

## СЕМІОТИКА І СОЦІАЛЬНА ФІЛОСОФІЯ

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30970/vps.21.2019.1>

*Джон Ділі* (1942-2017) всевітньо відомий філософ, провідний фахівець в галузі філософської семіотики, послідовник Ч. С. Пірса. Був професором університету в Г'юстоні (*Houston, TX*), США, Президентом Американського товариства семіотики і віце-президентом Міжнародної асоціації семіотики. Читав лекції в багатьох університетах Америки і Європи, його праці перекладені різними мовами, серед них «Основи семіотики» – українською. Запропоноване тут есе надано проф. Анатолію Карасю для публікації в Україні. Публікується вперше.

### INNENWELT AND UMWELT

**John Deely**

Зміст цього есе розгортається у відповідності до таких пунктів: 1. Важливість термінології. 2. Семіотичне походження й імпортування термінів. 3. Умвельт у відмінності до доквілля. 4. Активна формація Умвельту. 5. Умвельт як «значенневий світ» або «царство значення». 6. Первинність семіозу. 7. Яким чином антропосеміоз специфікується через диференціацію від зо-семіозу в контексті загального розуміння Умвельту. 8. Життєвий світ (*Lebenswelt*) як Умвельт, що стає видо-специфічно людським.

В есе відзначається, що німецькомовні терміни «Umwelt» і «Innenwelt» є важливими технічними термінами семіотики, особливо біосеміотики. Ці поняття, як і семіотичний підхід у філософії, належать до позаепістемологічної парадигми. Тобто семіотика пропонує власну парадигму, яка є радше *поетична* і впливає з дії знаків та їхнього застосування в житті і мисленні. Це означає, що притаманне для класичної філософії протистояння між реалізмом та ідеалізмом, як і між природою і культурою, не може бути адекватною перспективою дослідження дійсності.

Хоча знак здійснює свої функції на перетині природи і культури, він у властивому для нього бутті не є зрідненим з жодною цариною в сенсі онтогенези. Знак діє на всіх рівнях біологічного життя, але стає рефлексивним інструментом всередині антропосеміозу, де він проявляється на перетині комунікації й сигніфікації і де лише ми (люди) вперше й буквально охоплюємо його як такий. Відповідно, феномен «Умвельту» належить до зоосеміотики, а вже по тому – також до антропосеміотики.

Продемонстровано, що Якоб фон Ойскюль вперше прийшов до переусвідомлення поняття і феномену фізичного доквілля. Прийнято було вважати, що воно є «однаковим» для всіх організмів. Насправді, доквілля не є тим спільним світом, в якому будь-який з *видів*, що там водночас існують, фактично проводить своє життя. Кожна біологічна життєва форма (вид), з причини її інакшої тілесної конституції (генетичного спадку), прилаштована тільки до певних частин і аспектів фізичного універсуму, або до певної «ніші» у фізичному доквіллі. Це стосується рослин не менше, ніж тварин. Коли таке «прилаштування до»

прибирає тілесну форму когнітивних органів, що ними зокрема є відчуття, або ж чуттєві модальності, тоді пов'язані з цими модальностями особливості фізичного довкілля, стають «об'єктивованими», тобто – присутніми не лише фізично, але й когнітивно.

Речі довкілля «стають об'єктивованими» за посередництвом знака. Тобто, річ *позначена* є об'єктом, а бути позначеним – це бути сприйнятим. Сказати, що річ може бути і може не бути об'єктом, означає говорити, що вона може або не може *бути відомою*. Тоді як зворотне твердження: об'єкт може або не може бути річчю, – говорить, що *не може бути об'єктом те, що є невідомим і, відповідно, – все, що є відомим – є об'єктами*.

У статті наголошується, що «умвельт» (*видосвіт*)<sup>1</sup> не є звичайним аспектом довкілля, доступним у відчуттях. Значно важливішим є спосіб, яким такі аспекти об'єднуються в спільну мережу й конститууються як «об'єкти досвіду». Відмінність між об'єктами досвіду й елементами відчуттів визначається не чинниками фізичного довкілля, але *мережею й сіткою відношень*, які набуваються між тим, що «фактично» може бути *представлене* (репрезентоване) у фізичному середовищі, й тим, що належить до когнітивної конституції біологічного організму в процесі його взаємодії у межах свого виду і взаємодії з цим середовищем тут і тепер.

