# Regarding Semiotic Analyses

## James Moylan[1]

**Precis:**

This paper describes, appreciates, and integrates the observations of several neo-Marxist structural theoreticians.

Concepts proposed and utilised by Saussure, Barthes, and Bourdieu are considered with a particular focus on defining and describing a cohesive 'semiotic epistemology'.

A semiotic epistemology is described as being: a theoretically coherent and justified definition of the congress of semiological systems of disambiguation (of language coda and meta-discourse articulations).

Having defined and described a semiotic epistemology the author then appreciates various aspects of our use of language in the light of these propositions.

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## CONTENTS:

Introduction.

## **The Hegelian dialectic**

Dialectics might be typified as being a series of formal modalities for describing the resolution of disagreement through argumentation. In the modern age the best known of these formally defined dialectical abstractions is the one promoted by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).

Some historians quibble about whether or not Hegel ever employed the precise 'thesis – antithesis – synthesis' formulation that is most often described as the 'Hegelian dialectic'[2] however there is little disagreement amongst scholars that this formulation is only one iteration of a theoretical tradition that stretches way back into the mists of antiquity. While the history of the dialectical method and associated formulations is beyond the scope of this paper, this long tradition is mentioned as the Hegelian formulation is proposed later in this work as being representative of 'traditional' positivistic modes of comprehending and describing the act of signification and/or exposition.

Hegel's dialectic formulation is of particular interest as he proposed that it not only assists in describing modalities of signification and exposition, but that it also assists in explaining the evolution of social structures.

> *… Hegel thought that better social and political ideas emerged when deficient understandings (theses) encountered their opposite understandings (antitheses) and were resolved by better understandings (syntheses). The dialectical process of ever improving would, according to Hegel, result in a post-historical stage - an "end of history"- where all deficient ideas would have been overcome and humans would be governed by absolutely correct ideas, by pure rationality.[3]*

So Hegel proposed that his dialectical formulation explained not only the resolution of 'the conflict of opposites'[4] within language, but that it also described the resolution of 'the conflict of opposites' within societies as a whole.

> *In very general terms, Hegel proposed that historical progress occurred as*

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[2] See for example; Di Domenico, Maria Laura, Paul Tracey, and Helen Haugh. 'The dialectic of social exchange: Theorizing corporate - social enterprise collaboration.' Organization studies 30.8 (2009): 887-907.; Mueller, Gustav E. 'The Hegel Legend of 'Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis'.' Journal of the History of Ideas 19.3 (1958): 411-414.

[3] Schumaker, P. (2008). From *Ideologies to Public Philosophy: An Introduction to Political Theory*. Australia: Blackwell Publishing. 114.

[4] Described by Lenin as being a 'struggle of opposites' in Lenin's *Collected Works*, 4th Edition, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1976, Volume 38, pp. 357-361 (via https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/misc/x02.htm at at 13/08/2016).

*societies acquired ever better understandings of such values as freedom and equality through the conflict of old ideas (called theses) with their opposites (antitheses).*[5]

*He showed that the development of ideas did not follow a closed circuit, but rose from lower to higher forms, that quantitative changes turned into qualitative ones in this process and that contradictions were the source of development.*[6]

## **A Material dialectic**

The concept of a material dialectic was fashioned in contradistinction to Hegel's propositions. Marx proposed that '[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.'[7] So the concept of a material dialecticism was developed as a mode of historical critique that would turn the old Hegelian dialectic on its head. Instead of opening with a cultural fact (a thesis), material dialecticism would commence with a focus on the cultural realm and propose that human cultural practices and languages are modalities by which the material world, and the cultural realm, are reproduced.

> *My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain… is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.*[8]

Marx noted that '[t]he first historical act is… the production of material life itself'[9]. So dialectic materialism was proposed as a dialectical method that would focus on '…the social production which men carry on as they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will'.[10] With these factors being envisioned as being 'the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness

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[5] Schumaker, P. (2008). From *Ideologies to Public Philosophy: An Introduction to Political Theory*. Australia: Blackwell Publishing 114, quoted in Chukwudi, Uchendu Patrick. 'Dialectics and Social Transformation: A Comparative Study of Hegel and Marx.' (via www.academia.edu/download/34054290/Dialectics_and_Social_Transformation.docx at 13/08/2016)

[6] Afanasev, Viktor Grigorevich. *Marxist philosophy*. (1965) 28, quoted in Chukwudi, Uchendu Patrick. 'Dialectics and Social Transformation: A Comparative Study of Hegel and Marx' (via www.academia.edu/download/34054290/Dialectics_and_Social_Transformation.docx at 13/08/2016)

[7] Marx, K. 1964 *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* McGraw-Hill, UK. 51.

[8] Karl Marx. *Capital* (Afterword to the Second German Edition Vol. 1, 1873, Penguin, 1990) 14.

[9] Karl Marx. *Capital* (Afterword to the Second German Edition Vol. 1, 1873, Penguin, 1990) 60.

[10] Marx, K. & Engels, F 1962 *Selected Works*, 2 Vols. Foreign Language Publishing House, Russia. 488.

correspond.'[11]

Yet when these remarks are considered in context, Marx was not outlining or describing a new theory of history. Rather he was simply discussing his epistemological aspirations in the broadest sense. His coining of the term 'material dialectic' was initially far more rhetorical flourish than it was theoretical proposition.

In fact Marx was not even criticising Hegel or his celebrated model when he coined the term 'material dialecticism'. The opposite was the case. Marx was annoyed that his work, which self-consciously employed Hegelian terminology and reformulated many Hegelian propositions, had been misinterpreted by some scholars as constituting a general critique of Hegel's work. Marx was anxious to set the record straight and credit Hegel with being the first to try to systematise a model that purported to describe and explain facets of human signification in a manner which was rationally based and might be considered without recourse to the need to entirely embrace mysticism or address metaphysical concerns.

> *The mystifying side of Hegelian dialectic I criticised nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion. But just as I was working at the first volume of "Das Kapital," it was the good pleasure of the peevish, arrogant, mediocre Epigonoi[12] who now talk large in cultured Germany, to treat Hegel in same way as the brave Moses Mendelssohn in Lessing's time treated Spinoza, i.e., as a "dead dog." I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker, and even here and there, in the chapter on the theory of value, coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to him. The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.[13]*

So Marx theorised regarding the development of a form of analysis that would focus on material facts and on the nature of our perceptions regarding material facts, rather than on ideas and the synthesis of ideas. In a moment we will consider how the work of structural linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, and other scholars would soon assist in sketching out modalities of analytical practice which employed just such a 'material dialectic', however before we examine these developments we will spend a bit more time examining the Hegelian dialectic

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[11] Marx, K. & Engels, F 1962 *Selected Works*, 2 Vols. Foreign Language Publishing House, Russia. 488.

[12] The *Epigonoi* is the name of an ancient Greek tragedy written by the Sophocles in the 5th Century BC and at this time was used in a derogatory manner to refer to theoreticians who slavishly attended to the developing 'Marxist' theories. 'Epigonoi' can be roughly translated as meaning 'progeny'.

[13] Karl Marx. *Capital* (Afterword to the Second German Edition Vol. 1, 1873, Penguin, 1990) 14.

and sketching out in general terms some of the epistemological urgencies it articulates.

## Thinking about thinking.

When most people are asked they will describe the process of 'thinking' as involving the conscious manipulation of ideas. 'Thought' will be proposed as being an arena of contestation where one proposition is compared and contrasted with another according to various criteria. And we 'think' *using* 'language'. However, generally, that is about as complex as a response will get.

One difference in the response of Mr Joe Public and Prof. Astro Physicist, if asked, will be that the professor will likely build a bigger and more complicated model. In this bigger model, all of the 'thinking' is supported by an organic calculator that we call a brain, which in turn supports a thing we call a 'consciousness'. And while this 'consciousness' acts like a big open memory system in a computer, and assists in ordering and processing perceptions into 'language'; 'consciousness' and 'language' will invariably be represented as distinct and separable phenomena.

'Consciousness' resolves 'ideas' which are then expressed in 'language' is the commonplace supposition. We think *with* our consciousness *using* language. This commonsense appraisal of 'how we think' is obviously Hegelian in nature.

However you need not be a learned academic to realise that Hegel's formulation is woefully inadequate in explaining that which it purports to explain. In some manner that is not explained language somehow punches personally significant meanings into our consciousness. In fact some individual words and phrases carry such vast accretions of significance that even when contemplated alone and without company they evoke a deep emotional response. Then, when used in a story, they act as a fulcrum unlocking ever more complex layers of meaning.

So how comes the Idea into conscious appraisal? How does one fulsome Idea come to be battling another on a field of common imagination, with armour and weapons built to a common pattern?

Hegel's proposition begins in culture and ends in culture. It ignores far more than it explains.

For there is no denying that we are all born to a language that is fulsome, rich, and complete, without us. Unless you happen to be another Shakespeare, when you pass away you will likely leave the language unchanged. In this way language is arbitrary and corporate, not just personal. It is fashioned by a multitude with no common plan or purpose. It is an artificial

cultural artefact.

So while we are undoubtedly the architect of our thoughts, the bricks and mortar we use to build them are all identical to those employed by all others, and are corporately produced and defined; and not just 'words'. The slum landlord, the corner grocer, the Judge of the Supreme Court, and all their children, recognise much the same social order and social rules. Everyone absorbs and exhibits much the same corpus of social criteria. But if the Idea comes first; then why does the beggar not think themselves into a king? Why acknowledge the actual king? How do you account for a beggar who is also a fervent monarchist? Why would a beggar cheer for a king? Moreover, we all know a beggar from a prince at a glance whilst also sharing much the same opinions regarding each.

And how is there a 'we'? Incorporated into every sentence of this work there is a simple assumption that the reader and writer share much more than just a common language. For as surely as there is a 'me' there also is a corporate 'we'. A personally entertained but purportedly objective rationale that is forged in accord with corporate criteria and shared scales of distinction, to which every participant in language is provided automatic access.

What is this disassociated 'we'? In the Hegelian model it might be described as the very field upon which ideas are jousting. But it goes even further. We all seem to be pretty good at judging these contests. We seem to share a rulebook which specifies what is fair and what isn't. So a common language not only implies that individuals will also share ideas, it also seems to provide common cultural knowledge's and conceits as well as a common rule book with which to appraise jousting ideas.

So how is it that there is some sort of 'common-sense' that seems to come with a language? After all, a shared set of labels is understandable. Without a seemingly objective shared set of labels then language is impossible. We cannot all use our own words. But why also a common set of moral and ethical parameters, as well as a reasonably uniform cadre of predilections, scruples, prejudices, paranoias and peccadillos? We all seem to inherit from our common language much the same suite of social knowledge *and* social hang-ups; regardless of our station in life.

Of course the ultimate answer to this language puzzle, as supplied by both the ancients as well as by Hegel, was that we are all provided with 'free will' by a benign and personally interested creator. This pale alibi for a theory - this *God of the gaps* - has acted to mask and obfuscate many of the great epistemological challenges posed by the fact of language, right up to the modern

age. However this has not stopped theorists from daydreaming.

So Marx came to be engaging in just this sort of woolgathering when he mused about the creation of a 'material dialecticism'. It was just a passing fancy about a magic key that might unlock the secrets of culture and language. Yet epistemology and considerations about language dynamics were never Marx's primary concern, so when he mused about a possible new science of history, while he didn't know exactly what material dialecticism was, he certainly knew what he wanted it to achieve; and it was a magnificent daydream.

Instead of opening with a cultural fact, material dialecticism would commence with a focus on the material realm. It would explain in simple terms how human material and cultural products and practices act to replicate themselves over time and it would also propose a simple set of rules and terms that would adequately explain the interrelationship of power, culture, and our common language. It would embody and employ *a whole new epistemology*.

In the century and a quarter following the death of Marx many of these aspirations have been realised. The dialectical methodologies and terminologies commonly utilised by both Hegel and Marx have since been supplemented or supplanted by a variety of neo-Marxist modalities of analysis that are both theoretically robust and 'scientifically' grounded.

- When we wish to identify and consider the congruence of meanings codified within our language coda and meta-discourse, and explore the possible interrelationship between these and an individual, a society, and a circumstance; we can now turn to utilising modalities of *semiotic analysis*.

- When we wish to appraise aspects of the material products of culture, and consider the possible interrelationships between the institutions of culture, the structural dictates of language, and the impositions of power; we can now undertake a *structural analysis*.

- When we wish to utilise any of these structural or semiotic insights to explain or describe more fulsomely aspects of recorded history, we can now construct a storyline which is not only descriptive and insightful, but also theoretically cohesive and amenable to rational *and* probabilistic justification. We call this new form of structurally and theoretically justified story-telling *a post-structural analysis*.

In the following pages all these modalities of analysis will be mentioned and semiotic modalities of analysis discussed in detail.

## Regarding a 'semiotic epistemology'

While this paper seeks to advance a description of a rational and coherent epistemology that is materially cognisant; the aspiration is not to craft an approach that is at all equivalent to either Marx's material dialecticism or Hegel's original conjecture. While the semiotic epistemology that is presented is in part fashioned with regard to the urgencies that articulate the dominant liberal humanist epistemology (our current meta-discourse), it does not seek to supplant it - just describe it.

A semiotic appreciation implies that our modes of apprehension and appreciation are enjoined in a largely unconscious, purposive, and compulsive manner, and so are simply not amenable to either direct appreciation or fundamental alteration. So the *semiotic epistemology* is presented as an entirely artificial theoretical artefact that can only ever be employed in a counter-intuitive manner - never experientially entertained.

This is because a semiotic epistemology proposes that we can only ever appreciate *facsimiles of signification or exposition* (not instances of signification or exposition). Moreover it proposes that the archetypes that we use to describe and explain these aspects of our use of language, in retrospective appreciation, are themselves implicated in any fulsome description of how we use language. (In other words *how we think we think* is almost as important as *how we think* for understanding how we utilise language.)

