, with the demonstration that triadic relations form the very being of signs, first appeared outside of the Latin language. Poinsett would base his whole semiotic on what I would call the *singularity* of relation, 'singular' in constituting the only form or mode of 'ens reale' that transcends the distinction between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, and by that very transcendence (that 'singularity') makes possible within and among the physical interactions of 'real beings' in the universe what philosophers after Peirce will call *semiosis* – the action consequent upon the being proper to signs.

Suppose that we have an appointment to meet in this room at a certain hour, and I do not show up. You came in order to meet me, on the basis of my existing in relation to you as a subject (a physically existing person) objectified (known to you). The relation was between us, but in order to be so, the relation was performed *over and above* both of us. The relation somehow united our otherwise distinct and separated subjectivities, yes, but in order to do *that* it had to be more fundamentally *suprasubjective*.

Now when I fail to show up for our meeting, you wonder where I am. Unbeknownst to you, I am no longer anywhere, for, by a bizarre turn of fate, I was struck and killed by a meteorite. At that moment, I ceased to be a subjectivity within the physical universe, but I did not cease to be an *object* in relation to *your* subjectivity. In that capacity – as the terminus of a suprasubjective relation between your subjectivity and something other than yourself – I continued to exist objectively, even after and despite my death by meteorite.

Precisely this is Poinsett's insight as to how semiosis (the action of signs) is possible in the first place: one and the same relation which, under one set of circumstances was an awareness-independent *ens reale*, can become awareness-dependent (*ens rationis*) under changed circumstances, without any change whatever in its positive essential being as linking one thing to or with something 'other', something 'over and above' the one related. The relation, always suprasubjective, depends on *particular* circumstances to be *intersubjective*, but when those particular circumstances no longer prevail, its status as terminus is not terminated until and unless *the relation* itself is terminated, as when *both* subjects of an intersubjective situation cease, but not when one of the subjects continues to be aware of the other here and now.

But that Latin understanding of *ens rationis* – as a relation existing always suprasubjectively but only sometimes intersubjectively – did not survive into modern times. This was Descartes' mistake: the adoption of the view on relation promulgated by William of Ockham.⁹ All of the moderns – Rationalist and Empiricist alike, down to and after the 'synthesis' of modern thought by Immanuel Kant – adopted the view

that relations as such arise only when someone *makes a comparison in thought* between two objects existing in thought. Apart from such thought, ‘outside’ of it, there is no actual ‘intersubjectivity’; there are just the subjectivities themselves with the characteristics or ‘accidents’ which, in awareness, lead me to create ‘relations between’ them. There is no such *thing* as ‘relation’ in the sense of an actual *ens reale*. Only in awareness do relations arise between or among *objects*, but the order of *things as things* contains no such reality or ‘thing’ as relations.

But if there are no relations as such outside of and quite apart from my consciousness, the relations I create by comparisons made within my consciousness can in no way guarantee that the objects compared, which I may *presume* to be things independent of me, indeed, have any existence apart from my consciousness either.

Descartes is just over the horizon. For if there is no such *thing* as relation, where ‘thing’ means *ens reale*, there can be no intersubjectivity either. Already with Ockham’s view, unwittingly, the modern ‘problem of the bridge’ has been posed: there is no path from *inside* consciousness to anything whatsoever that is, as cognized or known, *outside* consciousness. With Ockham’s view of relation, I am already trapped inside the bubble of myself, exactly as Kant concluded, exactly as became the inescapable conclusion of modern philosophy.

For there to be a way from *inside* consciousness to anything *outside* consciousness as knowable in its own right *presupposes* that there are relations over and above subjectivity which as relations have a dimension that is indifferent to the subjective status of their termini. Relations prove to be ‘bridges’ connecting some things that are known to some things that exist independently of being known, and connecting also things that exist independently of being known to one another as knowable *through* or *on the basis of* their interconnections, the ‘real’ relations between subjectivities which, in awareness, make knowledge both possible and, at one and the same time, open to mistakes.