«Інненвельт» – це поняття, яким охоплюється моделювальна система, що закладає підґрунтя й корелює з «умвельтом» (видосвітом) і не є повністю прив'язана до тілесності (біології). Перше продуктивне пояснення цієї автономії в контексті семіотики ми знаходимо в Т. Сібока. Народження організму є строго детермінованим. Проте вже з народженням – з'являється здатність до модальності, яка приходить з відчуттями й когнітивністю. Але те, що ми будемо здатні висловлювати завдяки володінню вербальною мовою, є далеким від того, що жорстко фіксується й детермінується. Нехтування цим феноменом веде до поширеного непорозуміння серед освіченої верстви. Воно полягає в сплутуванні між *мовою* в людському сенсі «лінгвістичної комунікації», яка є справою «*інненвельту*» як моделювальна система, і яка не є тісно пов'язана з біологічною конституцією, й *комунікацією*, яка є універсальним феноменом, притаманним для всіх живих істот.

«Інненвельт», як «значенневий світ» в якому живе людська істота, розгортає постлінгвальні структури, які притаманні тільки для лінгвістичної тварини і стосуються культури і штучних мов. Тоді як всі інші тварини, навіть якщо вони застосовують символічні засоби комунікації, залишаються прив'язаними до прелінгвістичного, чуттєво-перцептивного об'єктного царства.

(Переклад – Анатолій Карась)

**Ключові слова:** умвельт, інненвельт, життєсвіт, семіоз, зоїсеміоз, антропосеміоз, моделювальна система, комунікація.

**Keywords:** Umwelt, Innenwelt, semiosis, zoösemiotics, anthroposemiosis, modeling system, communication, meaningful world,

The grounding of the action of signs within animal life forms, including human animals, is the subject of this essay. Thus, within semiotics, it does not extend to questions either of phytosemiosis or of physiosmiosis.

<sup>1</sup> Термін «умвельт» згідно зі значенням, яке в нього вкладається з погляду семіотики, стосується життєвого поєднання біологічного виду з аспектами довкілля (реальністю), в якому цей вид перебуває, утворюючи своє специфічне середовище, пов'язане з відповідними когнітивними особливостями виду. Тому в українській мові перекладом концепту «умвельт» може служити слово «видосвіт»; воно тим більше цікаве додатковою конотацією в семантиці концептів «бачення», «зору», «виду». - Анатолій Карась.

## 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF TERMINOLOGY

Umwelt and Innenwelt, apparently German terms, have become in fact technical terms within semiotics, especially biosemiotics as Thomas A. Sebeok fashioned it.<sup>1</sup> The terms are too important to be left to scholars, etymologically inclined ones in particular. Still less is it enough to rely on existing German-English dictionaries to render the terms, for the notion of Umwelt in particular, as it has come to be established in the usage proper to semiotics as the doctrine (in contrast to “science” or “theory”) of signs, admits of no full predecessor, least of all one dependent on the thoroughly modern, even “ultra-modern”, epistemological paradigm developed in work of Kant, so much admired by Jakob von Uexküll. For semiotics has its own paradigm, noetic rather than epistemological, as I would now say, namely, that proper to the sign. And for the sign, as Poinot early intimated,<sup>2</sup> the perspective proper to realism in philosophy is no less inadequate than the perspective proper to idealism in the modern sense. For the sign performs its task at the crossroads of nature and culture. And though it marks paths variously deep into both realms, the sign itself in its proper being is native to neither realm, always “mixed” in its ontology – at least as it comes to be a reflexive instrument within anthroposemiosis, where alone we first and initially grasp it as such.

## 2. SEMIOTIC ORIGINS AND IMPORT OF THE TERM

The semiotic usage of the term Umwelt, then (I eschew placing it in quotation marks, for, as I have tried to insist, it is not a “foreign” word, but a term indigenous to the developing doctrine of signs), began with Thomas A. Sebeok’s reading of the work of Jakob von Uexküll.<sup>3</sup> Similarly the term Innenwelt, which is the subjective or organismic correlate of Umwelt as the meaningful environment in which an animal lives, acquires its proper meaning only in the context of the web of reciprocal relationships that semiotic

---

<sup>1</sup> I have not here documented the historical sources upon which Jakob von Uexküll drew (material covered in Deely 2001, 2004, and 2004a), but only those works within which the concept of Umwelt as Sebeok took it up for semiotics were introduced. (But I cannot resist to note that the actual term “Umwelt” was coined by the Danish author Jens Baggesen in an ode to Napoleon he wrote in German [Baggesen 1800: 102], whence the term subsequently migrated to Danish as “omverden”: see Deely 2002: 127n1 or 2003: 32–33n7.) Beyond this, I have restricted my references to those very few works directly quoted or cited in the course of my remarks; for my aim here has been not etymology or scholarly illustration in the full sense, but simply and directly to explicate and influence the *usage itself* of the term Umwelt within semiotics as a contribution to the establishment, little by little, of a noetic paradigm (no longer a modern epistemological one) “home grown” from reflection directly on the being and action proper to signs as the fundamental and universal vehicles by which experience grows and on which knowledge within experience depends. For this is the line of intellectual development most promising for the foreseeable future of semiotics, at least if semiotics provides, as Locke obscurely prophesied, a “new sort of Logick and Critick”, to wit, a definitive breaking out of and moving beyond the confinement of modern philosophy that resulted from its adoption (up to and including Kant) of an epistemological paradigm which precludes that very intersection of nature with culture which semiotics takes as its distinctive “point de départ”.