Building the semiotic equation

Having looked a little at some of the ways in which we typically *think that we think*, we will now turn to investigating some alternative explanations.
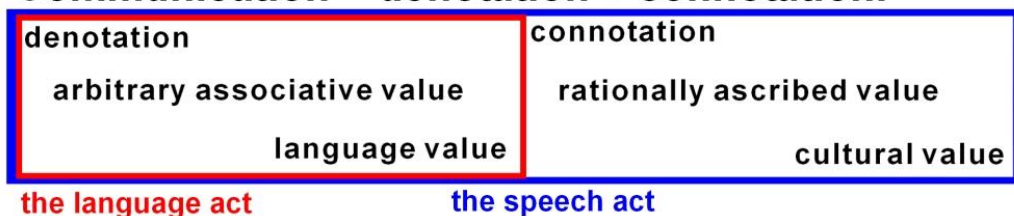
## Saussure



**Figure 1.** Simple Saussurian model of denotation & connotation.

Academia can be a cruel master. When Karl Marx entertained a whimsical daydream about how one day science may enlighten us at to how an individual's social existence might determine and influence their consciousness, the whole world seemed to sit up and take notice. However,

when the French linguist Ferdinand Saussure crafted a masterful treatise which provided profound insight into exactly this question, nobody paid it much heed at all until well after his death.

In 1913 when he died Saussure's master work, *Course in General Linguistics*,[14] was still to be published. Yet while in the hands of later theorists this work would lay the solid foundation upon which the modern theory of semiotics would rest, posthumous credit can never repay Saussure any of the debt of gratitude that we all undoubtedly owe this largely neglected theorist. Yet while his name might be largely forgotten, many of the ideas and terms Saussure pioneered have since entered our academic lexicon and continue to inform our appreciation of how we use language.

Saussure's singular contribution was to note that all human languages work in much the same manner in that they employ two separate yet interconnected ways of organising information. He called one way organising information *the speech act*[15] and another *the language*.[16] To obviate any confusion that might be caused by too literal a translation from the original French we shall refer to these elements as *the speech act* and the *language code*.

These were not new observations. When we talk (or write) there are quite obviously two sets of rules that we are employing. Saussure began by sketching-out the apparent features of 'language' that we all intuitively understand. Somehow a jumble of letters that are arranged into words and sentences, manages to supply every speech act with a rolling series of 'meanings' that are then manipulated consciously. It is obviously not just a matter of simply matching a word with literary definition.

When we read the word 'cat' and the word 'mat' we don't consciously decode the literal meanings attaching to these words unless we are still learning how to use the language. In fact, we only really notice the literal definition for words when we don't recognise one (in a process of retrospective appreciation). Otherwise the process of 'reading' (or listening) happens in a seemingly automatic and unforced manner. We read the word 'cat' and then 'mat' and this causes us to anticipate 'sat'. There are obviously a series of overlapping principles at work.

Saussure's great insight was to realise that when we 'read' language we actually use two modes

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[14] Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Trans. Roy Harris. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court. 1983 (first published posthumously in 1916).

[15] In French 'la parole'.

[16] In French 'la langue'.

of 'thinking'. Not only are we continually engaged in manipulating 'meanings', we are also decoding signs unconsciously. Saussure called the unconscious modes of thinking 'denotation' and the conscious ones 'connotation'.

## Denotation & connotation

### *Denotation*

Denotation is the process of determining what meaning functions a word performs. It is important to resist the temptation to think about the way in which we decode language in denotation as being any sort of rational process. As soon as you begin to 'think' (in Hegelian terms) then you have begun to engage in connotation. Rather denotation refers to a number of closely related reflexive and relational *non-rational modes of appreciation*.

Therefore it is far easier to contemplate denotation as describing a function rather than an outcome. A denotational value exhausts *into* meaning; it is not 'meaning' in and of itself. It is a potential that resides in all language elements. It is a potential that repents a fusion of both the definitional content of the sign (in the language code) and the physical and social context in which that sign is displayed. Denotation is therefore a precursor to instances of rationality and guides the way in which we 'think' about things. And it all happens in microseconds of reading or conjugation.

Please do not equate the denotational value of a word (or sign) with just the literal meaning of a word. This is the most oft repeated mistake when people try to comprehend this concept. For example when we see the word 'flag' in a sentence its denotational value (its meaning functions) are rarely the same as the dictionary definition.

Consider the 'flag' in the phrase 'our flag was still there'. Here the value of the word (the linguistic category) is so conditioned by the form of the sentence that the dictionary definition (the linguistic categorical imperative) is barely present. Here the word 'flag' represents country, patriotism, morality, perseverance, and a hundred other potential utilities. This is why the process of denotation can be described as affixing a meaning potential or function to a sign, rather than a language code definition. The appreciation is one that has regard to the potential meaning utilities of a sign in context; often it is only in retrospective reappraisal that the category or the categorical imperative becomes apparent.

### *Connotation*

While the concept of denotation can be difficult to grasp, most everyone can readily understand

what connotation means. Connotation refers to the rational modes of 'thinking' that we are all familiar with such as categorisation, comparison, corollary, metaphor, metonym, allusion, allegory, contrast, deductive and adductive inference (etc.). Thus *signification* was conceived of by Saussure as being a fusion of these two ways of thinking, where a non-rational *denotation* reflexively blossoms into *connotation*.

Suddenly we are on the verge of conceiving how the material world might be reflected in the human mind and then translated into forms of thought.

### Claude Lévi-Strauss

From the turn of the twentieth century to the late 1950s functionalist and structural/functional explanations dominated in the social sciences. It was no longer enough to just *describe* aspects of culture. Anthropologists and sociologists alike were now preoccupied with attempting to divine *the purposes served* by social acts and institutions.

During these years it was widely believed that the existence and form of a social artefact or institution was largely explained (in purposive and positivistic terms) by reference to the manner in which it fulfilled (collective or individual) functions. So the explaining of why institutions and players exist, and ergo what functions they fulfil, was seen to be the correct role for any respectable social scientist. Then along came Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Lévi-Strauss had noted Saussure's observation that the language coda unconsciously imports arbitrary cultural imperatives into every individual speech act and proposed that underlying all human behaviour might be templates of cognitive discrimination that operate unconsciously[17] in a manner that may be reflected in various forms of human cultural expression. Note that Lévi-Strauss was searching for an ordering of cultural activity that acted *similarly* to those proposed as acting in language. He did not seek to further enhance the models being used by the structural linguists but rather concentrated on imagining new ways of understanding the relationship between culture, nature, and the individual.

In his search for new understandings Lévi-Strauss reinterpreted Hegel's dialectic (of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis) and proposed that any cultural institution might be conceived of as being represented by a whole gamut of overlapping dialectics. So 'marriage' might be

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[17] 'Unconscious' is here used to denote the belief that elemental deep structures of human cognitive facility are perceived to be an ordering agent working on a universal basis, rather than in a Freudian sense where the deep structures that order the expression of meaning are formulated by the slow accretion of Pavlovian particularities that are not capable of being considered as general attributes.

considered as conflating dialectics hosting: 'wife – husband', 'single – married', 'respectable – common', 'wife – mistress', 'wife – sister', 'husband – brother', 'good – bad', 'Christian – heathen', 'correct – incorrect' etc. In this new reformulation of the Hegelian notion there was not just one debate happening, but rather many, with all of them conceived as being brought into play whenever any social label or institution is considered.

In many ways structural anthropology was a blind academic alley. However its rapid rise and equally rapid fall does mark a significant turning point in the story of how the semiotic equation came to be fashioned. It represents the first widely recognised utilisation of the insights gleaned by Saussure outside of the discipline of structural linguistics. As such it also marks a significant fork in the road for all practitioners of social analysis across the western world. From this point the majority of economists, legal thinkers, doctors, and the general public, would all continue to employ, adapt, and refine various positivist theoretical models that are Hegelian in nature, while Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes were about to lead another band of intrepid thinkers down a whole new theoretical path. The very same path that Mr Marx had daydreamed about so many years before.

When the French theorist Roland Barthes encountered Lévi-Strauss' new way of conceptualising social institutions it prompted him to reappraise Saussure's work. Upon doing so an idea occurred to him: an idea that has been illuminating our understanding of human communication ever since.

## Roland Barthes

> *What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined …and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality. And just as bourgeois ideology is defined by the abandonment of the name 'bourgeois' myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they were once made.*

Roland Barthes[18]

Saussure postulated that all language works in much the same manner and identified two separate yet interconnected facets of communication. He proposed that we identify what a signs function *is* through denotation, and then consider what this language function *means* connotationally. However when considered in isolation this is an obviously incomplete and reductive appreciation of language. While it does explain how cultural definitions and

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[18] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1973 155.

imperatives might be imported into a speech act, it fails to adequately describe the subtle complexity of meanings that attach to virtually every instance of signification or exposition.

If we use the word 'flag' as an exemplar once again, then we might say that Saussure had demonstrated how we go about defining the language code functions that the word 'flag' serves in the phrase 'our flag was still there'. However Saussure's explanation failed to adequately explain how this language code function is then filtered through the reader's cultural knowledge to turn the language code meaning (i.e. 'flag') into a cultural meanings (i.e. 'country', 'patriotism', 'morality', 'perseverance' etc.).

The brilliant idea at the heart of Roland Barthes formulation of the semiotic equation was the realisation that Saussure and the structural anthropologists had been contemplating just a small part of what is actually a much larger semiotic dynamic. Whereas Lévi-Strauss had been examining material culture in a search for traces of an underlying organising principle, the genius of Barthes was to return to the very same equation proposed by Saussure and simply expand the scope of the existing explanation.

*The semiotic equation.*
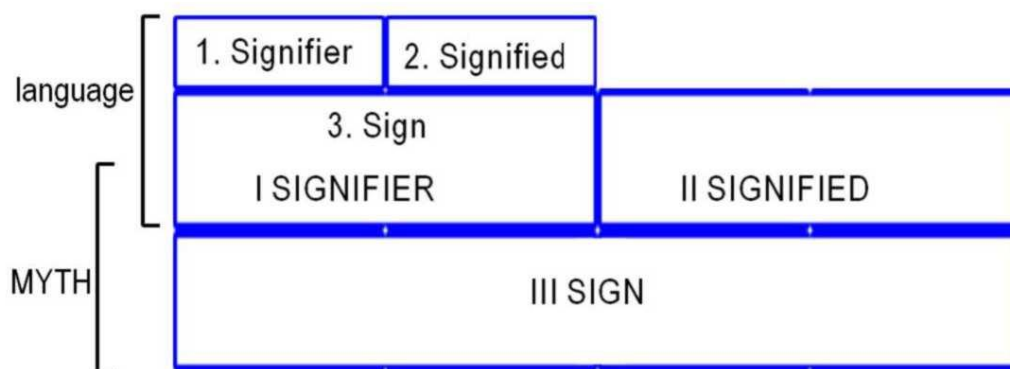


**Figure 2.** The semiotic equation.[19]

So the *semiotic equation* that Barthes first sketched out in his short treatise 'Myth Today', proposes that language incorporates (1) *denotation* flowering into (2) *connotation* with the resultant (3) *language-function* becoming a (I) signifier in a secondary social language called *myth*. In this secondary language the (I) language-function is then (II) denotationally and connotationally contextualised against the sum of the social knowledge entertained by the reader of the text, resulting in (III) a final negotiated (global) meaning.

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[19] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1973 124

Barthes proposed that as soon as a language code function has been resolved (in what has since come to be known as the first level of signification - or *language*) this fulsome language code meaning is then itself contextualised in culture using similar rational and non-rational modes of 'thinking' (in what has since come to be known as the second level of signification – or *metalanguage*).

As Barthes observed:

> *'It can be seen that in myth there are two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it), which I shall call the language-object, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system; and myth itself, which I shall call metalanguage, because it is a second language, in which one speaks about the first'.*[20]

So denotation exhausts into connotation. Then the resultant language value is transformed into social knowledge.

However this should not be entertained as describing particular discrete stages of signification passed through to generate meaning but rather is better understood as representing a theoretical appreciation of all of the factors that are influential in the generation of meaning via language that are entertained (experientially) as occurring *almost* simultaneously.

To illustrate the interrelationship of all the elements in the semiotic equation Barthes points to the instance of a pupil in a classroom being provided a literary example to illustrate a linguistic rule. The following example is based on the original but substitutes a more contemporary question.[21]

Imagine a high school pupil in an English class is asked to appreciate the sentence: *In the past there is no antibiotics.*

At once it is obvious this is not about the history of antibiotics. The student instantly concludes they are considering <u>a semiological system that is co-extensive with the language code</u>. The language object is instantly contextualized *culturally*. So the first level of signification, which is the outcome of language coda appreciation (*denotation* flowering into *connotation* equals *language value*) now becomes the first element in a metalanguage equation (*language object* contextualised in *social discourse* equals *global meaning*).

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[20] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1973 124.

[21] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1973 125.

In this instance the language value (*In the past there is no antibiotics*) proposes a metalanguage signification (*This is a grammatical example*). However *the global signification*, the intended *meaning value*, reflects neither the first nor second levels of signification but rather requires a further contextualisation of the language value culturally and subjectively (*This is an example – I am a pupil in an English class*) to arrive at an obvious proposed meaning (*You should not mix past and present tense in the one sentence*).

And it all happens, at once, in a single flash of comprehension.

## A brief introduction to the terms 'polemic' and 'discourse'.

The enhanced semiotic equation (which is soon discussed in detail) proposes that there are two distinct modalities of discrimination that are employed at each and every stage of the process of signification; 'polemical' and 'discursive' modes of discrimination.[22]

Barthes[23] describes 'denotation' as a conflation of all the non-rational elements of signification that are engaged in when a sign is being initially appraised. His use of the term fails to account for many of the aspects of denotation that were so fulsomely described by Saussure. So when he formulated his famous semiotic equation, he failed to incorporate or acknowledge many of the observations regarding denotation that had so obviously prompted many of his most significant insights.

Both of these theorists noted that (utilising their terminology) in denotation a sign is appraised *paradigmatically* as well as *syntagmatically*. In other words, in denotation, both a range of potential functions attaching to a sign are appraised as well as a range of definitional categories (words) and their associated categorical imperatives (definitions).