We see that relation requires only three elements: a foundation or basis, a terminus, and the relation itself joining or linking foundation to terminus. As to the *relation itself*, notice that while it is dependent upon the foundation and terminus (that it cannot exist without both), it is *in* neither, but *between* as over and above both. In the *ens reale* situation of relation – that is, in order for the relation to be a physical relation – both the foundation and the terminus must exist as subjects, subjectivities in their own right; both the things related have to exist. What distinguishes animals from previous forms of subjectivity, however, are *psychological states*, and what distinguishes those in turn from all other states of physical existence is the fact that psychological states cannot exist without giving rise to relations to what is other than themselves, *regardless of whether that ‘other’ has a subjective constitution of its own or not*.

The being of fundament *as fundament* and terminus *as terminus* depends upon the existence of the relation as a suprasubjective linking. So what defines a relation as relation in *all* cases, even in cases where the relation is intersubjective, is not intersubjectivity but *suprasubjectivity*. Every relation as relation is a suprasubjective mode of being, whether it is *also* intersubjective or not. To put it another way, intersubjectivity *presupposes* being suprasubjective, but suprasubjectivity *does not* presuppose intersubjectivity until and unless a given relation is occurring under circumstances which place it within the order of *ens reale*. So we have the world divided into *ens reale*, which is the order of subjectivities and intersubjectivities that obtain independently of how human beings think, believe, or want things to be, and the larger *objective world* of animals within which *ens reale* forms only a part generic to all animals, but recognizable as such only by human animals.¹⁰

Descartes made the mistake of collapsing objects into ideas. But objects are not ideas; ideas are psychological states which found relations to objects, but the objects as objects are termini of those relations, and the relations themselves reduce to neither their foundations nor their termini. Thus objects, as the termini of relations founded on *but over and above* psychological states, exhibit in perception and intellection an indifference to whatever subjective status they may or may not have as *entia realia*. But this ‘indifference’ results from the indifference of relation itself (relation in its distinctive positive being or ‘essence’) to the conditions which make relation at one time awareness-independent, yet at another time awareness-dependent, and this ‘indifference’ is never free from the causal roots of objectification in the dyadic causal interactions (intersubjectivities) which bring about sensations as logically prior to and independent of the interpretations which perception and intellection adds to what is sensed. Descartes mistook the indifference-of-perceived-objects-as-perceived-to-a-fully-correspondent-subjective-status to be an absolute condition of objectivity *tout court*, little realizing that this opinion was itself an unanalyzed consequent of the Ockhamist view of relations as consisting solely of comparisons made by the mind (Descartes, 1628).

In modern day English, ‘object’ and ‘thing’ have come to be synonyms.¹¹ Suppose we are at your house working together on some project and I ask if you have a pair of scissors. ‘Sure’, you say, and go to a drawer where they are supposed to be but aren’t, so you go looking for them. Now if you did not have the *idea* of scissors in your head you couldn’t go looking for them, but whatever is in your head is certainly not the scissors. For the scissors you are looking for is not only an object, but also a thing. As object it depends upon your idea, but as thing it is independent of your idea. To be an object means simply to be known. To be a thing means to have a subjective dimension, to exist independently of being known, to exist whether known or not. What is the difference between Hamlet and Napoleon? There are many differences. However, the basic difference comes down to this: there was a time when you could shake hands with Napoleon; there was never a time when you could shake hands with Hamlet. Napoleon was once a subject as well as an object; Hamlet was an object from the get-go.

A thing, in order to be an object, has to be in relation to a finite mind. No such relation is necessary to its being as thing. So a thing is an object only when and insofar as it is known – only and insofar, that is to say, as it involves a relation with a finite mind.