<sup>2</sup> Poinot, *Tractatus de Signis* 1632: 118/6–9.

<sup>3</sup> See J. von Uexküll 1899–1940, esp. 1920, 1934, and 1940; also T. von Uexküll 1981, 1982.

analysis reveals: for just as there is no “outside” without an “inside”, so there is no Umwelt without an Innenwelt.

Von Uexküll himself (1864–1944) was what has been termed<sup>1</sup> a “cryptosemiotician” rather than a semiotician proper. He did not see himself from within the perspective of semiotics. He thought of himself rather in terms of research in biological science – early ethology, some might put it. It took a semiotician, Sebeok in particular, as it happened, to see that von Uexküll’s work, in its central application of the expression “Umwelt” (here let it be for a moment a “German” term, and hence “foreign”), concerned “biological foundations that lie at the very epicenter of the study of both communication and signification in the human animal”, and every other animal (for that matter).

### 3. UMWELT IN CONTRAST TO ENVIRONMENTAL NICHE

For the Umwelt belongs first of all to zoösemiotics, and to anthroposemiotics only from there. In other words, the Umwelt is first of all, even within semiotics, a vehicle for expressing especially the role of biological heritage in the use and function of signs, rather than for expressing what is species-specifically human in the use and function of signs. Now the philosopher who best understood the limiting functions of psycho-biological constitution upon knowledge was Immanuel Kant. So it is not at all surprising that von Uexküll saw himself indebted philosophically to Kant above all in his creative research within biology.

What von Uexküll uniquely realized was that the physical environment, in whatever sense it may be said to be the “same” for all organisms (we are speaking, of course, of the environment on earth, though much of what we say could be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to biospheres on other planets should such eventually be found), is not the world in which any given species as such actually lives out its life. No. Each biological life-form, by reason of its distinctive bodily constitution (its “biological heritage”, as we may say), is suited only to certain parts and aspects of the vast physical universe, to a certain “niche” with the larger physical environment. This is true for plants no less than for animals. But when this “suitedness to” takes the bodily form of *cognitive* organs, such as are our own senses, or the often quite different sensory modalities discovered in other animal lifeforms, then those aspects and only those aspects of the physical environment which are proportioned to those modalities become “objectified”, that is to say, made present not merely physically but cognitively as well. This marks the “line of passage” from simple “niche” within the subjective and intersubjective order of physical (or awareness-independent) reality to the beginnings of the world as species-specifically “objective”.

What needs to be stressed, then, is the limited and partial aspect of the environment of which the organism becomes aware in sensation. The niche environmental in the physical sense is “limited” on the physical side independently of awareness. But the Umwelt as

---

<sup>1</sup> By Sebeok 1976: x, 1977; see the discussion in Deely 1990: 119ff.

such *necessarily and directly* involves awareness *as well as* awareness-independent physical factors. Whence the Umwelt possesses from the start a suprasubjective character as the dimension proper to it, even as concerns those of its primary components which have in their own right a subjective dimension. Thus the Umwelt stands in contrast with *both* the subjectivity of the Innenwelt *and* the subjectivity of the environmental niche (including the intersubjective physical relations as awareness-independent among physical subjectivities). For Umwelt in its entirety obtains on the side of the *termini* of relations, just as Innenwelt obtains on the side of factors subjective to the animal but as *provenating*<sup>1</sup> the animal's "public", that is, the animal's "objective", world.

When I look out over a rich meadow on a beautiful day, I see what might be loosely described as "an infinite variety of colors". That will do for the poet or even the practical man, but the careful thinker will realize that such expressions are but shorthand for our limitations: we see not all colors possible, but only those that, under given conditions of light and shade, fall within the range of our type of eye. Nor is "our type of eye" the only type of eye. That same meadow will appear variegated quite differently to the eye of a bee, a beetle, or a dragonfly, however much we may suppose an underlying common "physical" being which is "the same" no matter who or what species of individual happens to be beholding the meadow. A rose by any other name may still be a rose. But what a rose is will not be the same to a bee and to a human suitor.

So species-specific subjectivities of the animal body on the one side and of the physically surrounding bodies on the other side are only starting points in the construction of an Umwelt. For an Umwelt is not merely the aspects of the environment accessed in sensation. Far more is it the manner in which those aspects are networked together as and to constitute "objects of experience".