This implies that our language coda is arranged simultaneously in an atemporal fashion *and* a temporally constrained manner. With the process of (what Saussure termed) paradigmatic association of a category (word or concept) with a categorical imperative (a definition), being a reductive a-temporal mode of appreciation, always preceding and being accompanied by a temporally constrained and ordered contextualisation of that paradigmatic value by attention to the apparent syntagmatic (function and context) values.

In the enhanced semiotic equation Saussure's terminology is refined by referring to all the

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[22] This concept represents a novel addition to the academic literature regarding semiotic analysis.

[23] In *Mythologies*, Collins, New York. 1973.

modes of disambiguation that relate to the identification of possible *functions* that might attach to a sign (such as word order, narrative & teleological imperatives, grammar, syntax and contextual relationship) as *polemical* functions. Whereas the modes of disambiguation that relate to the identification of the range of possible *categories* (words) and associated *categorical imperatives* (definitions) are described as *discursive* functions.

It is proposed that denotational appreciation *is always paradigmatic* in that it is a process of comparing a range of potential values by reference to similarity and difference simultaneously. The enhanced semiotic equation proposes that all paradigmatic appreciation incorporates both a-temporal and reductive modes of discursive appreciation, in which physical dimension abstractions are ordered (via contrast & similarity), and subsequent, temporally constrained and ordered, polemical appreciations in which functional abstractions are ordered via word order, grammar, syntax, narrative context, personal context, and perceived function.

So these terms, *discursive* and *polemical*, refer to a contrasting suite of discriminations that are each employed during the course of paradigmatic denotational appreciation so as to assess differing facets of meaning potential. We employ (a-temporal) discursive modes of ordering and appreciation in determining what a sign 'is' (the linguistic category or linguistic categorical imperative), then we employ polemical modes of ordering in determining what a sign 'means' (the range of potential meaning trajectories articulated in the relationship of the categorical imperative or category to its possible linguistic, narrative, and social context functions (see Figure No 2.)).

These same modalities of discrimination are also evident when we consider the semiological systems which assist in disambiguating meaning when appreciating an apparent language value, as well as being of utility in typifying the ways in which formal aggregations of knowledge are arranged and described.

Signification: modes of appreciation and ordering.

**1st level: discursive *and* polemical ordering**
Denotation orders paradigmatic types discursively   -   resolves what sign 'is'
Denotation orders syntagmatic functions polemically - resolves what sign 'means'

**2nd level: discursive *and* polemical ordering but only polemical ordering apparent**
Denotation orders language value as cultural function discursively - resolves what cultural function 'is'
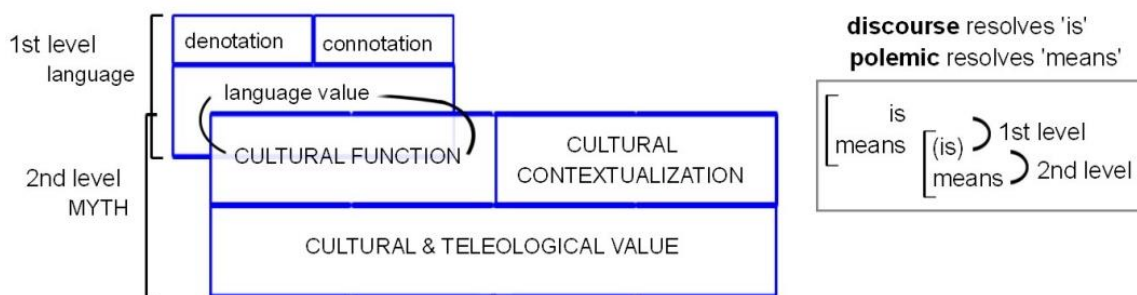Habituation resolves cultural funtion polemically - resolves what cultural funtion 'means'

1st level
language

denotation  connotation

language value

CULTURAL FUNCTION

CULTURAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

2nd level
MYTH

CULTURAL & TELEOLOGICAL VALUE

**discourse** resolves 'is'
**polemic** resolves 'means'

is
means  (is)  1st level
        means  2nd level

**Figure 3.** Signification: modes of appreciation. The assessment of a paradigm of knowledge in a discursive manner means that the elements are arranged reductively and a-temporally with reference to physical similarity and contrast (like but different in type). While ordering the same in a polemical manner means that the elements are arranged in a temporally constrained and contingent manner by reference to their language &/or cultural functions (like but different in function).

**Thinking a bit more about thinking.**

No wonder Descartes decided there had to be a god! By now many reading this work will be entertaining a similar yearning for simple explanations for complex phenomena. However much of this apparent complexity is due to problems that are inherent and particular to the study of human communications.

We don't really 'think' in any of the commonsense ways that everyone thinks we think. Nor do we like to think that the way in which we think might not be magical and personal. So when we do try and think about the way in which we think we instantly get involved in word knots. We don't have a common language which adequately describes all of the various aspects and functions of language. In fact the words that we do use (like 'thinking' and 'rational') often seem to conflate many different meanings. So as we enhance Barthes semiotic equation please excuse the occasional long sentence and the introduction of some unfamiliar terms.

Barthes' semiotic equation is supplemented by examining each particular aspect of signification and describing it in detail. Where Bathes describes denotation in general terms, the enhanced semiotic theory breaks denotation down into separate aspects that each entertain and articulate different modalities of discrimination and ordering. In this way the original semiotic equation is enhanced in describing not only how we 'think' but also how we 'know'.

So I propose a *semiotic theory of epistemology*, not an *epistemology of language*. For in a semiotic model of cognition, 'language', 'thinking', and 'knowing', are simply aspects of cognition. To talk about an 'epistemology of language' is nonsensical in semiotic terms. Language itself is how we know and how we think. Language *is* thinking, knowing, actively remembering, and reflexively forgetting, all at once. In semiotic theory there are no modes of 'thinking' or 'knowing' that are not aspects of 'language'.

So while it will certainly be demonstrated in passing that 'I think - therefore I am', I will nonetheless treat this trivial syllogistic observation with the disdain it deserves. Rather in this work I concentrate on how 'I talk and listen - therefore I am'.

## *Humans are, by definition, complicated dudes.*

We all understand from personal experience that what is often termed our 'internal monologue' is actually far more than just a *mono*logue. We spend much of our days talking to not only ourselves but also to the world in general and particular. We pass remarks to animals, plants, insects, the weather, absent friends, strangers, relatives, enemies, and particular named groups

Moreover, after not many minutes alone in any natural arcadia most of us will be silently engaging in earnest dialogue with the wind, flowing water, ourselves, or even god (or at least a vague and temporary approximation of an all powerful theistic or deistic entity). We don't just talk to the world; the world talks back.

This is not meant to suggest that we are all experiencing the torment of private demons or aural hallucinations. Rather it is a reference to that remarkable mental capacity that we all share and paradoxically call an 'internal dialogue'. Every reader will immediately comprehend what is meant by the observation that our so-called 'internal monologue' is actually multifaceted and many-voiced. We don't just talk to the world in general and particular terms, we also propose to ourselves what the world in general, and all its elements in particular, might 'think' about anything and everything that we might 'think'.

There is no escaping the blindingly obvious fact that humans are, by definition, complicated dudes.

So, because everyone already thinks that they know how we 'think' and 'know' things, in describing the fact of signification a deliberative initial process of deconstruction and close consideration is required. This is because at first appreciation 'thinking' and 'knowing' appear to be indivisible concepts. How often do you hear someone remark that 'consciousness is

indivisible'? As we shall see: this statement is palpably and demonstrably false.

So this already difficult journey is initially made even more daunting in having to spend a good deal of time dismantling the boat we have been using (a Hegelian epistemology), and then building a whole new vessel (a semiotic epistemology), even before we can set out and explore the world.

However the effort is well worth it. A semiotic understanding of language assists in appreciating not only the majesty of language but also the subtle artifice of culture.

An enhanced semiotic theory

## Purposive and reflexive ideation

If there is a potential for a cultural meaning to be evoked by a concurrence of physical shapes then humans *will* decode that meaning reflexively. Even when the approximation is vague and undeniably arbitrary we still all reflexively 'see' much the same sort of 'face' in a tree or a rock, or much the same sort of 'dragon' in the clouds. In effect every human is an out-of-control, non-stop, 'thinking' machine.

Everything we see bleeds meaning. It is born of the positivistic impulse that we call 'language'. All we need do is 'look' for long enough and a cultural meaning will *always* become apparent. Nature becomes culture. All in one incredible instantaneous flash of 'seeing' we call 'signification'.

# Enhanced semiotic equation
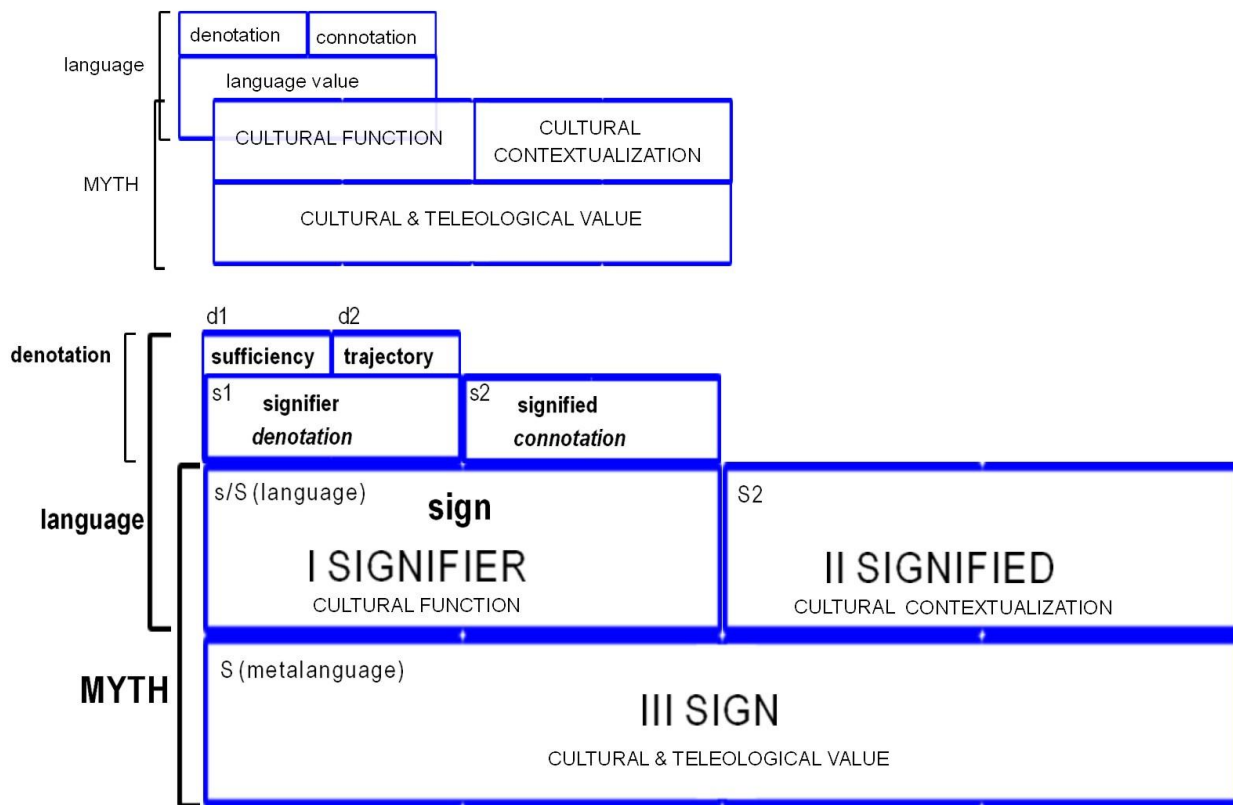


**Figure 4.** Enhanced semiotic equation.

## A positivistic process engaged reflexively

While it is possible to stare off into the distance in an unseeing manner and you can let your eyes wander over a landscape without entertaining any sort of 'thought' - human signification is a positivistic process that is engaged compulsively and reflexively, so if you want to 'not-see' then you have to 'switch-off' your 'seeing'. In other words, the default setting for the human is for our 'thinking' switch to be switched 'on'.

This is why all of our various states of 'non-thinking' are *named* states of consciousness. They are all 'abnormal'. When you are *not thinking* you are engaging in *meditation*, or *sleeping*, or you are *knocked-out, unconsciousness*, or in a *coma*. The usual state for the human is to be actively 'looking'; to engage in an eternal dialogue of disambiguation (an *internal monologue*) which sorts our perceptions into cultural meanings and then re-encodes these meanings to accord with context and a personal schemata of significance and validity.

Note that the Hegelian notion of the way in which we 'think' entirely discounts this perceptual reality. When we employ the commonsensical Hegelian model we conceive of 'thinking' as being

only about formal sorts of 'ideas'. Not the everyday 'nonsense' that floats through everyone's mind, all the time. As we noted earlier, in the Hegelian model of 'thinking', 'big ideas' joust with other 'big ideas' and the field upon which they joust just magically appears, and we all seem to magically share much the same sort of 'rule book'.

The process of *denotation* can be said to make the field blossom into existence, even as every contestant launches off into their battle of ideas. The rule book that we all share (or rather the many similar rule books that we all use) is another matter. This *predetermined schemata of significance and validity* is not born of how we 'look' at things but rather how we 'know' things (or how we sort and entertain social knowledge). As we shall explore in considering how we 'know' things, consciousness is not indivisible. There are at least two particular ways in which we 'know' things that are similar yet represent distinguishably different modes of *actively remembering*.

So denotation *discursively* defines into existence a jousting field and then *polemically* writes a rule book (and provides polite applause). So *discursive appreciation* might be described as being all about 'how we think' and *polemical appreciation* as being about 'how we know'.

**Denotation conceived of as a type of paradigmatic 'looking'**

To understand the proposed semiotic epistemology an understanding of what is meant by the term *denotation* is essential, however cultivating such an understanding can be a little difficult because this term describes all the *non-rational* aspects of language. As they are non-rational processes, the only way in which we can adequately conceptualise how these modalities of appreciation function is by recourse to allegory and metaphor, as well as by looking for echoes of how these processes work in our own conscious mind. So we commence our consideration of the modalities of denotation with a helpful allusion.

Most of us know what it looks like when you hold a mirror up to another mirror and peer into a seemingly eternal retrogression of images. If you shift the angle of the mirror you are holding then the trajectory of the images shooting off into the distance whips about wildly.