But when a thing comes so to exist (that is, when a thing becomes also an object), is it the foundation, the terminus, or the relation itself? It is as terminus of a relation to a finite mind that a thing becomes an object of awareness. *But an object of awareness need not be a thing here and now*, except for the ‘limit case’ of *sentire* prescissively considered. The object may have once been a thing, as in the case of a dinosaur bone correctly interpreted; or it may never have been a thing, as was the case with Ponce de León’s Fountain of Youth in Florida. But as an object it is always public in principle, just as any two things can be related to a common third. Relations can be physical and also objective, or physical without being objective, or physical and objective at one and the same time, or purely objective: *but only as termini of relations to a finite mind can objects exist actually* (virtual objectivity is another question to be dealt with in its own right) *as objects*, regardless of their subjective status in the order of *ens reale*.

Relations being so simple – there is only foundation, terminus, and the relation itself – we have only to consider that the *relation itself* is over and above subjectivity, even though it depends upon some subjectivity as providing a foundation. The relation itself, the relation as relation, is over and above *every* subjectivity. But because relations have no secondary matter, relation in its suprasubjectivity is unaffected by distance or position in

space. Only the *subjectivity* of the object, if it has a subjectivity, is affected by position and distance. The way Peirce puts it: 'Far or near, a son is in the same way the son of a father'.¹² It matters not if the son is on Mars or driving in Kansas; in the same way in all cases he is related to father as son.

Imagine the case of a New York lawyer whose wife has a one-night affair with someone from Finland passing through her city. To her surprise and the passer-through's ignorance (having left the country the next morning), she becomes pregnant. Her husband assumes the pregnancy was caused by him. In childbirth the woman dies. In fact, the surviving child has a Finnish father. That is a biologically based or physical relation of parenthood unknown to child and mother's husband alike, as also to the biological father. Nonetheless it is 'real' by virtue of obtaining in the order of *ens reale* – physically real but unknown, 'unobjectified'. So 'reality', *as far as experience goes*, hardly reduces to *ens reale*. The large element of social construction, which modern thought has come to recognize and demonstrate as an irreducible dimension of human experience owes its possibility to the singular feature of relation as able *objectively* to link things regardless of their status *as entia realia*, regardless of their subjective constitution or lack thereof in terminating relations of awareness.

Yet another remarkable dimension consequent upon the singularity of relation: relation is the only form of being which can be involved with nonbeing, the only pathway in *ens reale* whereby *entia rationis* can take on an actual status within physical interactions.¹³ Wherever deceit is possible, or wherever something nonexistent succeeds to make its way into the realm of existent things, the singularity of relation is, one way or another, always involved.

Now Peirce (1903) introduced a distinction between 'sign' and 'representamen'.

One reason for the distinction was to seek a definition of sign extending beyond human experience of signs, applying to signs occurring anywhere in nature. Thus, the representamen would stand for what we are able to determine a sign is, not just within our experience (in anthroposemiosis, as we would say today) but in itself (in semiosis in general).

The second reason for introducing the distinction is actually more profound and important, and was not clear to Peirce from the start: a sign formally speaking is actually not anything that you can see or point to as such.¹⁴ For example, the words in a dictionary I can see and point to function as signs only presupposing in me as interpretant the habit of the language in which the dictionary is written. Despite the ordinary (dyadic) conception of sign, in fact a material object functions as a *sign* only when its perception includes a third element, what Peirce called a '*potentia cognoscitiva*', but what Peirce called more generally 'an interpretant' in order to make the point (not yet explicitly realised in Latin thought) that the third element 'need not be a mental mode of being' (Peirce (c.1905), CP 5.474, 1907), thereby opening the way to an understanding of semiosis that extends beyond (or below) the animal world of sensations and sense perceptions.