No doubt there are relations among items of the physical environment that have no dependency upon the awareness of beings in that environment. No doubt too that, given the type and condition of my eye, what colors will appear to me when I look in a certain direction will not depend upon my evaluation of anything that is there. If we prescind (in Peirce's usage) sensation as such within our perceptions of the world, it is quite evident that our bodily constitution filters and restricts, but does not by itself determine, what we will become aware of in sensation. If my eyes are normal and a traditionally equipped classroom is lighted, I cannot fail to see the black rectangle against the lighter background that I will interpret as a blackboard affixed to a wall. But what my eyes objectify and what my mind makes of that vision remain as distinct as sensation as such in contrast to perception. Perception it is that transforms sensations into objects experienced, like dark rectangles against lighter surfaces "seen" to be blackboards on walls.

The bee unfortunate enough to fly into the classroom will not see a blackboard. The beetle will likewise fail to apprehend what is so obvious to me, such as the purpose of the

---

<sup>1</sup> In strict linguistic terms, this is an English verb form derived from the Latin infinitive "provenire". For a full discussion of the linguistic aspect, see Deely 2010: xiii–xiv.

blackboard, or the student desks. What objects will the bee or the beetle, or the dragonfly, for that matter, encounter in this same classroom?

That is the question (or type of question) which guided the *Umwelt-Forschung* pioneered by Jakob von Uexküll. Von Uexküll uniquely saw that the difference between objects of experience and elements of sensation is determined primarily not by anything in the physical environment as such but by the *relation* or, rather, network and set of relations, that obtains between whatever may be “in fact” present physically in the surroundings and the cognitive constitution of the biological organism interacting with those surroundings here and now. Nor are those relations primarily of the type that antecede and hold independently of any such interaction. To the contrary. The relations in question are not mainly between the organism and what is sensed (those limited and partial aspects of the physical surroundings which are proportioned to and activative of the limited range of this or that sensory channel in combination with however many other cognitive channels the organism in question is biologically endowed with). No. The relations in question concern above all how the limited and partial sensory aspects of the physical environment are connected among themselves so as to constitute *objects of experience*, and this constitution depends above all on the constitution of the organism doing the sensing. For it is the interests of that organism, not the “independent” nature of the source of the sensory stimuli, that is at issue in the perception as such that the organism finally acts upon and uses to orientate itself within the environment for the purposes of its life and well-being.

In other words, the organism does not simply respond to or act in terms of what it senses as sensed, but rather in terms of what it *makes* of that sensation, what it perceives to be sensed, rightly or wrongly. The female wolf responds to the male’s howl differently than does the sheep, regardless of gender. Thus, whereas sensation prescised and taken as such actively filters but passively receives incoming stimuli, perception by contrast actively structures sensation into things to be sought, things to be avoided, and things that don’t matter one way or the other. Yet what constitutes a pattern of stimuli as desirable and to be sought or menacing and to be avoided depends less on the stimuli than upon the biological constitution of the organism receiving the stimuli.

#### 4. ACTIVE FORMATION OF THE UMWELT

While the awareness of animals begins in sensation prescissively taken, this pattern of stimuli as assimilated to the level of sense-perception (as contrasted to sensation as such) becomes a part of something actively woven, not merely passively received. Between and among sensory elements of stimulation, the organism itself weaves a network of subsequent relations which obtain only in the perceiving, not prior to and independent of it. It is the pattern of this network of relations within perception, not any prior pattern within sensation alone, that determines and constitutes the objects of experience so far

as they are distributed into the categories of desirable (+), undesirable (-), and neutral ( $\emptyset$ ). Perception does no more.

In this way, each species constructs and lives within *its own* lifeworld. The whole process is executed by means of signs, but the perceiving organism does not think of the matter in that way. It simply uses signs, as Maritain best put it,<sup>1</sup> without realizing for a moment that there are signs. For whenever one element of experience makes present something besides itself, be that other “real” or not (for example, the danger perceived only through an erroneous amplification of the stimuli of sense), the element in question is functioning as a vehicle of signification. This is why Sebeok so aptly speaks of experience as “a semiotic web”, that is to say, a web woven of sign relations, at whose nodes alone stand the objects of experience as experienced, whatever be their further status as “physical” or “real” independently of the experience within which they are given.

## 5. UMWELT AS “MEANINGFUL WORLD” OR “REALM OF MEANING”

So it is clear that experience, for any organism, does not simply consist of anything that is “there” prior to and independently of the experience (as is the case with the physical environment whether as a whole or as providing a niche for given organisms), but only of “what is there” within and dependently upon the experience. Whence however many or few relations within the experience may *also* obtain independently of the experience, these relationships have *meaning* only insofar as and as they are incorporated within that larger network of relations constituting perception in contrast to (while inclusive of) sensation, that larger network upon whose pattern the appearance of objects as such depends. And this larger network involves relations which would not obtain but for the biological constitution of the perceiving organism acting as interpretant even of what is given in sensation along with, indeed, *within*, the perception of objects as objects.