When we undertake denotation we unconsciously regard a sign in much the same way as we apprehend this retrogression of images. At once we perceive a series of possible meanings. Instantly we sort these images by bringing the ones that are most sufficient to the foreground, while at the same time we angle the glass so that the trajectory of the possible meanings matches the shape of the room in which we are standing, as well as the images in mirrors that

have preceded the one we are currently looking at.

We appraise and sort the images using *discursive* paradigmatic ordering. We adjust the trajectory using *polemical* paradigmatic ordering. However each is just another aspect of what we are 'seeing'. To think about denotation in this way - as simply how we 'look' at things - assists in comprehending a reflexive non-conscious process.

You can also identify an echo of how denotational (non-rational) paradigmatic 'remembering' works by simply examining the way in which you *consciously* compare and contrast items in a paradigm (so employing a second level a-temporal reductive analytical appreciation in a manner that is analogous to the process of denotation).

Think about 'What sort of car is the fastest?' As you run through the elements in your paradigm of 'cars' (like but similar in type and function) your attention repeatedly shies away from one definition after another, progressively discounting each as being 'like but insufficient', until such a time as a sufficiency of *what the sign isn't* resolves in your mind a fulsome definition of what the sign 'is' and then instantly, what it 'means'. *Denotation* is an analogous non-rational process.

## The two types of paradigmatic association

We will now consider how the two different modes of paradigmatic discrimination are employed in disambiguating meaning.

### *Discursive (reductive) appreciation & truetype assertions*

Discursive appreciation is two dimensional, atemporal, and reductive. It is a mode of reflexive remembering that compares and contrasts only (what are appreciated as being) physical attributes. Signs that are appreciated as being descriptive signs (i.e. describing physical 'things') we will call *truetype* signs. This term is used to indicate that a *truetype assertion* refers to concepts that are asserted to be simple 'things' in language and simple 'facts' in culture. In this instance a 'sky, a 'marriage', a 'train', a 'storm' and a 'train trip' are all 'things' in that they are accorded similar status in discrimination.

While a *truetype assertion* actually represents an arbitrary category of definition (a word) matched to an arbitrary categorical imperative (a definition) these are regarded as apparent 'things' and natural 'facts' in language and culture.

All the other signs in language are read to be *archetypal assertions*. An archetype in language is also an archetype in culture. So while a truetype assertion appears simple and natural, an archetypal assertion always allows for the possibility of artifice.

An archetype is acknowledged as a changeable thing. This reflects our everyday experience of 'ideas' and 'concepts' as being stable but mutable. They can and do change and are subject to manipulation. However a truetype assertion is another matter. After all, while everyone knows that ideas are changeable: a rock is just a rock - isn't it?

So while we 'look' at signs discursively - we 'read' polemically. The movement might be described as one from an atemporal *recognition of category* and associated categorical imperative (atemporal discursive appreciation) to a temporally contextualised *appreciation of the functions* displayed by the sign (temporally contingent polemical appraisal).

In this manner functional signs (archetypes) are resolved only after the discursive aspects of a sentence have been identified. 'Rock' and 'bird' are first discursively identified as 'things'. Then polemically the shape and order of the words, and other apparent word functions (i.e. narrative, personal, ideological, and social context) resolves the signs for 'throw', 'the', and 'at' only as precursors to a global realisation.

In this way archetypal signifiers are usually recognised and utilised solely as aspects of semiological potential - they are utilised and discarded without ever achieving conscious appraisal The actual linguistic category represented by the archetype, and its alibi of definition, are rarely ever apparent, appreciated, or realised as independent appreciable values during the course of disambiguating meaning from a narrative (reading, watching, or listening).

*Polemical (syntagmatic & functional) appreciation & archetypal assertions*

Polemical appreciation is a multi-dimensional, associative process. It is temporally contingent (i.e. the ordering does pay attention to and employ temporal dimensions of ordering). At the level of language it is concerned with what words and sentences 'mean' (their individual and contextual functions). At the level of metalanguage it is concerned with ordering the validity, interrelationships, priorities and significance of ideas (archetypes) and facts (cultural facts).

A *polemically implicated* sign is one read as describing the relationships between objects or as representing a non-material concept (an *archetype in language*) and so will be entertained as a cultural archetype. Archetypal assertions therefore represent everything in language and culture that is not discursively apparent, be it a concept (up), a function (rocketing), a linguistic function (the), a relationship (adjacent), an idea (greener), or grammatical, syntactical, narrative, ideological, teleological, word order, or colour implications.

So where a discursive paradigm appreciates differences in type, a polemical paradigm

appreciates differences in function. Where a discursive paradigm draws a picture of 'what' type of 'thing' is being talked about, polemical appreciation then colours in and animates the picture by providing it with a narrative and ideological trajectory in both language and culture.

**Table 2.** Two types of paradigmatic association.

| | | | PARADIGM TYPE | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | | **DEFINITIONAL - DISCURSIVE** APPRECIATES PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES ATEMPORAL, TWO DIMENSIONAL & REDUCTIVE | **SYNTAGMATIC - POLEMICAL** APPRECIATES FUNCTIONAL ATTRIBUTES TEMPORALLY ORDERED, MULTIDIMENSIONAL & ASSOCIATIVE |
| **LANGUAGE** | **1ST ASPECT** REFLEXIVE OBSCURED NONRATIONAL | **UNCONSCIOUS** | **objectifies category value** archetype of **definition** *open paradigm – partial value* > defines truetypes in language | |
| | **2ND ASPECT** REFLEXIVE APPARENT NONRATIONAL | | | **contextualises category value** archetype of **cognition** *closed paradigm – fulsome value* > defines archetypes in language |
| **METALANGUAGE** | **3RD ASPECT** REFLEXIVE OBSURED NONRATIONAL | | **objectifies language value** apparent fact of **definition** *closed paradigm – fulsome value* >> proposes cultural facts in metalanguage | |
| | **4TH ASPECT** REFLEXIVE APPARENT SEMIRATIONAL | **SEMI CONCSIOUS** | | **contextualises language value** apparent fact of **cognition** *open paradigm – partial value* >> proposes archetypes in metalanguage |

In summary:

**At the first level of signification**

In objectifying categories and categorical imperatives as language:

- We discursively delimit (objectify) a paradigm of possible categories (signs) and their associated categorical imperatives (definitions) by identifying descriptive elements (truetype signs).

- Then we polemically contextualise identified truetype meanings to resolve

the language value of identified truetype and remaining archetypal assertions.

Realising an 'apparent language value'.

## At the second level of signification

In objectifying truetype and archetypal language values as culture:

- Reflexively we polemically re-regard a fulsome language value in a discursive manner (being 'objectification'), thus proposing truetype assertions as cultural facts and archetypal assertions as cultural archetypes.
- Then semi-consciously and reflexively we discursively and polemically re-contextualise cultural facts and archetypal assertions.

So realising a 'global meaning'.

## Polemical appreciation in reading

Let's consider once more the word *flag* in the sentence 'our flag was still there'. The word *flag* and the discursive paradigm of *flags* only inform the way in which we read this sentence in an indirect manner. The paradigmatic (language code) *type* meanings attaching to all the words in this sentence are entirely bypassed because the 'word form' of the sentence immediately proposes a best probable reading.

We read 'our flag was still there' yet instantly recognise a meta-sign. (*This is a line from the US National Anthem*). Discursive recognition of this meta-sign at once forces a polemical contextualisation and then re-contextualisation of the meta-sign. (*What might a line from the US National Anthem mean?*) (*How might this be employed as an example in a paper about how we use language?*).

So meaning *trajectories* are implicated by the meta-sign, not just bare literal meanings. Immediately we know to look for how this phrase might be connected with 'country', 'patriotism', 'morality', 'perseverance' etc. We are not looking for these actual things - just potential connections. We also know that this is a sentence being highlighted in a story about language, so we are also looking for how our looking for these things might serve to illustrate some particular point about our utilisation of language. So polemical appreciation often implicates and then ascribes meanings to words and sentences that are far more than just the sum of a few words.

It is also polemical appreciation that assists when we fail to recognise a word. In most instances the context in which a word appears allows for enough of a trajectory of meaning to be imputed

that we can simply 'blip' over it. We cannot discursively ascribe a particular 'type' content, but we can polemically discern and so assign a likely trajectory of meaning (a function). Usually this is more than sufficient as the unrecognised term is just a minor element in a much larger narrative.

Thus the 'meaning' of a word in language (the first level of signification) is conditioned not only by its utility as a linguistic referent (i.e. its dictionary definition) but also by its semiological facility to mediate language and cultural meanings (i.e. in the first and second levels of signification). In this way it can be demonstrated that any act of signification ('thinking') must be considered in a holistic sense. It all happens almost at once, all the time, in a rolling series of significations where each aspect of language assists all other aspects of language in disambiguating meaning in a manner that is entertained experientially as occurring in an (almost) instantaneous and indivisible fashion.

## Four aspects of signification

*Aspects of signification.*

| Aspect | Rationality | Function | Immanence |
|---|---|---|---|
| **LANGUAGE - Language code - rendering categories and categorical imperatives as language** | | | |
| **1** | **Discursive objectification (unconsciously)** <br><br> *Discursively identify categories (signs) and associated categorical imperatives (definitions) as truetype assertions.* | **contrast possible sign types – truetype assertions identified** | *Sign objectified as language. Provides archetype of definition.* |
| **2** | **Polemical via paradigmatic (unconsciously)** <br><br> *Polemically contextualise identified truetype (category) signs so resolving truetype signs and archetypes in language.* | **contextualise possible sign meanings – archetypal and truetype assertions realised in language** | *Sign articulated as language. Provides alibi of definition.* |
| **CULTURE – Language objectification - rendering truetype and archetypal language values as culture** | | | |
| **3** | **Discursive objectification (reflexively)** <br><br> *Discursively objectify truetype (category) and archetypal assertions (functional) in language as cultural facts and cultural archetypes* | **Objectify category and language values** | *Language objectified as culture. Provides archetype of 'reasoning'* |
| **4** | **Polemical via paradigmatic (semi-consciously and consciously)** | **contextualisation renders language values as articulations of cultural facts and cultural archetypes** | *Language articulated as culture. Provides alibi of 'reasoning'.* |

> *Semi-consciously and consciously polemically and associatively contextualise cultural facts and cultural archetypes.*

**The 3rd aspect of signification (like the 1st) is obscured.**

**Polemical appreciation (2nd and 4th aspects) always provide the apparent 'meanings' in signification.**

**Polemical objectification (the 2nd and 4th aspects) asserts itself as being a simple process of discursive definition (the 1st aspect) or discursive description (the 3rd aspect). So while the process of attaching a definition to a word (the 1st aspect) is reflexive and unconscious, the 2nd aspect asserts that this is a rational and mediated process of definition. And while the process of discursively objectifying truetypes and archetypes as cultural facts and cultural archetypes (the 3rd aspect) is reflexive and unconscious, the 4th aspect asserts that this is a rational and mediated process.**

*Aspect 1. Discursive appraisal.*

In discursively *decoding* meanings we associate words with definitions, and in discursively *encoding* meanings we associate definitions with words. We use exactly the same reductive atemporal process modality to both encode and decode meanings, the only difference being a reversal in the polarity of appreciation. Then regardless of whether or not we are encoding or decoding we instantly (polemically) contextualise this initial discursive assessment (in a 2nd aspect signification).

This is why there is a tiny but discernible pause as we 'summon our ideas' at the commencement of any act of enunciation, and also why there are periodic pauses in every exposition as we decide on what we want to say next and how we want to say it. The *what* of reading and writing is thus defined in a discursive manner and the *how* subsequently in a polemical manner.

So we employ an initial stutter of 1st aspect/2nd aspect conjugations every time we appreciate what is being said or when we are about to say something. We flick between the *what*, of what is being said (identifying truetype descriptive assertions), and the *meaning* of what is being said (resolving archetypal functional utility and context assertions). We do this several times in every moment of 'reading' or 'composition'.

As this aspect of signification is entertained (in polemical retrospection) as being just a simple matter of matching literal definitions with matching words, or vice-versa, this aspect of language functions as our *archetype for 'definition'*.

## Aspect 2. Polemical appraisal.

This 2nd aspect of denotational signification is the process of polemically contextualising truetype assertions (which can be signs and meta-signs) in *language*. This process animates all of the signs that are left to be 'read' (the remaining archetypal assertions). So it might observed that we only *identify* truetype assertions in the first aspect of signification because we ascribe meaning to *all* of the assertions (truetype and archetypal alike) in contextualising truetype assertions.

This movement in language code (aspect 1- aspect 2) was described earlier as being from identification of type to appraisal of function.

So where the 1st aspect of signification is about recognising 'facts', the 2nd aspect is about resolving the apparent interrelationship of facts and archetypes in context.

The 2nd aspect of signification always proposes an obvious 'language value' attaching to each word and each proposition. This is the first meaning 'that pops into your head'. This initial 'understanding' is an *apparent language value*. When you contemplate an apparent language value and associate it with a word or a definition, then you are identifying an *alibi of definition*.

The *apparent language value* and its matching *alibi of definition* represent two very different values. The *apparent value* is the fulsome meaning of a word being read in context (being a combination of category, categorical imperative, and narrative context) whereas an *alibi of definition* is a simple reductionist appreciation of what we perceive to be a categorical imperative (a definition) and an associated category of meaning (a sign).

However note that both the apparent meaning and its alibi of definition are actually complex epistemological artefacts masquerading as simple aspects of language.

## Aspect 3. Discursive re-appraisal in metalanguage (objectification of language as culture).

It is this third aspect of denotation that seamlessly referees many of the apparent epistemological incongruities proposed by 'language'. It is here that 'culture' is created in transforming truetype and archetypal assertions into cultural facts and cultural archetypes. This is achieved by objectifying a polemically fulsome language value as a discursive element in 'culture'.