There is never just 'sign and signified', but always a 'hidden third' presupposed in semiosis. And it is the *relation* as irreducibly triadic and linking the three elements here and now that makes the foreground element *commonly called* 'sign', *but more technically better named perhaps* 'representamen', function formally to achieve semiosis (Deely 2014). On this view, it would be proper to say that it is *the triadic relation itself* (invisible to any direct perception) that is the *sign* formally speaking, whereas what is *commonly called* 'sign' is better identified technically as a *representamen*.¹⁵

Moreover, Peirce and Peirce distinguished between *actual* and *virtual* semiosis.¹⁶ Peirce said that a statue of the emperor is in the same way a statue of the emperor when

the emperor is dead. But when the emperor was alive there was a *relatio realis* between the statue and the emperor, while that very same relation, unchanged as relation – suprasubjective in both cases – passes into the order of *ens rationis* when the emperor dies. In his lifetime the emperor, as terminus of the relation, had a dimension of subjectivity which gave both him and the relation to him *ens reale* status. But when that dimension of subjectivity perished, when the emperor was no longer a living substance *as well as* a terminus of a relation, when he became *purely an objective terminus and nothing more*, he continued to receive from the being of the relation itself the objective status of terminus even having lost the subjective status of living person. The statue, which is a physical reality able to act on your senses in such a way as to make you think of the emperor even though the emperor may have died, is what Poinot means when he says that ‘a sign virtually is a sign actually’: the statue endures as a ‘sign’ in the sense of *representamen*, as distinct from what makes the sign be formally a sign which is the triadic relation the statue provokes in your awareness by representing the emperor signified to you as interpreter (a ‘mental interpretant’) of the sign.¹⁷

Thus signification, the outcome of semiosis, is already present in the physical interaction of bodies, for example, which produce sensations: sight makes us aware not only of colors but of shapes, positions, movements, etc.; sound makes us aware not only of noise but of direction, distance, intensity, etc.; and so on with each of the so-called external senses which provide internal sense (perception) and reason (or understanding) the fodder for forming those interpretants of the surroundings that we call ‘percepts’ and ‘concepts’ or ‘ideas’. These are already sign relations. For even though the color, shape, movement, etc. are perceived by the organism simultaneously, and often enough interpreted simultaneously as well, nonetheless there is a dependency involved whereby the color as *representamen* conveys the shape and position as signified, etc. The shape is seen dependently upon the differentiation of light that gives color. So when Poinot asks whether the external senses as point of departure for the awareness of any animal make use of signs (are involved in semiosis), his answer is an unequivocal and definitive affirmative.

He gives in this context, moreover, two proofs that sensation prescissively considered within sense perception does not *of itself* involve concepts directly. First, he points out, there is no need of them to make an object present, because true sensation, in contrast to phantasms of feeling in severed limbs and the like, arise directly from physical interaction of two or more bodies here and now, ‘*actio sensibilis in sensu*’, in the classic Latin formula (which would perhaps better be stated as ‘*resultantia actionis sensibilis in sensu*’). Second, he points out, if the objects of *sense* were provided only on the basis of mental representations, we would have no way of getting to the realm of objects which are *also* things, objects which, as objects, have here and now a subjective dimension which itself becomes partially part and parcel with the objectification of the sensed reality in perceptual interpretation of the surrounding physical elements here and now sensed.

Modern philosophy began with the reduction of objects to ideas in our minds. The consequent of solipsism, however unacceptable, proved theoretically inescapable. So most thinkers came to ignore it. ‘Of course we know things; that’s what objects are – the things known!’ Under the influence of this modern ‘turn to the subject’, then, ordinary language came to be affected, eventually to reduce objects to things and subjectivity to human psychology – in effect a sedimentation down to the level of common language of the philosophical view of ideas as self-representations adopted in common by the early moderns. ‘Subjective’ came to mean ‘inside the mind’, while ‘objective’ came to mean

‘the world of things as they are’. The subjective we can dismiss; the objective is our aim in reporting and knowledge.

It is an incoherent situation.