Now there is a great difference between an object and a thing<sup>2</sup>, however confusedly the two notions are made to play in popular culture. For while the notion of thing is the notion of what is what it is regardless of whether it be known or not, the notion of object is hardly that. An object, to be an object, requires a relation to a knower, in and through which relation the object as apprehended exists as terminus. A sign warning of “bridge out” may be a lie, but the thing in question, even in such a case, is no less objective than in the case where the sign warns of a “true situation”.

So we see plainly that while nothing precludes an object from *also* being a thing, nothing necessitates that a given object *also* be a thing. And an object that is one kind of thing for one kind of organism (a wolf, say) may be quite a different kind of thing for another kind of organism (such as a sheep); even without getting into the question of

---

<sup>1</sup> Maritain 1976: esp. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Full thematic treatment of the object/thing distinction in Deely 2009.

mistakes organisms make about what kind of thing an object is or is not, mistakes which may cost life or limb, or which may in the end “make no practical difference”.

To say that an object may or may not be a thing and to say that a thing may or may not be an object sound like simply inverse sayings, but they are not. For to say that a thing may or may not be an object is merely to say that any given element in the order of what exists independently of finite knowledge (“things”) may or may not *be known*, whereas the inverse saying that an object may or may not be a thing is to say that *what is not known is not an object*, or, equivalently, to say that *whatever is known is an object*. And since whatever exists as an object does so only within that network of relations (what Sebeok characterized as “a semiotic web” and von Uexküll called an “Umwelt”) indifferently from nature and from mind (yet according to a mixture or pattern wherein those relations within and by cognition itself tend to predominate in the presenting of an object *as this or that*), we see at once that “what an Umwelt is” amounts to *a species-specific objective world*, with elements of the physical environment made part of a larger, “meaningful” whole or “lifeworld” wherein the individual members of a given species live and move and have their being *as members of that species* rather than some other.

We see then how different and richer is the concept of Umwelt than the subalternate concept of “environmental niche”. The concept of environmental niche simply identifies that part of the environment as physical upon which a given biological form mainly depends in deriving the physical aspects of its sustenance. The concept of Umwelt, by contrast, shows us how a given “environmental niche” is merely the physical part of a larger, objective, not purely physical, whole which is, as it were, fully comprehensible only from the perspective of the particular lifeform whose world it is, whose “environment” is meaningful in the specific ways that it is thanks only to an irreducible combination of relations many of which have no being apart from the lifeworld and all of which contribute to the contrast between the physical environment as neutral or common respecting all organisms, on the one hand, and parts of that same physical environment interpreted and incorporated within a meaningful sphere of existence shared by all the members of a species, on the other hand. Only things which are objects make up part of these species-specific worlds, but within these worlds are many objects which also are not things apart from the worlds.

Von Uexküll compared each Umwelt to an invisible bubble within which each species lives. The bubble is invisible precisely because it consists of relations, since all relations as such, in contrast to things which are related, are invisible. The objective meaning of each world and each part within each world depends less on physical being than it does on how the relations constituting the Umwelt intersect. The difference between objects and things makes mistakes possible, but it is also what makes for the possibility of meaning in life, and different meanings in different lives.



## 6. THE PRIMACY OF SEMIOSIS

There is yet another way of putting this matter, one which brings more immediately to the fore the dominance of semiotics as the perspective proper to the problematic traditionally called “epistemological”. Relations among things always directly presuppose physical existence; but for relations among objects as such, physical existence is presupposed only indirectly. To hit a tree with my car I have to have a car and there has to be a tree. But to discourse about my car hitting a tree I need neither a car nor a real tree. The reason for this anomaly traces back to a little noticed yet fundamental point for epistemology: the status of objects as objects presupposes directly the action of signs, whereas the status of things as things does not (although I would argue that even the status of things presupposes the action of signs indirectly, as a “physiosemosis”<sup>1</sup>. In Peirce’s terms, of course, this is but to say that things belong to the category of secondness, while objects involve always thirdness.

But we need not deviate into a technical discussion of these semiotic categories in order to make the point that relations among things always suppose two existents, whereas relations among objects suppose only one existent necessarily, namely, the interpreting organism. For even when the sign vehicle is a physical mark, sound or movement external to the organism, that which it signifies need not be physical, when the organism is mistaken, for example, or thinking of a state of affairs that is possible (“this hotel robbed”) but not yet actual, as when a beaver sets out to build its dam. So we realize that what we have heretofore called objects, and what are yet commonly confused with things, in fact are, as a matter or principle and in every case, significates. To say “object” and to say “object signified” is to say exactly the same thing. The two-word expression merely makes explicit what the one-word expression implies and – all too often – serves to quite effectively conceal from the one using the expression.