*Avoiding apparent and insurmountable epistemological absurdity.*

The re-regarding of a language value as a cultural function is both rationally inexplicable and compulsively entertained, all at once, enabling us to knit together a 'normality' within which we

might operate. We call this 'our culture' and 'our culture' is a truly remarkable place. It is a realm where *anything* can and might be 'true'. It is a relativistic world where anything an individual 'thinks' is just as important as any famous treatise. It is a world where 'truthiness' and the 'vibe' are often more significant than science or probability. In other words; our consciousness is a (4th aspect) *polemically entertained retrospective abstraction*.

Our vision of 'culture' is the product of a reflexive and reductionist objectification of language (aspect 3). Here truetype and archetypal assertions are seamlessly transformed into facts and ideas. And while many of us entertain a commonsense belief that not everything described in literature is 'true', we do not reflexively apply the same yardstick to 'culture'. After all, it is apparent that a 'rock' exists in the natural world. There is a valid and substantial reality to the *cultural fact* that we call a 'rock'. We can bend down and pick up a 'rock'. So to conceive of a 'rock' as being only a conflation of an arbitrary cultural category and a definition, with further arbitrary cultural functions tacked-on, seems absurd. The apparent fact of a 'rock' as it is entertained polemically in the hand obviates any possibility of cognitive dissention. We commonsensically believe that 'a rock is just a rock'.

So in reflexively objectifying a language value as a cultural arbitrator we seamlessly turn from resolving what signs *mean in language*, to *manipulating apparent facts and archetypes in culture*. The artifice of culture is such that this transformation is instantly obfuscated by the apparent fact of 'culture'. We are able to unconsciously objectify language values and cultural concepts and consider both in the 'third person' (and the fourth, fifth, and sixth person), and have this whole process masked from our conscious attention, because if it were not masked from our consciousness the potential utilities of 'culture' would simply never be realised; every moment of cultural refection would be choked with apparent and insurmountable epistemological absurdity.

*Culture as an objectification of literature.*
In objectifying language as 'culture' we assume all the same polemical imperatives that are so fulsomely expressed in language, and then abstract these as facts, commonsense, social mores and institutions in 'culture'. So just like in literature, in culture *anything* can happen.

In our cultural realm *meaning* always initially trumps logicality or probability. Polemical appreciation is reflexively concerned with ordering and so remains largely unconcerned with matters like science, probability, or logical validity, unless these aspects of ordering are consciously privileged in a process of 4th aspect retrospection.

And while culture is an objectification of literature, our social 'commonsense' tells us that exactly the opposite is true. Literature is generally conceived as being *a product of culture*; we all talk as if there is a culture machine somewhere in the bowels of every big city, spewing out great works of art, literature, and the occasional good television program.

*Multidimensional contextualisation = lots of meanings and lots of different 'voices'*

So in *discursive appreciation* we ascertain (in a reductive two dimensional reflexive manner) then in *polemical appreciation* we objectify (in a multidimensional, constructive, inferential, suppositional, presumptive, and presuppositional manner). Sometimes this happens all at once. So the inside of our heads can get a bit crowded.

Just as literature is 'many voiced' – so our objectification of literature promotes the appreciation of many voices. In polemical abstraction we contextualise not only potential language and cultural values, we also reify *empathetic* values (assessments of likely ways of reacting and 'feeling' about social information). This aspect of polemical ordering demonstrates unequivocally that our appreciation of culture is largely an objectification of language code dynamics.

We habitually ascribe likely empathetic reactions to different classes of people and often entertain an internal dialogue in which different empathetic viewpoints are made substantial in narrative form. ('The wife won't like it; even if it does please the boss.')

In this way we all not only assert that we know what our own opinion is (which is understandable) but we also habitually assert that we 'know' what all sorts of other people will likely 'feel' about something. These are polemical inferences that reflect our contextualising of *language dynamics* as *cultural dynamics*. We encode in literature, and read literature, as expressing a range of views being entertained and expressed by many different players. So we entertain the same dynamic of consideration whenever we are polemically ordering language values as culture. We anticipate a number of different but equally valid 'truth's' to be evident regarding any literary or cultural proposition. (What *I* think. What *Joe* will likely think. What *my kids* will likely think. What *the church* would think. What *the boss* would think. etc.).

While these are 4th aspect polemical abstractions they are modelled on 2nd level abstractions and employ almost the same cognitive modalities. I say 'almost' because while a polemical abstraction in language always proposes a fulsome apparent meaning, this is not the case for polemical abstractions in culture. Where a polemical abstraction in language (an apparent

language value) is always fulsome and 'complete', the same in culture (the corresponding evident cultural value) is always approximate, passing, and partial.

So experiential reality will always fail to conform to the high standards set in literature; this explains why polemical reasoning regarding culture is so often validated by reference to literature. ('As the *good book* says…', 'According to Pliny…', 'I read somewhere…'.)

*The epistemological two-step*

In the 3rd aspect of signification we objectify language and then in the 4th aspect we consider it as a separate entity (culture). We call our personal voice 'consciousness' and personifications of language 'the social discourse' (or 'the media', or 'the public square, or the 'gossip of the town', etc). What we refer to using all these phrases are simply different aspects of the objectification of language.

When we animate one of these objectifications, in the first person, we call this an 'internal monologue'. In effect this is just a personification of language that we use to contextualise and observe our own use of language.  So an 'internal monologue' is not 'the other' (although it certainly can empathetically mimic or mock the voice of an 'other) rather it is an objectification and ongoing contextualisation of our own use of language. It is a presupposition of an 'other', a 'them', a 'me', a 'you', and as many other personifications in language as might be implicated or needed in any given cultural context.

So instead of living in a world of rock, water, and fire, we generate our own similitude in which anything is possible. We objectify language and simultaneously and reflexively repudiate this objectification. We propose a world of 'culture', and then talk to this personification and many other aspects of 'culture', as if they were sentient beings. In semiotic terms we do 'hear' voices. We all entertain an apparent meaning in language, and then experience instant echoes of cultural meaning. We all engage in an internal dialogue with the world in general and all of the elements within.

Objectification and personification is thus the epistemological two-step by which the field upon which we joust is created. A common set of categories and definitions are presumed. Temporal, teleological, and narrative cohesion is imputed. The objectification of language seamlessly presupposes that the rationale imposed in language is actually that of the physical world. Then it disguises this hubris by asserting that language is just a simple description of the physical world.

A moment of quiet consideration will enable any one of us to identify at least a dozen utterly illogical or improbable things that we don't believe but we know that many other people believe, and sometimes with deep sincerity. However we also know that this list will vary with every person asked. So it might be said that everyone simultaneously entertains at least two explanations for everything (an apparent meaning and its alibi) yet none of these explanations need be scientifically valid or at all probable. We do not expect culture to be scientifically or probabilistically 'rational'. We simply expect and believe that 'culture' will display recognisable and comprehensible modalities of ordering.

This is a demonstration that experientially we initially order our expectations in culture in a polemical rather than a discursive fashion. However this is not to say that we are all, perforce, destined to wander forever in a polemically ordained insane asylum.

This is because acknowledging that culture is an artifice is both required and refuted, all at once. We are all 'rational' beings, so we all employ two modalities of 'knowing' at once. Rationality is an endless cycle of *ascertain*, then *appraise, ascertain*, then *appraise*. Ascertain (discursive appreciation), then appraise (polemical assessment). Ad infinitum.

So of necessity we all 'know', at one and the same time, that while there are no 'things' in culture (just definitions and concepts), culture remains simply jam-packed with 'things'. We all know that rocks, trees, grass, hills, and streams exist, even if we also acknowledge that these words conflate many similar but different categories of physical objects and their proposed attributes.

In this manner we all entertain information as simultaneously representing both an arbitrary definition *and* a cultural fact or archetype. With this contemplation constituting a process of (4th aspect) *polemical retrospection* as all consciously entertained schema of disambiguation are, by their very nature, polemically ordered.

*The 3rd aspect discontinuity*
While the act of signification is entertained holistically it is actually a contingent and falteringly congruent process. If we closely examine the manner in which we entertain signification we can all identify an apparent but slight discontinuity. We resolve a language value which has an apparent 'meaning' then this meaning is instantly transformed into a cultural function which prompts a secondary flood of cultural 'meanings'. So while we actually think in a series of alternating cycles of '*is – means – is – means – is – means…..'*. As discursive objectification is not a process that is apparent, we experience signification as a series of alternating cycles of '*it*

*means –means – it means –means– it means –means …..'.*

This reality can be appreciated by simply pondering on the manner in which we all experience 'signification'. We resolve a fulsome language value which then instantly seems to evoke echoe s of cultural meaning. When we apprehend the phrase 'our flag was still there' we are provided with an already fulsome 'meaning' on first apprehension, however at once further contextualisation's (of *country, patriotism, morality, perseverance* etc.) echo as a series of slightly discontinuous cultural evocations (semiological articulations) that frame and enhance the original (apparent language) meaning.

Why the reality of *'is – means – is - means'* is actually experienced as '*it means – means*' is explained by reference to what elements of signification are available for conscious appraisal. We can all readily understand the idea of (polemically) disambiguating a *language value* (as we all know what a 'definition' is) and we can all readily identify the fact that we do undertake some form of 'defining of words' whenever we 'read'. Yet while we all also experience echoes of cultural meaning, just how this secondary congress of meanings might be evoked by a sign is not as readily comprehensible, so we commonsensically attribute these evocations of meaning to being just mere aspects of the literal (language code) definitions we all share. So we all believe in apparent meanings and their alibis of definition, however any further disambiguation of how we come to understand a 'rock' to be a rock, or 'marriage' to be a 'cultural institution' requires a process of deconstructive structural appreciation.

If it can be named and touched it is objectified as being a 'cultural fact' - and looking back (considering this in polemical retrospection) always *feels* irrational. This is why discursive artefacts in culture are commonsensically appraised as representing natural categories.

*Intuition.*

When someone says they 'threw a rock at a bird' then you might ask 'what sort of bird?' but you would rarely ask 'what sort of rock'? In using language we all employ apparently natural categories in this Kantian fashion. We provide just as much of a conflation of definitional distinction as is required to provide a sufficiency of meaning. While knowing what sort of bird a rock is being thrown at may supplement the cultural meanings available (the global signification), information about what sort of rock does little to enhance the cultural function of our 'rock'. It is received and entertained as being an uncomplicated natural category.

So asking 'what sort of rock' feels nonsensical. This is because it is a counter-intuitive consideration. The process of weighing up what 'categories of knowing' are likely to be

appropriate and what are not *is* the process of intuition. Deconstructing natural categories is a matter of re-regarding them as arbitrary abstractions, and so represents a process of counter-intuition.

*God.*

While a simple shift from an atemporal and discursive appreciation of language, to a multidimensional polemical one, might not seem much in evolutionary terms, this is the 'great leap forward' that marks the likely division between earlier hominids and the genus *homo*. For many long millennia our ancestral forebears lived in a world where there was only me and you. As soon as we began disambiguating temporal, relational *and empathetic* meanings using 'language', and then began assimilating these modalities of differentiation to our unconscious denotational 'looking' at signs, then 'language objectified' became 'culture personified'. So hominid became Harry.

The same function that enables us to empathise with 'what the boss thinks' is the same as that used to understand 'what the stone idol thinks'. In this way anthropomorphism is just a matter of anchoring a personified objectification of language to a particular object (or place, or event, etc).

In this aspect of signification we normalise an epistemological reality in which there are not only other people in the world, but where there are also *sentient* bodies of knowledge 'out there' and voices 'inside my head'. So it just 'makes sense' that even as we are the author of our own language acts, so God must be the author of all these other conversations. And the apparent fact of a voice within, with which we can and often do conduct conversations, thus proposes the existence an omniscient god, with a belief in an omnipotent *and* omniscient being just one abstraction away.

### Aspect 4. Polemical re-appraisal in metalanguage.

This fourth aspect of signification is best described as being a semi-conscious modality of rationality that is conditioned by habituation. In language meanings are bounded, fulsome, and alibis of definition are always apparent and seemingly sufficient, whereas in metalanguage the potential significations available are endless so the semiconscious process of automatic appraisal and reflexive re-appraisal is often engaged time and time again before there is a diminution in the range of new meanings that are evoked. We call this 'daydreaming' or 'thinking'.

As noted, the third aspect of denotation is obscured. In the 4th aspect, a language value that is initially asserted and received as a simple and apparent meaning in language, is then instantly accompanied by echoes of further possible cultural implications. Our standing aside from the language, and our appraisal of language from the outside, is immediately masked by a ready and apparent language value, an equally available alibi of definition, and a series of apparent and seemingly natural cultural articulations that reify these linguistic assertions as simple and apparent cultural descriptions.

However these secondary evocations are never quite equal to, or as seemingly as sufficient as, the initial language value being considered. This is due to the initial language value being perfectly and fulsomely explained by its alibi of definition, whereas a cultural fact or a cultural archetype never describes or explains culture as adequately or completely.

So while we tell ourselves that we use these *archetypes of definition* (i.e. definitions and their associated categorical imperatives) to explain how we use language, the reality is that they are generated mainly so as to assist in masking the epistemological absurdities that are occasioned by the objectification of language as a description of culture.

*The polemically habituated and the discursively habituated.*
Habituation is the principal factor at play in the fourth aspect of signification. While *the outcome* (globally) of all signification is asserted and entertained in a polemical fashion, many educated humans now employ self-consciously constrained modes of polemical re-appraisal. This modality of polemical re-appraisal refutes the utility of most apparent polemical connections by employing a 4th aspect schema of disambiguation which is discursive in doctrine even though it is (perforce) entertained in a polemical manner.

So although we all 'think' polemically (as this is the only mode of conscious rationality available) for many people their mode of 4th aspect polemical ordering now self-consciously privileges discursively ordered and constrained abstractions. In other words they order their 4th aspect polemical abstractions by reference to not only linguistic and relational utilities but also with regard to logical consistency, scientific observation and its expression as doctrine, as well as assessments of probability. We call this modern schema of disambiguation 'scientific thinking' and the habituation that encourages this habit a 'science-based education'. However it is also obvious that education implicates not only discursive schemata of disambiguation. A majority of educational institutions still employ modes of education that privilege various forms of polemical abstraction. These might be described as forms of 'theocratic education'.