For subjectivity is not only psychological but also physical. The basic form of subjectivity is substance, the subject of existence, *subiectum essendi*, what separates each of us from one another and the rest of the universe. And that subjectivity becomes psychological as well as physical when animals enter the living world. But animals have sensations first of all, which make them partially aware of their physical surroundings, and, in order to survive, animals must interpret this awareness, thus creating their species-specific objective world or *Umwelten*. But in order to do this, they must be *related* to the surroundings, and the complex of concepts formed by the inner senses of memory, imagination, and estimation do just this by interpreting what the animal is made aware of by sense. That complex of concepts on the inner side, together with sensations, forms the animal *Innenwelt*, the subjective foundation of the objective world or *Umwelt* in which the animal finds meaning according to its species: no *Umwelt* without an *Innenwelt*, no *Innenwelt* without an *Umwelt*. *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* are related as foundation and terminus, the terminus being ‘public in principle’, the foundation being subjective or ‘private’ to the individual, but as provenating (providing the necessary foundation for) the suprasubjective relations out of which the objective world is woven.

But I digress. Modern philosophy is, from the semiotic viewpoint (and respecting the overall history of philosophy), like an insert that blocks you from the Latins to the ancients, and it blocks you yet more essentially from a knowledge of the world. (Of course the scientists are going about their business of reading the ‘book of nature’ anyway, while the philosophers are standing back, chuckling at those scientists’ naïveté – ha ha ha! those poor scientists don’t realize that the things of nature are actually unknowable in themselves.)

Now what distinguishes human awareness in the world of animal awarenesses is the fact that what human understanding can consider in knowledge is not restricted to the realm of *directly* sensible instances. Engaged in arguments whether God exists, for example, you cannot point to what you are arguing about and say ‘There’, the way the scientists of Einstein’s day did at Alamogordo when arguing about whether the atom could be split. But this – argument about the reality of God – is a remote case.

The proximate case where this ability of intellect (‘human understanding’) to deal with an object directly uninstantiable brings us immediately back to the case of *relations*. For dealing with relations in their difference from related things is the essence of linguistic communication as species-specifically human. (Notice I do not say ‘language’, but ‘linguistic communication’. As Sebeok argued,¹⁸ *language* as species-specifically human (i.e., in contrast to all zoösemiotic ‘languages’) is an *adaptation* of the human *Innenwelt* as biologically underdetermined in its genetically specified reaction range, while *linguistic communication* by contrast belongs rather to the *Umwelt* as an *exaptation* constituting linguistic objectifications as a species-specifically *human* communicative modality, a ‘glass ceiling’ in communication with other than human animals.)

The human mind provides in understanding the only level of animal awareness that can deal with relations in their difference from related things. And that’s what language as *linguistic communication* is built on, and why language as *linguistic* communication (not simply as communication in a generic sense) is a glass ceiling to animals other than human animals.

As you leave the main train station in Helsinki, off to the right there’s a huge statue of a man on a horse, equally visible to humans, birds, dogs, etc. But only by asking “Who is

that?” – not in some zoösemiotic form, but anthroposemiotically, and in species-specifically linguistic mode at that – do you have a chance of finding out that the statue in question is of one Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (4 June 1867–27 January 1951), who commanded the winning side in the Finnish civil war that ended in 1918. Only by linguistic means, in their species-specifically human mode, might you learn further that Mannerheim then became Regent of Finland (1918–1919), Commander-in-Chief of Finland’s Defence Forces during World War II, Marshal of Finland, and the sixth President of Finland (1944–1946). Thus, because he first established then later preserved Finland’s independence from Russia, Mannerheim is in effect the father of modern Finland. *Seeing* the statue as an object of sense-perception tells you none of that, yet that and more forms the specifically human story behind the statue – an object visible to all animals with eyes to see, but interpretable in cultural and historical terms only among human animals. To see the history in the statue presupposes and requires species-specifically human linguistic communication. No other animal is capable of communicating *in that dimension*.