To preclude this concealment, and all the philosophical errors attendant upon the failure systematically to distinguish objects from things, we need only to realize that signs are what every object as such immediately presupposes. Without signs there are no objects. For signs are those very irreducible relationships that comprise the semiotic web, and the semiotic web is precisely that network of suprasubjective relationships which constitute objects as such as publically accessible elements of the Umwelt shared by every member of each biological species.

In Poincaré’s time (the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries), the distinction between objects and things and the status of objects as signifieds was explained in terms of the difference between physical relations, which in principle link two subjects (or are “intersubjective”, connecting two or more elements physically existing), and sign relations, which in principle link minimally three elements of which one at least (namely, the object signified), need not exist physically at all, or not in the way that it is represented as existing

---

<sup>1</sup> See Deely 1997, 1998, 2014.

physically. Later on, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Peirce would succeed in expressing this situation by a terse formula, or maxim: sign relations are irreducibly triadic, whereas physical relations as such are only dyadic.

We see then how truly Sebeok characterized the species-specific objective worlds which von Uexküll labeled *Umwelten* as concerning “biological foundations that lie at the very epicenter of the study of both communication and signification in the human animal”, and, as I said, every other animal, for that matter. I think it is not too much to say that, insofar as there is any one single concept that is central to the study of zoösemiotics, that would be the concept of Umwelt, the invisible bubble or species-specific objective world within which every biological organism that is an animal dwells.

### **7. HOW ANTHROPOSEMIOSIS SPECIFICALLY DIFFERS FROM ZOÖSEMIOSIS WITHIN THE UMWELT GENERICALLY UNDERSTOOD**

But the concept of Umwelt has one shortcoming, is, we might say, as a biological concept, inadequate in one particular to explaining the human use of signs. For when it comes to the human being, it is true but not enough to say that we live in a bubble determined by our biological constitution. True, our body, no less than the body of a snail, alligator, bee, or armadillo, determines the range and type of physical environmental aspects that we can *directly* objectify; and our perception, so far as it depends upon sensation, is quite bound by those limits, just as is the perception of a dog, dolphin, or gorilla.

But the human modeling system, the Innenwelt underlying and correlate with our Umwelt, is, strangely, not wholly tied to our biology. The first effectively to notice this anomaly in the context of semiotics was again Sebeok.<sup>1</sup> When we are born, or, indeed, when our genotype is fixed at fertilization in the zygote from which we develop, what we can see or sense in any direct modality is established and determined, just as is the case with any animal life form. But what language we will speak or what we will say in that language is far from so fixed and determined. Sebeok was the first effectively to point out that failure to grasp the implications of this fact result largely if not entirely from the widespread and long-standing confusion, in learned circles no less than in popular culture, between *language* in the human sense of “linguistic communication”, which is a matter of an Innenwelt or modeling system that is not wholly tied to biological constitution, and *communication*, which is a universal phenomenon that in and of itself has nothing whatever to do with linguistic communication.

Thus zoösemiotics studies the communication systems of animals, both those that are species-specific to each animal form and those that overlap two or more forms, including communicative modalities shared between human animals and other animal species. But language is not first of all a communication system. Language is first of all a way of modeling the world according to possibilities envisioned as alternative to what is given

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g., 1984, 1986. See synthesis in Deely 2007; cf. also 2007a.

in sensation *or* experienced in perception. When such a modeling system is exapted for the purpose of communicating to another something modeled, the attempt succeeds, if at all, only when the other to whom one attempts to communicate such a praeter-biological content is a conspecific (that is, only when the prospective receiver likewise has an *Innenwelt* which is not wholly tied *omni ex parte* to biological constitution); and the result of the communication (when and to the extent it succeeds) is the establishment precisely of a *linguistic code*, which will correlate with but in no way reduce to elements accessible through one or another sensory modality of the organism.

The intersubjective establishment of such a code, then, is the establishment of a new, species-specific channel of communication, to wit, *linguistic communication*, commonly miscalled and thoroughly confused with language itself. That is why, for a communication to be linguistic, it matters not a whit whether it be spoken, written, or gestured: all that matters is the type of *Innenwelt* underlying the communication which makes immediate, non-reductive interpretation of the linguistic code possible in the first place. That is why the “meaningful world” in which the human animal lives involves postlinguistic structures<sup>1</sup> accessible in what is proper to them only by a linguistic animal, whereas all the other animals, even when they employ symbolic means of communication (as is in fact fairly common), are restricted to the order of prelinguistic, sense-perceptible object domains (including postlinguistic structures only in their sense-perceptible aspects of embodiment).