So while the majority of the worlds population still continue to employ primarily polemical modes of understanding, and continue to be educated and educate their children in a theocratic manner, a small segment of the worlds population now do their best to temper the habits of our runaway thinking machine by consciously sorting the polemical assertions that are the artefacts of language in accord with logical, scientific, and probabilistic criteria.

These two groups might be differentiated by describing them as the *polemically habituated* and the *discursively habituated.*

### **Discourse & Polemic – typifying social forms.**

We might also typify our formal modes of ordering and appreciating knowledge by whether or not they accord with either discursive or polemical imperatives of ordering. We will consider these formal corporate aggregations of knowledge by reference to the explicit and implicit rules by which they order the information they entertain and mediate.

*Corporately entertained discourse.*

A discourse might be typified as being a category for entertaining knowledge which explicitly asserts that it is a logically ordered mode of entertaining knowledge which entertains only rational modes of rhetoric (argumentative rhetoric). Anthropology, sociology, biology, palaeontology, geology, etc. are all entertained most of the time in the form of an academic discourse.[24]

All the information within a discursive rhetoric of knowledge is explicitly asserted to be arranged by reference to all the other information that is contained within the same discourse, in a particularised and rational manner.

Both discursive and polemical ordered modes of entertaining knowledge entertain doctrinal rules stipulating the way in which information should be ordered. However in discourse the doctrinal rules are not only subject to change but are expected to change over time as discursively ordered congresses of knowledge are asserted to be self-evidently articulations of scientific rationale and logic.

Discursive modes of entertaining knowledge might also be described as being temporally

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[24] We also usually *conceive* of the media and all of our news and social discussions as employing a discursive form of rhetoric however this is a significant aspect of an arena of discussion which is both polemically and discursively ordered in turn, with each form of representation serving particular utilities. As 'the media' is a special case, and is not *a formal mode* of appreciating and organising information, it will not be considered here.

circumscribed in that all the information contained with the discourse is considered to be correct only at a particular point in time, whereas in a polemically ordered congress of knowledge the information being entertained is represented as being eternally, apparently, and implicitly correct.

Discursive modes of entertaining knowledge are usually employed to define what is and is not and what might and might not be. (As opposed to what is and is not and what should and should not be.) This is because a discourse of knowledge asserts that the information entertained is either rational, irrational, probable, or improbable (as opposed to right or wrong).

In this way a discourse of knowledge asserts that the information is amoral but just. This is because rather than employing an eternal morality, it invokes ethics. A discourse asserts that it is ethically coherent because it is rationally ordered (with the assertion of rationality being an assertion of logical validity, scientific coherence and conformity, and probabilistic reasonableness.)

### *Corporately entertained polemic.*

A polemically ordered congress of knowledge is a modality of entertaining and ordering knowledge which asserts that it is an implicitly and eternally valid mode of entertaining knowledge. A polemic of knowledge entertains a purposive mode of rhetoric (i.e. it employs dogmatic rhetoric) and articulates ideologies of meaning. Feminism, liberalism, humanism, socialism, communism, capitalism, Christianity, Buddhism, the Law, economics, and medicine (etc.) are all usually entertained in the form of a polemic of knowledge.

A polemic is positivistic and purposive in that it is self-referentially replete and forcibly orientates both enunciation and text doctrinally and morally. All the information within a polemic is arranged to accord with explicitly or implicitly defined rules which specify if information is right or wrong. In other words the information within a polemic is arranged with reference to an overarching doctrine of morality as well as with regard to particular doctrinal impositions.

Polemical statements implicitly assert that they are morally coherent and so eternally correct. A polemic of knowledge is thereby distinguished by its orientating the holder of this 'true' knowledge to all other classes of people and aspects of society.

While polemical modes of entertaining knowledge are here artificially contrasted with discursive modes of entertaining knowledge, even people who might wish to profess that they

only ever employ discursive modes of entertaining knowledge actually 'think' polemically and so, of necessity, employ polemical assertions all the time. This knee-jerk habit is simply an artefact of 'thinking'.

Hidden away within our implicitly entertained cultural presuppositions are vast arrays of polemical assertions that are always yearning for articulation. Assertions we often call 'commonsensical knowledge' or 'the ordinary'.

<u>Insights arising from a semiotic view of signification</u>

## *The Tyranny of the Ordinary.*

> *[We are] steeped in [the] anonymous ideology [of consumption]: our press, our films, our theatre, our pulp literature, our rituals, our Justice, our diplomacy, our conversations, our remarks about the weather, a murder trial, a touching wedding, the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear…*

Roland Barthes.[25]

In our digital age there are simply oodles of things to know, ways to know things, and snazzy gizmos to play with along the way. So sometimes hours of furious activity are devoted to simply becoming informed and being informative.

Sometimes we do three things at once brilliantly, but more often we do a dozen things adequately; because time is precious and there is so much to do. Multitasking *is* modern living. We knit together newly negotiated inferences at a furious rate, continually juggling and switching modality, topic, and activity; we talk on the phone, listen to the radio, surf the net, talk with the passing throng, pat the cat – whilst researching, writing, arguing, blogging, manipulating graphics, playing solitaire, writing essays, reading papers, watching videos, etc.

So a deluge of mythology overwhelms our senses at every turn, all apparently ordinary and so largely unconsidered. But only largely. Despite the agency occurring within the periphery of consciousness this deluge of information does have a powerful normative effect as ideology is most successfully imposed where it is seamlessly consumed - where it is packaged as and regarded as 'ordinary,' and so unremarkable.

Much of the power of this depoliticised speech to influence lies in its deceptive ordinariness. Ordinariness banishes and extinguishes contingencies. The 'ordinary' seamlessly blends the will of the state, the corporation, and the hegemony, with available desire. The ordinary clothes political machination and ideological dictate in mythical drag.

## *Naturalisation: manufacturing the ordinary*

Denotation is a non-rational facility in which a reflexive and associative facility provides a material object or an idea with a label. This label is an element of the language coda and represents an arbitrary association of a sign with a culturally relevant definitional value. Our linguistic coda is made up of thousands of particular definitional elements (letters words, signs

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[25] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1973 152.

& meta-signs) and each has a distinct and particular etymology. So the language coda can be described as being an artificial cultural artefact.

However it is a coda supporting two distinct and concomitant facilities. It is employed paradigmatically in denotation, and thence associatively and semi-rationally in connotation. The rules of the language coda are reified implicitly in denotational association and thence implicitly and explicitly in exposition or signification. That the language coda is entertained in non-rational associative and semi-rational connotative terms simultaneously is significant.

Denotation is an arbitrary value negotiated in a non-rational associative and reflexive manner right at the commencement of any act of exposition or signification. A (category) label seems to erupt into consciousness. Thus this label, although it is a cultural category, asserts itself as a natural category, and so the resultant language object also asserts that instead of being a cultural artefact it is a natural fact. So 'wife' is easiest conceptualised as a natural category for women, and 'marriage' conceptualised as a natural fact. To think of these as being arbitrary cultural categories implicates the need for schemata of disambiguation to be employed retrospectively, which is a counter-intuitive modality of appreciation that is largely foreign to those who employ modalities of purposive and positivistic reasoning (namely every human alive).

This assertion - that the label attaching to a denotation is a natural category - and the corollary assertion - that the resultant language object is a natural fact - are assertions of *naturalisation*. This process of naturalisation acts to obscure the impositions of political power by equating cultural actions with natural phenomena. It acts as a bulwark of conservatism as this aspect of reflexive semiological disambiguation presents institutions and actors as representative of cultural facts and natural categories.

*The alibi of naturalization*
Discursive denotation is fulfilled with a sufficiency of type definition while polemical denotation is fulfilled with a sufficiency of function and meaning trajectory. So the initial meaning proposed by most signs will instantly preclude the vast majority of potential 'meanings' from being realised as the categories of meaning which are not sufficient will never be implicated or employed.

The only ordering considered in this initial identification and contextualization of a sign is the prior sufficiency of paradigms of type and function in ascribing meaning (as utility dictates

sufficiency in this instance) not the *quality* of that sufficiency.

It is important to note that paradigmatic choice is implicated and forced (associative and reflexive) rather than consciously discovered and thence negotiated. In this way a paradigm is always apparently sufficient to the information being entertained as sufficiency of definition is the rationale being engaged and employed in both discursive and polemical modes of denotation.

So an entertained paradigmatic value will always be (initially) entirely sufficient to its associated semiotic utility (as subjectively entertained). *So language explains language in a manner that is always initially received and entertained as being complete and sufficient*.

This is significant for the process of *naturalization*. The *it* of the signification might be described as the *apparent* element of the signification. That the *it* always anchors a second level of signification (i.e. *it means*) is seemingly refuted by the definitional (discursive) facets of the first level of signification. This is why a semiotician will remark that the denotation is standing as an *alibi* for a connotation. Thus the flag is an alibi for nationalism, the coin an alibi for economy, and a ring an alibi for marriage.

Thus the term *alibi of naturalization* refers to an implicit inference of functional and descriptive sufficiency that is displayed by a sign in such a way that the cultural arbitration involved (i.e. via the arbitrariness of definitional categories or relative to the substrate of semiological systems implicated) is largely unavailable for appreciation.

So the arbitrariness of categories and the fact of semiological disambiguation is occluded by the imperatives and urgencies that accompany every instance of signification. In most instances, rather than acknowledge the arbitrary elements of signification (as these require a counter-intuitive and structural re-appraisal) the existence of arbitrariness is simply refuted by recourse to assertions of naïve rationality and/or dissembling (via corollary, metaphor, contrast, syllogism, deduction, inference, etc) and the generation of secondary rationalities. These secondary rationalities are described as *mythologies*.

Identifying instances of primary irrationality or arbitrariness in our use of language is known as the *politicizing of mythology*. On the flip side – the generation of secondary rationalities (dissembling) such as is employed to excuse or dismiss arbitrariness of definition or the fact of semiological disambiguation might be described as a process of *de-politicization or mythologizing*.

Every functional member of our society, whether or not they are aware of it, has a good working knowledge of how to employ a great many aspects of the dominant liberal epistemology. The 'common-sense' of our society is a liberal common-sense.

Our brief consideration of the liberal epistemology as a meta-discourse will commence with a representative description of 'liberal humanism and democracy' drawn from an introductory text designed for students undertaking Cultural Studies.

> *The political philosophy of liberalism developed in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Essentially liberalism (being liberal or free) emphasises the dignity of the individual, individual rights and freedoms. Humanism is an ethical philosophy which also became increasingly important during the rise of modernism. Compassion, justice, equality, respect and a belief in the fundamental goodness of human beings are the chief characteristics of humanism. For some thinkers (e.g., Aldous Huxley) humanism is a secular ethics, while others (e.g., Mathew Arnold) believe that humanism is the fundamental value of Christianity. Liberal humanism combines compassion and respect with a belief in individual freedom; it informs much of the political debate over manhood and universal sufferage during the nineteenth century.*

> *During this period, democratic institutions became the physical expression of the liberal humanist ideal. Social cohesion was supposedly achieved through the reconciliation of individual and collective interests. Each person would vote for his or her representative, and differences would be resolved through parliamentary debate. Social order, law and governmental authority were the physical expression of the democracy and liberal humanism. The state, paradoxically, became the protector of individual rights and freedoms, even though these freedoms might at any moment be forfeited through the greater interests of the state: for example, in war or through criminal actions. Beyond these extreme conditions, however, the state, along with its laws, becomes self-confirming and self-aggregating in ways that take it well away from the personal lives of those it claims to represent. The freedom it claims to protect is therefore threatened by the authority it wields.[26]*

Note that 'justice, equality, respect and a belief in the fundamental goodness of human beings' *are* 'the chief' aspects of humanism, which are then seamlessly conflated with a liberal ethic and ethos. A 'personality' that is then analogously extended to providing an overarching rationale that suffuses and animates all the 'modern' institutions of state. Here we see spelled out in an explicit manner many aspects of the semiological substrate of presuppositions

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[26] Jeff Lewis. *Culture Studies – The Basics*, SAGE Publications, RMIT Melbourne (2002) 21.

regarding the 'personality of the state' that are apparent in the contemporary meta-discourse.

*The declaration of history becomes the fact of history*

The declaratory, arbitrary, and partial form of the two initial 'definitions' – of 'the political philosophy' of liberalism and then of 'humanism' – is immediately effaced by the utilities these definitions serve. A seamless movement in appreciation is forced and then hidden in plain sight.

Liberalism is (proposed as) an undeniable cultural/historical fact: '*The political philosophy of liberalism*' did develop '*in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*'.

Then the cultural fact of liberalism is seamlessly transformed, by the shift from identification of form to the employment of the functional purpose of that form in context. '*Essentially liberalism (being liberal or free) emphasises the dignity of the individual, individual rights and freedoms.*'

So a 'description' forces an instant narrative and then personal contextual re-appraisal of the apparent meaning - which at once situates the reader and forces and adoption of the terms being utilised and concepts reified as being self-evidently valid. This sleight of hand (from assertion to cultural fact) is achieved via a process of concomitant and forced semiological contextualisation.

The 'definition' employs exactly the same form of semiological rhetoric in the next two sentences (then repeats this pattern throughout). '*Humanism is an ethical philosophy which also became increasingly important during the rise of modernism.*' So humanism, like modernism, is a cultural fact. ('*Compassion, justice, equality, respect and a belief in the fundamental goodness of human beings are the chief characteristics of humanism.*') Ergo the reader is instantly rendered as being both a liberal and a humanist.

> <u>Semiological articulation 1:</u> Liberalism exists. > It means being an individual with dignity and freedom. > I have dignity and freedom.

> <u>Semiological articulation system 2:</u> Humanism exists. > It means compassion, justice, equality, respect and a belief in the fundamental goodness of human beings. > I have compassion, justice, equality, respect and a belief in the fundamental goodness of human beings.

> <u>Forced global realisation:</u> I am a liberal. I am a humanist. The author is describing fact.

This semiological *articulation of contextualisation* is forced yet not immediately apparent. The ability to consider that an imposition has occurred is immediately precluded and supplanted in the move from appreciating an assertion of cultural fact to an acknowledgment that because the

reader can comprehend the intended global meaning values (the 'history' in context) then the concomitant and forced meaning outcomes *are* cultural facts.