Of course animals communicate, Sebeok pointed out, but that communication is not by means of ‘language’ in any species-specifically human sense. He demonstrated that the biologically underdetermined reaction range of the human genotype, enabling humans to think directly in terms of the uninstantiable dimensions of objects, is an *adaptation* which, only when *exapted*, becomes linguistic communication.¹⁹ Thus, ‘language’ as an adaptation pertains to the human Innenwelt, while ‘language’ as an exaptation pertains to the human Umwelt. Just this exaptation, linguistic communication, is what gives to the Umwelt of human animals that species-specific feature of objectivity which justifies the further designation of the human Umwelt as *Lebenswelt*, wherein objects ready-to-hand appear to us rather as present-at-hand first of all (even when we are mistaken in the identification of a given object or set of objects as *entia realia*).

‘The birth’, says Jacques Maritain (1986, 53), ‘of intellectual life in us seems bound up with the discovery of the signifying value of signs. ... It depends essentially on the discovery of the relation of signification [...]’; whence animals other than human ‘make use of signs’ yet without knowing that there are signs – that is, ‘without perceiving the relation of signification’ in its difference from the signifieds. Not semiosis, indeed, but semiotic is species-specifically human: semiosis as the *action* of signs may run throughout nature, but *knowledge* of that action as consequent upon relation in its difference from related objects and things is possible only for human animals, which is why humans as semiotic animals turn out to have a responsibility for the consequences of what they do.²⁰

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. The main book-length documentation of this point is provided in the works of Giovanni Manetti (1987, 2013), but see also Eco et al. (1984, 1986) for an effective brief summation.
2. Compare Eco (1982).
3. Besides the work of Manetti, see Sebeok (1979, 1983, 1984a, 1984b, 1996, 2001, but especially 1984b, 1996).
4. See Deely (2001a): Chap. 4, ‘The Fate of Sign in the Later Latin Age’, 365–410, esp. 365–376.

5. For example, Aquinas (1980) c.1256–1259: *De Veritate*, q. 9, art. 4, ad 4. See also c.1269–1272: *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, Quodlibetum 4, q. 9, art. 17. Fuller discussion in Deely (2001a, 331–341) and Deely (2014).
6. See Cavarnos (1975, 13–38).
7. For an identification and discussion of Aristotle's Greek texts on this point, see Deely (1985, 472–475).
8. Details, including the Greek text, in Deely (1985, 472–474, text and notes).
9. Ockham was not the first to hold this view, but the influence of his version of the view in question became so prevalent by the fifteenth century that this view, 'Nominalism', as it came ambiguously to be called, is associated primarily with him.
10. Which is the reason underlying the otherwise misleading choice by the Latins to call purely objective beings '*entia rationis*', 'beings of reason'.
11. See the definitions of the term 'objective' and 'subjective' in Jewell and Abate, *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (2001), discussed at book-length in Deely's *Purely Objective Reality* (2009).
12. Poinso (1985 [1632]): '*eodem enim modo est filius sui patris filius distans et indistans*' (85/11–12).
13. Of this situation physiosemosis is the boundary case, the case whereby physical interactions that are 'nothing but' lifeless can bring about a Thirdness whereby 'something more' results indirectly from the dyadic interaction such that the lifeless universe is moved closer to being able to support life.
14. See Deely (2001b, 2004); and 'A Sign is *What*', YouTube link: <http://www.youtube.com/user/semiootik/videos>.
15. See Benedict (1985, 265–267).
16. Developed in Deely (1989).
17. Poinso (1985 [1632], Book I, Question 1, 126/3–4): '*... sufficit virtualiter esse signum, ut actu significet*'; Poinso is speaking here of 'sign' precisely in Peirce's later sense of 'representamen', i.e., the sense of 'the concrete subject that represents' as discussed in note 16.
18. See Sebeok (1984b, 1984c, 1986a, 1986b, 1988a, 1988b); synthesized in Deely (2012).
19. On the original distinction between adaptation and exaptation, see Gould and Vrba (1982); on Sebeok's application of that distinction to the question of language, see note 18.
20. See Petrilli (2004), Petrilli and Ponzio (2003), Deely (2003, 2005, 2010), and Deely, Petrilli and Ponzio (2005).

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