## 8. LEBENSWELT AS UMWELT BECOME SPECIES-SPECIFICALLY HUMAN

So the concept of *Umwelt* applies fully to the human animal insofar as humans are animals, but the invisible bubble within which the individual human being lives as a member of a biological species is permeable to things in their contrast with objects in a way that the *Umwelt* of no animal without language is: for the human *Umwelt* is not restricted to a semiotic web based only on biology.

In ancient and medieval philosophy this species-specifically distinctive openness or “permeability” of the human lifeworld was expressed in a maxim: *anima humana est quodammodo omnia*, “the human mind in a certain way is all things”, namely, in the extent of its possible knowledge. In fact, that is the reason for the very possibility of semiotics (as distinct from semiosis) in the first place. For *if*, as we saw, signs consist essentially in triadic relations which, as relations, are always suprasubjective and only sometimes intersubjective as well (insofar as semiotic relations incorporate physical relations within objectivity, as always happens), but are never themselves directly sensible even when all three of the terms they happen to unite in a signification may be sensible, *then* only an animal whose awareness is not wholly tied to biological constitution will be able to realize that there are signs, in contrast to merely using them, as Maritain pointed out as the case with nonlinguistic animals.

<sup>1</sup> I.e., the realm of culture: see Deely 1980.

So we arrive at a new definition of the human being, no longer the “rational animal”, as in ancient Greek and medieval Latin philosophy, nor even the “thinking thing” of modern philosophy, but rather the “semiotic animal”, the animal that not only uses signs but knows that there are signs, because as linguistic the human animal is capable of modeling that fundamental reality of all experience which never appears to the eyes and ears or any other biological channel of sense: relations as such in contrast to the objects or things that are related; relations as such as the fundamental reality which makes possible the experience of objects in the first place; relations as such which make possible the difference between objects and things; relations as such which, in their peculiar being and irreducibly triadic form, are that which every object presupposes; relations, those irreducible strands of the semiotic web which constitute the Umwelt or objective world in its contrast with and difference from the physical environment as such prior and in some measure common to every life form.

In other words, the human Umwelt is so modified from within by the exaptation of language to communicate that, without ceasing to be an Umwelt, it becomes yet so different from an Umwelt based on an Innenwelt without language that some further term to characterize it becomes imperative. I have proposed that the term *Lebenswelt* should be adopted to express an Umwelt which is species-specifically human, retaining Umwelt to express the generic idea of an objective world which is in every case species-specific consequent upon biological constitution. Whether this suggestion will catch on remains to be seen, and I have rested my case mainly on the three hundred and eleven paragraphs constituting my account titled *The Human Use of Signs*.

But while the question of whether my argument on this crucial point will prevail by becoming an accepted usage remains open, the question of whether Sebeok’s argument is sound in asserting that the concept of Umwelt is central to semiotics may be considered decisively closed in the affirmative. The success of Sebeok’s argument by itself justifies his ranking of Jakob von Uexküll as “one of the greatest cryptosemioticians of this period” in which we have been privileged to see semiotics pass from the status of abstract proposal to successful intellectual movement, perhaps the most international and important intellectual movement since the taking root of science in the modern sense in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Стаття надійшла до редколегії 21.01.2019

Прийнята до друку 21. 03.2019

## REFERENCES

- BAGGESEN, Jens Immanuel (15 February 1764–1826 October 3).  
1800. “Napoleon. Un Voss. (1800)”, in *Jens Baggesen’s Poetische Werke in Deutscher Sprache*, ed. Carl and August Baggesen (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1836), pp. 92–103.  
DEELY, John.  
1980. “The Nonverbal Inlay in Linguistic Communication”, in *The Signifying Animal*, ed. Irmengard Rauch and Gerald F. Carr (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), pp. 201–217.