Similar forced articulations of contextualisation are evident throughout the passage, transforming discursive discriminations into cultural archetypes and facts.

However note that only the semiological systems that reside in the linguistic coda are materially evident. This is key to *the liberal conceit*. Although semiological systems of disambiguation are a requisite element in explaining the utilities and facilities of language *in context*, as they are not *materially evident* at this level of language reception and utilisation, then the 'commonsensical' appraisal is that these aspects of language articulation are simply aspects of 'common sense'.

This purposively and compulsively entertained recourse to forced contextualisation regarding the likely social reception of an idea or proposition is termed *the liberal conceit* because it is a forced contextualisation that implicitly refutes the fact that any contextualisation need ever occur or has occurred.

The liberal conceit is a second level assertion in metalanguage that echoes the rhetoric of naturalisation, however instead of a literal definition metonymically invoking an associated congress of meanings, then asserting that this definition is a mere description, in metalanguage there is no material cultural artefact such as a dictionary definition to employ as a justification for symbolic violence; so the existence of a metalanguage and a consequential rhetoric of disambiguation is refuted by recourse to assertions of 'common-sense' or just plain 'thinking'. These are elsewhere described as *assertions of naïve rationality*.

In this instance of course both 'common sense' and 'thinking' are themselves artefacts of the very rhetoric of disambiguation they purportedly refute. Where the rhetoric of naturalism occludes the impositions of culture by analogously implicating categories and their associated categorical imperatives (as the only fulsome descriptions for language), at the second level of language only cultural (as opposed to material) assertions are apparent. As the liberal epistemology asserts that there is no overarching ideological framework of disambiguation in existence, then the disambiguation purports itself to be undertaken in a personalised and particularised fashion (i.e. in a Hegelian manner) so employing a similitude which intrinsically refutes the proposition that any disambiguation has occurred. However, as we have already noted, it also instantly manufactures and then reifies a whole world of jousting ideas and commonalities of discrimination.

So at the first level of language the movement is from *discursive identification of a sign* to *appraisal of the utility of that type function in context* and so it is anchored in a material object, at the second level of abstraction, *objectification of a language value as a discursive element in culture* to *polemical appreciation of cultural archetypes and facts* there is no such a material anchor, so we manufacture archetypes to provide explanations for what is otherwise inexplicable.

*Liberalism is a positivistic ethos*

These impositions are largely unavailable for consideration when appreciated in traditional narrative terms. Thus the liberal epistemology discounts the existence of semiological systems of disambiguation wherever and whenever they display (in bare apparent terms) that assertions being disambiguated may be arbitrary in nature or may occasion irrational or inequitable outcomes (i.e. impositions of symbolic violence).

Rather the liberal epistemology asserts that language use can always be described and justified, in a fulsome and adequate manner, solely by recourse to language. So the impositions that can be described (and are apparent) are only those that relate to categories (words) and categorical imperatives (definitions) and those that can be described in a manner which accords with a Hegelian dialectic.

This is because one of the founding doctrinal assertions embodied within and articulated in the employment of a liberal ethos is that liberalism is not an ideology but rather represents *an absence of ideology*. So liberalism typifies all competing modes of appreciation or critique as being politically situated and orientated (and therefore corrupting and invalid as modes of assessment and analysis).

So while liberalism is represented as being an ethos of toleration, it is actually a positivistic ethos which *a priori* refutes the validity of all other political postulations. Liberalism embodies a doctrinal justification and demonstration *in practice* that the consideration of collective urgencies and collective agency are of no utility in social field analysis.

Yet paradoxically, because most of the doctrinal imperatives animating liberalism are usually not superficially apparent and so amenable to theoretical justification, often liberal humanist theoreticians will engage in utilising structural or semiotic theories and terminology in criticising the validity of structural or semiotic theories. However that this is ironic is generally not apparent to this class of theoretician.

Universities can be typified as being institutions which articulate a liberal ethos and employ a liberal epistemology. Unless you happen to be a liberal theorist then this description is likely to be considered entirely unremarkable. In fact, as we will soon explore, in many ways our Universities are only explicable when viewed as institutions which articulate a liberal epistemology.

Within the academia of the modern western world our Universities are self-evidently organised in a manner which best assists in providing a flow of suitably educated and appropriately qualified graduates for the professions, industry, government, and the armed forces. They are economically and socially rational institutions that are required to be explicable in economic terms and be run in accord with a host of guidelines that are declaratory and deterministic in character.

However few of these factors are ever considered as being *academically* relevant.

Within the academia of the modern western world our Universities are self-evidently organised in a manner in which information is commoditised and then utilised in a host of different ways. They are places where the pragmatic and political utility of information can often be as important, or more important, than the theoretical coherence or moral or logical validity of that information.

However few of these factors are ever considered as being *academically* relevant.

This reflects the reality that when we use the term 'university' we are employing a surprisingly complex cultural archetype and not just a naive description. The word 'university' is incredibly evocative, constraining, and definitive all at once.

The word usually brings to mind much the same physical structure and institutional functions regardless of who might be using it. It evokes images of an institution of higher learning hosting and facilitating both research and education, usually incorporating undergraduate and graduate studies, together with professional schools teaching disciplines such as theology, law, medicine, and engineering, and usually authorised to confer a variety of qualifications as well as undergraduate and graduate degrees. However the term evokes so much more.

Universities are also conceived of in a paradoxical manner. They are a celebration of democratic process, as well as being a common locus of petty politics and institutional bias. They are ruled by the cool clear light of logic and reason, as well as being home to a bunch of left-wing

ideologues. Our campuses host all the latest ideas while also being the physical manifestation of 'academic tradition'. They host a battle of ideas where reason is the ultimate arbiter, and yet are widely acknowledged as being elite institutions that act to propagate and entrench privilege and inequity.

So why are all of these descriptions, arguments, and often mutually exclusive representations all conflated within our stereotype of what a university might be?

The liberal humanist would say that it is due to our Universities being complex institutions with unique historical traditions and particularities. The liberal humanist would propose that we all carry around with us a seemingly self-contradictory definition of a University because the variability across all of the establishments that bear this name prompts such a corpus of varying descriptions. The liberal humanist would credit our social conception of a University to be correct in every instance as it simply reflects the apparent variability across institutions and so reflects the particularities of individual institutions and the unique individuals who make up the staff and students at these institutions.

The semiotician would remark that our universities are conceived of in just such a paradoxical manner because our concept of what a university might be is one that is constructed with regard to the urgencies and constraints articulated by the meta-discourse of our society. Therefore it reflects both polarities of many linguistically defined and arbitrated *urgencies of utility*.

## Aspects of the substrate of semiological rhetoric

Roland Barthes identified a number of forms of semiological rhetoric which act to disambiguate particular meaning outcomes.[27] These rhetorical functions are here supplemented and re-described.

### A rhetoric of inoculation.

> '… this … figure, … consists in admitting the accidental evil of a class-bound institution the better to conceal its principal evil. One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil…'

> Barthes.[28]

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[27] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1989 154 164 – 169.

[28] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1989 154 164.

In the description of 'liberal humanism and democracy' tendered earlier in this work, a rhetoric of inoculation is most evident in the last paragraph.

> *The state, paradoxically, became the protector of individual rights and freedoms, even though these freedoms might at any moment be forfeited through the greater interests of the state: for example, in war or through criminal actions. Beyond these extreme conditions, however, the state, along with its laws, becomes self-confirming and self-aggregating in ways that take it well away from the personal lives of those it claims to represent. The freedom it claims to protect is therefore threatened by the authority it wields.[29]*

The power of the modern state is thus analogously conflated into a dialectic that referees 'the power of the state' in opposition to 'individual rights and freedoms.' Any possible recourse to competing conceptions regarding what 'a state' might be is immediately obviated by declaring this dialectic and then invoking aspects of the liberal description proposed and constrained by this same dialectic.

So 'the state' is reified as a protector of freedom excepting in the direst of circumstance (*in war*) or against arbitrary actions undertaken by individuals (*through criminal actions*). It might be *self-confirming and self-aggregating* yet this description of a 'state' instantly also implicitly proposes that it embodies a rational and coherent persona that can be, and is, concerned and interested in the wellbeing of individual citizens.

Thus the description provided inoculates the reader immediately against realising a conception of a 'state' as;

- Imposing arbitrary, indiscriminate, or 'criminal' modes of imposition.
- Acting with regard to classes or groups of citizens.
- Privileging particular groups of people or concepts.
- Being capable of generating unethical outcomes.


### A rhetoric of privation of history.

> *Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History. In it, history evaporates. It is a kind of ideal servant: it prepares all things, brings them, lays them out, the master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from. Or even better: it can only come from eternity: since the beginning of time, it has been made for bourgeois man... We can see all the disturbing things which*

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[29] Jeff Lewis. *Culture Studies – The Basics*, SAGE Publications, RMIT Melbourne (2002) 21.

*this felicitous figure removes from sight: both determinism and freedom. Nothing is produced, nothing is chosen: all one has to do is to possess these new objects from which all soiling trace of origin or choice has been removed. This miraculous evaporation of history is another form of a concept common to most bourgeois myths: the irresponsibility of man.*

Barthes.[30]

The privation of history is an urgency born of our positivistic and purposively engaged impulse to discursively objectify language as culture. It echoes the movement from the discursive identification of type (in abstract and reductive terms) to polemically appreciating and contextualising function - but paradoxically it proposes the opposite polarity of appreciation occurs.

It is a process that Bourdieu might suggest to be one of actively re-negotiating a conforming misrecognition of (rudely apparent) arbitrary impositions of symbolic violence. It provides the logic to generate a conforming narrative explanation of why (both personal and social) representations and suppositions regarding 'history' are valid.

In the description of 'liberal humanism and democracy' observed earlier, a rhetoric of privation is evident throughout. The rhetoric strips the philosophical debates that occurred during the period of all particularities. These debates are presented as being supportive of '*democratic institutions*' becoming '*the physical expression of the liberal humanist ideal*' regardless of content.

In this description the '*Europe*' of the '*eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*' is the narrative site of the development of liberalism and humanism (not an actual geographical area peopled by disparately motivated individuals). All the 'thinkers' of this age were corporately engaged in advancing and refining a common description of 'liberalism' and 'humanism'. Aldous Huxley was a liberal philosopher (not a popular writer). Mathew Arnold was a liberal philosopher (not an 'Inspector of Schools'). The '*debate over manhood and universal sufferage*' is also entirely assimilated to the forging of a liberal humanist concept of society. The teleology implicated is one in which all philosophical debates and political actions within the '*Europe*' of the '*eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*' naturally culminated in the forging of the description being read and entertained by the reader.

Thus the rhetoric of the privation of history is an articulation of disambiguation by which the tropes of history are recast as being descriptions of evident historical interactions and

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[30] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1989 165.

relationships.

*A rhetoric of identification.*

> *The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. ... How can one assimilate the Negro, the Russian? There is here a figure for emergencies: exoticism. The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home...*

Barthes.[31]

The rhetoric of identification is plainly evident in any newspaper. All individuals within society disappear behind a label such as 'single mother', 'unemployed teenager', 'bikie', 'student', 'businessman', 'rich-lister', 'socialite', 'sportsman' etc.

These labels assimilate all citizens into categories of utility that are forged by their contrast and relationship with the 'liberal man'. These labels advertise apparent divergences from a normality imposed and articulated by the fact of the many competing labels of differentiation.

While it might be supposed that by a simple process of oppositional inference it would be possible to delineate the particular features and attributes that attach to the 'liberal man' - by simply chronicling all the apparent contrasts – but this is not the case. The person who is not a 'single mother', 'unemployed teenager', 'bikie', 'student', 'businessman', 'rich-lister', 'socialite', or a 'sportsman' (etc.) is not the 'liberal man' but rather the 'other'. They are outsiders who are not assimilated to this scale of differentiation at all.

Labels such as 'terrorist' or 'anti-social' are deliberate allusions to an exotic 'other'. They are labels describing rare abnormal states (similar to labels such as 'crazy' or 'insane'). However in labelling a social 'other' (as opposed to a personal 'other') the trope of the 'common man' (i.e. the liberal man) is usually employed in emasculating the social other of immanence. It acts to simultaneously reiterate the validity of the perception of threat whilst also contextualising the appreciation in terms of degrees of normality.

So, oddly enough, recourse to labelling a social 'other' is often employed as a *trajectory of justification* (of entertaining and expressing satisfaction and comfort regarding our place in the world and the labels used and employed to describe our place in the world). In naming the 'other' we are asserting a belief in the validity of our own ideas and in our own competence

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[31] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1989 166.

rather than simply making an allusion to a particular threat or person. ("We're not 'barbarians'." 'He was acting like some sort of terrorist!", "What do you think I am? A damned heathen?" etc etc).

When using labels that apply to segments of society these social labels are also often used as a modality of justification demonstrating that the speaker is more 'mainstream' than the referent. ("I'm not some backwoods hick.", "As irresponsible as a drunk teenager…", "More sophisticated than your average housewife…").

*A rhetoric of naive rationality (tautological rhetoric or declarations of obvious cultural fact)*

> *…thus do parents at the end of their tether reply to the child who keeps on asking for explanations: 'because that's how it is', or even better: 'just because, that's all' - a magical act ashamed of itself, which verbally makes the gesture of rationality, but immediately abandons the latter, and believes itself to be even with causality because it has uttered the word which introduces it.*

Barthes.[32]

Statements of naïve rationality are restatements of the liberal doctrinal assertion that language is culture. They are simply unadorned (generally knee-jerk and verbal) assertions of naturalisation.

Who has not engaged in a fruitless attempt to convince a fellow citizen that a particular sign referees arbitrary (culturally determined) categories and is implicated in a host of second level articulations which contextualise the appreciation of that category utilising a substrate of semiological rhetoric – only to be affronted with the simple statement that: "You are just complicating things. It means what it says! Nothing more!"

There are two aspects of arbitrariness that are being refuted in a declaration of naïve rationality; *denotational* and *semiological* arbitrariness.

That denotation is a modality of sufficiency and trajectory (so it asserts a complete and sufficient description of a sign), provides for a functional and descriptive inference that is at once almost impossible to resist and which is also initially repugnant to rational appraisal. So the polemically habituated resort to declarations of naïve rationality as these are perceived to be mere statements of apparent (cultural) fact.

Moreover the polemically habituated often explicitly embrace the doctrinal imperatives within

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[32] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1989 166/7.

the current meta-discourse (that articulate an ideology of liberalism) and which deny that semiological systems of disambiguation exist at all. So the polemically habituated often resort to declarations of naïve rationality as a knee-jerk refutation that an overarching meta-discourse might or can exist.

This is why the habit of immediate tautological refutation is so widespread, even though these assertions are palpably nonsensical in nature. The commonsensical appraisal is that 'a rock is just a rock' and for the polemically habituated it can't and doesn't *mean* anything. And since there is no rational modality immediately apparent or available within a liberal epistemology for appreciating why a 'rock' may be appraised as actually being an arbitrary conflation of category with categorical imperative – many polemically habituated citizens simply resort to knee-jerk protestations that 'language is culture'.

### *A rhetoric of common sense (declarations of obvious cultural function)*

> *Bourgeois aphorisms, on the other hand, belong to metalanguage; they are a second-order language which bears on objects already prepared. Their classical form is the maxim. …. The foundation of the bourgeois statement of fact is common sense, that is, truth when it stops on the arbitrary order of him who speaks it.*

> Barthes.[33]

Where a rhetoric of naïve rationality proposes that a categorical imperative or its associated category of definition are descriptive of natural categories, a rhetoric of common sense asserts that syntagmatic utilities and semiological urgencies are descriptions of observable cultural relativities and causal relationships.

We all know a host of aphorisms, maxims, and proverbs. These are modalities justifying the apprehension of syntagmatic or semiological utilities of disambiguation as being descriptive of actual physical relationships or cultural dynamics.

While generally aphorisms and maxims seem to be of little import and are generally treated as being statements of 'the bleeding obvious' – this is a clue to the significance of these sorts of assertions as being descriptive of many particular functions and utilities served by the semiological systems which articulate the liberal epistemology. They chronicle the disparate doctrinal imperatives and urgencies of the liberal humanist epistemology in a direct and unequivocal manner. Indeed their function is largely to suppress epistemological equivocation

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[33] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1989 168/9.

through the use of a doctrinal declaration of congruence with the meta-discourse that is both appealing in a narrative sense as well as being normatively coherent.

When a maxim is employed it usually functions to thwart any possible further appreciation of philosophical dissent or to suppress further consideration of incipient recognition of irrationality.

Maxims might be described as *tropes of liberalism* in that they are employed in masking possible epistemological incongruity.

For example:

*A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush;* is both an alibi of economism as well as a refutation of the need for further rational consideration.

*A chain is only as strong as its weakest link;* is an assertion that quality and quantity are analogous and interchangeable.

*A fool and his money are soon parted;* is an alibi of commercialism which equates economy with moral and intellectual probity.

*A man is known by the company he keeps;* is an assertion of the utility of class distinction.

*A man's home is his castle;* is a refutation of economic disparity and class distinction.

*A little knowledge is a dangerous thing;* is an assertion that absolute knowledge and complete descriptions are not only possible but preferred.

*A penny saved is a penny earned;* is often employed to dismiss economic inequity as being a valid mode of differentiation as this maxim implicitly asserts that all citizens are economically equivalent.

*A picture is worth a thousand words* is employed, paradoxically, as a restatement of the doctrinal assertion that *language is culture*. This maxim unequivocally asserts that language describes culture fulsomely, with the more language employed, the more fulsome the description.

*A stitch in time saves nine; A watched pot never boils; Absence makes the heart grow fonder; Actions speak louder than words;* are all quantifications of quality as quantity (see below).

## A rhetoric of Neither-Norism

> By this I mean this mythological figure which consists in stating two opposites
> and balancing the one by the other so as to reject them both. (I want neither

*this nor that.) It is on the whole a bourgeois figure, for it relates to a modern form of liberalism. We find again here the figure of the scales: reality is first reduced to analogues; then it is weighed; finally, equality having been ascertained, it is got rid of. Here also there is magical behavior: both parties are dismissed because it is embarrassing to choose between them; one flees from an intolerable reality, reducing it to two opposites which balance each other only inasmuch as they are purely formal, relieved of all their specific weight.*

Barthes.[34]

Roland Barthes description of the rhetoric of Neither-Norism is entirely sufficient and needs little in the way of further clarification. This mode of rhetoric is most evident in our politics and media.

When employed in political discussion this mode of rhetoric is usually utilised to suppress and dismiss the need for political or ideological postulation. When liberal humanist politicians talk about 'walking a middle of the road' or 'adopting a balanced approach' they are not indicating that they adopting a theoretically informed position but rather the opposite: it is a bare refutation of the validity of fascistic or socialistic (or any named) ideological concept. It is a dismissal of competing propositions, not an acknowledgement of or arbitration of competing propositions.

When a liberal asserts that they are part of the 'mainstream' they are, in effect, declaring that all other political ideologies display no utility or validity. Moreover this trope of liberalism is so entrenched within our semiological systems of disambiguation that virtually all politicians, of all ideological stripes, invoke the myth of the 'mainstream' on a regular basis.

Neither-Norism is similar to the rhetoric of identification. By labelling disparate ideas they are immediately (personally and functionally) contextualised regarding their degree of deviance from the 'normality' assumed and asserted by the fact of the distinction. However it is a distinction of utility where both peripheries of any proposed dialectic are always dismissed as being of no utility, rather than as demonstrating degrees of conformity.

*The quantification of quality as a rhetoric (economism or a rhetoric of the validity of discursive appreciation)*

> *This is a figure which is latent in all the preceding ones. By reducing any quality to quantity, myth economizes intelligence: it understands reality more cheaply.*

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[34] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1989 167/8.

The quantification of quantity as quality is a universal prerogative of language. It simultaneously seeks to utilise and mask the epistemological hubris of discursive appreciation.

At every stage in the appreciation of language and in the disambiguation of meaning we engage in discursive and polemical forms of appreciation simultaneously. We discursively (reductively and abstractly) identify categories of distinction which are then objectified as language and culture by reference to their narrative and contextual utility. We reductively *quantify* and recognise differences in type which are then realised as being *qualities* of functional appreciation. Appreciation of size, shape, colour, proportion, quantity, and regularity are translated analogously into utilities of importance, significance, utility, universality, logicality, probability, probity, and value. The rationale of this transformation mimics the discursive rationale employed at every stage in the process disambiguating meaning from a language act or when that language act being considered in context.

In this manner the liberal epistemology asserts that the utilities *enabling* and guiding appreciation are simply utilities *describing* reality. So the rhetoric of the quantification of quality might also be described as being *a rhetoric of the validity of discursive appreciation*. It is another modality of naturalisation by which aspects of culture are presented and appreciated as natural phenomena.

*Economism*

Economism has been the subject of a great deal of research and writing so rather than focus on the obvious utilities which this rhetoric of disambiguation is employed to serve within our society, we will focus rather on providing a fulsome description.

At the outset it must be stressed that an econometric rationale of appreciation and discrimination does not employ the logical and constrained rationalities that are employed in the academic discipline of economics. Rather it employs *tropes of economism* that are expressive of economism being employed as an ideology.

Economism is an ideology as it utilises a substrate of rationality that is *cohesive*, *positivistic*, and *purposive*. It is cohesive and positivistic because the ideology of economism provides for a rationale of appreciation which purports to provide a fulsome and complete description of a social setting or action *in its own terms*. In other words, it explains social actions and situations

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[35] *Mythologies* Collins, New York, 1989 168.

using a rationality of disambiguation that is detached from and independent of all other modalities of appreciation and which incorporates its own unique modalities of ordering. In this economics and economism are similar. However economism is an ideology (as opposed to a science) because it is employed in a manner that is polemically analogous to economics yet is discursively distinct. It employs some of the rationalities that are apparent in economics yet these rationalities are employed to assert functional equivalencies rather than mathematical outcomes. Most significantly these functional equivalencies are asserted as being the outcomes of mathematical (and so natural) urgencies that in concert propose correct and incorrect outcomes. So where economics proposes a logic and methodology that provides for economically valid outcomes, economism proposes a rationale of economic functionality that provides for moral outcomes.

Economics proposes that 1 + 1 = 2 because this is an inevitable outcome of mathematical rationality. Econometrics proposes that 1+1 *should* equal 2 because this is an inevitable outcome of mathematical morality. So the rhetoric of the quantification of quality substitutes morality for logicality.

In this way economism is all about employing a cognitive sleight of hand in which the nature of the categories implicated in the process of polemical regard are asserted to be different yet equivalent. People are equivalent (in economic terms) to numbers. Money is equivalent (in economic terms) to value, or probity, or 'positive outcomes'. A 'saving' is a social benefit. A 'loss' is both personally and socially evil. 'Economic functionality' is held out as being equivalent to social functionality and so an economically rational society is one which is morally correct.

It is the force of the moral imperative which is asserted in the process of undertaking an econometric translation that provides the rhetoric with its normative agency and force. Unlike most modalities of naturalisation, those who employ a rhetoric of econometric translation rarely seek to validate the utility of these modes of disambiguation by reference to the discursive elements that underpin any proposition. Rather they point to the internal rationale of econometrics as providing an eternal and valid modality of appreciation *because* it is coherent and purposive. Econometrics is described as being valid because mathematics is valid. Mathematics is perceived to be a natural agency so econometrics is asserted as being a mode of appreciating (natural) morality.

A 'saving' is seen to be of natural benefit to a society because 'saving' something is good mathematically ('more' of something is intrinsically 'better'). That the econometric translation

simply employs a functional equivalence instead of a mathematical equation is entirely discounted as being of import because it is the moral force of an econometric argument that makes it so palpably persuasive.

So econometrics is an ideology of appreciation which seeks to quantify and assess social relationships with regard to moral criteria while purporting to employ mathematics. When an econometric translation is challenged the individual employing this form of rhetoric usually seeks to refer to the coherence and positivistic features of this rhetoric in justifying the validity of the rhetoric. So while it employs *a rhetoric of quantification of quality* in its function, in justification of this function those who employ these modalities of disambiguation often employ *a rhetoric of coherence as validity* (a rhetoric of the validity of polemic) to justify their use of econometric concepts and modes of appreciation.
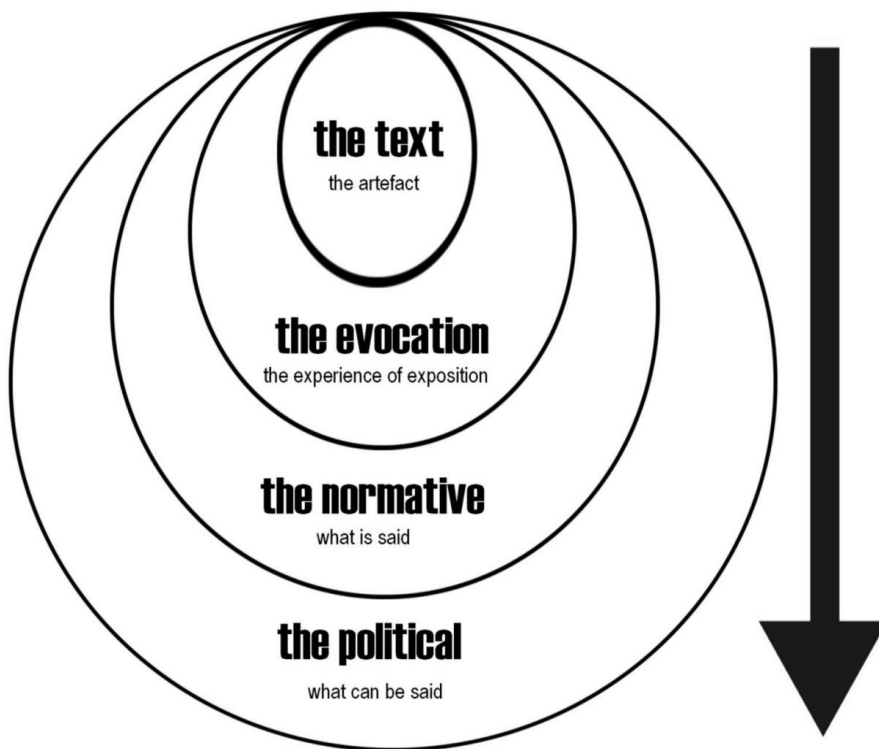


**Figure 5.** Exposition and signification as facsimile.

*In closing: overcoming the Tyranny of Normative Intuition.*

Analysis can only ever appreciate a facsimile of exposition; the actual transitive process of an individual disambiguating the potential meanings expressed by a sign within context (denotation exhausting to connotation) is an experientially indivisible sum. As soon as this process is re-regarded (i.e., analysed) we move beyond consideration of the actual, individual,

ontological relationship of sign to meaning, and enter the realm of retrospective appreciations of semiotic relativity.

This is why semiotics is described by Barthes as an 'art'. There are always many possible readings of a facsimile however those that are of most significance will be arrived at counter-intuitively – for it is the very process of intuition that we unpick.

The tyranny of normative intuition impacts upon signification in a number of ways;

1. We reflexively strip away complexity and categorise (discursively).

2. We reflexively choose the more aesthetically pleasing and congruent (polemically).

So in semiotic analysis we must struggle *counter*-intuitively. As we regard a facsimile the very process of signification urges us to adopt;

3. The simpler, less complex, and seemingly 'meaningful',

4. And the more decorous and aesthetically pleasing.

We also intuitively resist knowledge that a text might be politically implicated or render a value judgement. So when we attempt to politicise speech (in analysis) we also intuitively resist recognising (via the modalities referred to in 1-4):

- Who we exclude.
- How we exclude them.
- That we are implicated.
- That we are privileged.
- That we are a member of a class.
- That economic or class distinctions exist.
- Arbitrary impositions.
- Irrationality.
- Power relationships.
- Patriarchal impositions.
- Gender impositions.
- Equity distinctions.
- Class impositions.
- Novel ideas.
- Novel definitions.

Often these impositions are simply not apparent in a text. They are articulated in arbitrary definition and in the congress of semiological systems the text evokes and utilises.

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