1990. *Basics of Semiotics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).
1994. *The Human Use of Signs* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).
1997. “How Is the Universe Perfused with Signs?”, in *Semiotics 1997*, ed. C. W. Spinks and John Deely (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), pp. 389–394.
1998. “Physiosemiosis and Semiotics”, in *Semiotics 1998*, ed. C. W. Spinks and John Deely (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 191–197.
2001. “Umwelt”, *Semiotica* 134–1/4 (2001), 125–135; Special Issue on “Jakob von Uexküll: A paradigm for biology and semiotics” Guest-Edited by Kalevi Kull.
2002. *What Distinguishes Human Understanding?* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press).
2003. *The Impact on Philosophy of Semiotics. The Quasi-Error of the External World, with a Dialogue between a ‘Semiotist’ and a ‘Realist’* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press).
2004. “Semiotics and Jakob von Uexküll’s Concept of Umwelt”, presented 10 January 2004 at the 9– 10 January 2004 International Symposium “Zeichen und der Bauplan des Lebens – Uexkülls Bedeutung heute” opening the Jakob von Uexküll-Archiv at the University of Hamburg; published in *Sign Systems Studies* 32.1/2 (2004; Tartu University, Estonia), 11–34.
- 2004a. “The Thomistic Import of the Neo-Kantian Concept of Umwelt in Jakob von Uexküll”, *Angelicum* 81.4 (2004), 711–732.
2007. “The Primary Modeling System in Animals”, in *La Filosofia del Linguaggio come arte dell’ascolto: sulla ricerca scientifica di Augusto Ponzio/Philosophy of Language as the art of listening: on Augusto Ponzio’s scientific research*, ed. Susan Petrilli (Bari, Italy: Edizione dal Sud), 161–179.
- 2007a. *Intentionality and Semiotics. A tale of mutual fecundation* (Scranton, PA: Scranton University Press).
2009. *Purely Objective Reality* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter).
2010. *Semiotic Animal. A postmodern definition of “human being” transcending Patriarchy and Feminism, to supersede the ancient definition as “rational animal” and the modern definition as “res cogitans”* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine’s Press).
2014. “Objective Reality and the Physical World: Relation as Key to Understanding Semiosis”, in *Semiotics 2013. Annual Yearbook of the Semiotic Society of America* (Ottawa, Canada: Legas, 2014), in press.

MARITAIN, Jacques.

1957. “Language and the Theory of Sign”, originally published in Ruth Nanda Anshen, Ed., *Language: An Enquiry into Its Meaning and Function* (New York: Harper & Bros.), pp. 86–101, but reprinted with the addition of a full technical apparatus explicitly connecting the essay both to Maritain’s work on semiotic (begun in 1937) and to the text of Poinsot 1632 (on which Maritain centrally drew) in Deely, Williams and Kruse, Eds., *Frontiers in Semiotics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 51–62, the most definitive English version of this seminal text from Maritain and the version to which page reference is made in this essay.

- POINSOT, John.
1632. *Tractatus de Signis*, subtitled *The Semiotic of John Poinsoot*, extracted from the *Artis Logicae Prima et Secunda Pars* of 1631–1632 using the text of the emended second impression (1932) of the 1930 Reiser edition (Turin: Marietti), and arranged in bilingual format by John Deely in consultation with Ralph A. Powell (First Edition; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). This work, the first systematic treatise on the foundations of semiotic, is also available as a text database, stand-alone on floppy disk or combined with an Aquinas database, as an Intelix Electronic Edition (Charlottesville, VA: Intelix Corp., 1992).
- SEBEOK, Thomas A.
1976. *Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs* (reprinted with new front matter but unchanged pagination; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).
1977. “Neglected Figures in the History of Semiotic Inquiry: Jakob von Uexküll”, reprinted in *The Sign & Its Masters* (reprinted with new front matter but unchanged pagination; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 187–207.
1984. “The Evolution of Communication and the Origin of Language”, lecture of June 3 in the June 1–3 ISISSS ‘84 Colloquium on “Phylogeny and Ontogeny of Communication Systems”. Published under the title “Communication, Language, and Speech. Evolutionary Considerations”, in Sebeok, *I Think I Am A Verb. More Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs* (New York: Plenum Press (New York: Plenum, 1986), pp. 10–16.
1986. “How Primary a Modeling System Is Language?”, in *Semiotics 1987*, ed. John Deely (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), pp. 15–27.
- von UEXKÜLL, Jakob.
- 1899-1940. *Kompositionslehre der Natur. Biologie als undogmatische Naturwissenschaft*, selected writings edited and with an introduction by T. von Uexküll (Frankfurt a. M.: Ullstein).
1920. *Theoretische Biologie* (Berlin; 2nd ed. 1928, reprinted Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1970). Attempted English translation by MacKinnon 1926, q.v.
1934. *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen* (Berlin), trans. by Claire H. Schiller as “A Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men” in *Instinctive Behavior: The Development of a Modern Concept*, ed. by Claire H. Schiller (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1957), 5–80.
1940. “Bedeutungslehre”, *Bios* 10 (Leipzig), trans. by Barry Stone and Herbert Weiner as “The Theory of Meaning” in *Semiotica* 42.1 (1982), 25–82.
- von UEXKÜLL, Thure.
1981. “The Sign Theory of Jakob von Uexküll”, in *Classics of Semiotics* (English edition of *Die Welt als Zeichen. Klassiker der modernen Semiotik*, Berlin: Wolf Jobst Siedler Verlag), ed. Martin Krampen, Klaus Oehler, Roland Posner, Thomas A. Sebeok, and Thure von Uexküll (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 147–179.
1982. “Semiotics and the Problem of the Observer”, in *Semiotics 1982*, ed. John Deely and Jonathan Evans (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 3–12.