

Review article

**A web as vast as nature itself\***

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By now it has become more obvious to us that signs are ubiquitous, filled with energy only partly derived from the human process, and revelatory of orders of relevance that are not confined to the domain of human contrivance. The minor tradition of French structuralism, along with its manic cousin poststructuralism, has struggled in vain to illuminate those extra-human orders that make any form of anthroposemiosis possible in the first place. The major tradition, which our author John Deely traces through seventeenth-century Iberian thought to the work of Peirce, has engaged in the more basic, and less narcissistic work, of finding the categorial structures that actually serve to bring the orders of nature into some kind of at least rudimentary transparency. Unfortunately, in the minor tradition it is as if signs are saying to each other: 'if you scratch my back, I'll pretend not to notice'. Or an even more cynical reading might have it: 'if you scratch my back, it will just be me'. While in the major tradition, the wording might go: 'let the object do the scratching for both of us'. Through this homely image the reader has already figured out that secondness plays a crucial role in the major tradition while a kind of firstness of thirdness does the primal 'work' in the minor.

Is this scratching a symmetrical or an asymmetrical relation? If it is asymmetrical, then secondness can only go in one direction. The object can scratch the sign, but the sign, or interpretant, cannot scratch the object. Of course, in the minor tradition, these are meaningless questions as signs can only affect each other, since there is nothing else that can enter into their orbit. For the major tradition, it is important to show how there *can* be a fundamental symmetry linking signs with objects and objects with signs (whether representamens or interpretants). Secondness can traffic in both directions. For Peirce and Deely, signs are always chasing after a moving dynamic object. The object can displace the sign,

\* John Deely, *The Human Use of Signs or: Elements of Anthroposemiosis*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994.

or can fill it with new meaning, or can put it into question, or can pass quietly 'underneath' it. Yet the sign can also enter into the object and help it to shape its evolving contour. This two-way traffic can only make sense if signs and objects are real and efficacious both within and without the human process. The word 'real' has become a kind of honorific in semiotics, but has absolutely no philosophical force per se. It merely represents valuations about efficacy within a certain conception of interacting orders (Buchler 1989). Thus, for example, to call a sign more 'real' than an object, or vice versa, is to misuse a valuational term as if it were a metaphysical term. A more judicious perspective would say that a sign is 'real' in certain respects that differ from the ways in which an object is 'real'.

This preamble is meant to signal to the potential reader of Deely's volume that his project of anthroposemiosis understands the danger of using 'real' as an honorific or put-down term. At the same time, all of this takes place within the context of a strong affirmation of the extra-human status of many, if not most, forms of semiosis. The book is unrelenting in attacking solipsism, narcissism, and anthropocentric conceptions of sign activity. The last aspect is deeply problematic, as we will see, but the strength of his enterprise is precisely in showing that it is impossible to locate the human process within the worlds of semiosis without first paying homage to prior forms of sign activity in the domains of zoösemiosis, phytosemiosis, and physiosemiosis. In each of these dimensions of nature — the animal, the biochemical and organic, and the physical/virtual — signs function in order-specific ways. These ways have to be understood if the unique domain of the anthroposemiotic is to be articulated with some metaphysical insight and semiotic precision.

All sane philosophy is a species of naturalism, whether descriptive, process, honorific, or ecstatic (Corrington 1994). By this is meant that a genuine and non-narcissistic philosophy honors the sheer scope and complexity of the non-encompassable nature 'within' which the human finds itself. While Deely is somewhat unclear about the metaphysical structures of nature, he at least knows that his revisionary account of the human must be in some sense naturalistic. He takes great pains, for example, to show how his own rendering of the world avoids what for him are the facile distinctions between realism and idealism, inner and outer, human and non-human. He insists that the world is real, but not in the sense confined to the *theory* of realism, which he holds to be pre-semiotic. Ideals do obtain, but only in the context of very powerful Darwinian conditions. Put in other terms: Deely's anthroposemiotic self can only do so much in a semiotic pluriverse that has its own powers and needs.

Hence the self shares in the kind of intrinsic semiotic activities found in the animal kingdom(s) and in the inorganic orders which are virtually semiotic. The most interesting transition for many is precisely that wherein the human reshapes the zoösemiotic *Umwelten* to attain human ends. We will return to this theme later. Of particular import is the idea that the human can never transcend all of its antecedent pre-human forms of semiosis, even while giving them a dimensionality that is only slumbering in the zoösemiotic. Deely is unrelenting in delineating the ways in which anthroposemiosis both is and isn't continuous with zoösemiosis. The nuancing of the semiosis of this shifting terrain is one of the most brilliant accomplishments of this work.

To prepare the way for his examination of this terrain between the two great orders of semiosis, Deely clarifies the status of the semiotic within the human. As noted above, he rejects the realism/idealism distinction as a pre-semiotic confusion that has no bearing on the actual 'way' of semiosis. By the same token, he redefines the terms 'objective' and 'subjective' in such a way as to give himself the requisite maneuvering room to open out the self/sign/world correlation. As he has done in his earlier works (Deely 1982 and 1990; cf. my reviews of these works in Corrington 1988 and 1992), Deely gives a much broadened status to the 'objective' within the context of experience. In the current work, he specifically wants to avoid the initial worry over whether some experience is 'about' something inner or outer, subjective or objective:

8. To speak of any being objectively taken is to speak of some being which belongs to its environment also through cognition and emotion, as well as physically and through the structure of a body as such. This is a very important point, and the point which is ultimately foundational for anthropology. Objective relations, even when they are social, also contain and express more than the social, either on the side of the physical environmental relations which the social only imperfectly transcends, or on the side of the cultural relations which the social relations (in the case of anthropos) sustain but never absorb fully. The cultural transcends the social even more than the social transcends the simply physical, but the *objective* includes all three. (p. 3)

By including the bodily, the social, and the cultural, the objective is the encompassing term/reality for whatever encounters the human process in the context of semiotic experience. No one member of the triad is more real than another, nor is any more basic or foundational. Yet it is endemic to the semiotic enterprise that given perspectives will lift one or more of the three domains out for special and privileged treatment. Were this only a heuristic move, there could be little complaint. Unfortunately, what usually happens is that the chosen domain suddenly becomes 'more

real' and hence, by inversion, more efficacious and more significant than the others. Peirce's three primal categories also get caught up in this vortex. Body-driven semiotic perspectives emphasize secondness, while cultural forms must stress thirdness, e.g., Cassirer's symbolic forms. The social perspective often eulogizes a kind of secondness of thirdness, such as Foucault's social inscription of personal and interpersonal space. Each of these forms has something to say about semiosis, yet each has shown the almost demonic temptation to semiotic imperialism. In all such cases, and they are the norm rather than the exception, the fullness of anthropos is covered over.

In human experience, then, we encounter objective relations whose referents may vary widely, both as to class and to particular. For Deely, the objective encompasses any and all impactions of nature on the human process, insofar as those impactions are semiotically configured. 'Beneath' the objective (objects) are things. Yet here, too, Deely is sensitive to some basic metaphysical issues. He comes out against both materialism and panpsychism. Whatever the 'things' of the world turn out to be, it makes no sense to use some sort of sweeping category like matter or mind as the posited underpinning of whatever is in whatever way. Here Deely reminds one of the later William James who referred to the basic 'what' of the world as 'stuff'. James's own use of homely images protected him from having to ask: just what, exactly, is the world made of? While James was somewhat inept as a metaphysician, he had a primal intuition about letting go of the whatness question that is to be deeply commended. Deely, coming from somewhat different roots, affirms this Jamesian insight: namely, that we do not have to say just what the world is; we let semiosis deal with each partially veiled 'what' as it enters into the objective structures of finite human experience. Peirce, for some very complex psychological reasons (Corrington 1993), insisted on naming the what as partially deadened mind. This made his psychological and metaphysical world much safer than it actually is.

Put in more semiotic terms: signs tell us what and how a given order of the world acts as it enters into the complex web of anthroposemiosis. Things (in Deely's sense) are behind the scenes giving stage directions to the signs that act out their drama of moving from the status of a representamen to the more mature stage of being an interpretant. As sign users, we don't always hear the stage directions, and for the most part, we don't need to. But as semiotic investigators of a complex universe, we should struggle to attend to the stage directions that come from what Peirce would call the 'ground' of the sign/object/interpretant triad. The ground relation remains somewhat mysterious in Peirce, but it is surely more than some kind of Wittgensteinian language game (cf. Sheriff 1994).

The ground is a vectored and grace-filled connection between semiosis and its originating powers and potencies.

The objective world is the world of experience and signs function as patterns of relationship. Deely has a very dynamic ontology in which act is prior to being:

15. The focus of anthropology, then, is not just a certain kind of being. It is rather a certain kind of action, constitutive of a certain kind of being *through which* the human individual as all other elements of the physical universe alike are known and knowable in the first place, namely the being proper to experience. (p. 6)

This anthropological model carries over to the universe at large: 'Action is coextensive with being and sustentative of it...' (p. 1). This strong sense of action makes Deely's universe a very busy place. One senses that being hungers to become realized through action, or more forcefully, that without act, being is a ghost of its possible self. By privileging action in this way, Deely makes the connection between what is a potential knowable and the invasion of semiosis into the human process clearer. Yet what metaphysical price must be paid? Is it not more judicious to see the semiotic and pre-semiotic worlds as both drifting equally between passivity and indifference on the one side, and manifesting a continual series of irruptions of actions, only some of which may reach intelligibility on the other, and thus both operating within the shifting confines of the human process? Are not drift and waste part of the 'way' of being in its self-disclosure through time? These questions will begin to sharpen when we probe into the heart of anthroposemiosis proper.

Thus in the action-sustains-and-shapes-being framework, there is a powerful directionality from the orders of the world to their deposit within the human process. It is as if being would remain in a kind of metaphysical mourning if it could not come off the ramparts like Hamlet's father's ghost and take up residence in court. The full manifestation of this transition is what Deely means by semiosis:

77. This remarkable other chemistry, whereby physical elements of the environment are first of all taken up into experience as objective elements and then further transformed within experience into vehicles representing and conveying what they themselves are not, is called semiosis. Semiosis is the name for the action of signs, in sharp contrast to the action of bodies whereby physical effects are produced. (p. 26)

Semiosis occurs when there is a profound process of othering in which being others itself into things, objects, and then signs within an ongoing

process that has interpretants as its living body. Being the actor becomes being the sign, but only insofar as mere causal and body-to-body transactions are left behind. Signs are themselves ontologically unique. In the words of his earlier work, Deely affirms, 'a sign is neither a thing nor an object but the pattern according to which things and objects interweave to make up the fabric of experience' (Deely 1990: 55).

The pattern of semiosis generates and yet comes out of a vast web of interpretants and makes it possible for things, via objects, to become manifest to whatever degree. Thus for Deely, the focus shifts away from the sign vehicle, although never entirely, toward the relational structures that interweave whatever comes into the domain of the human process. Outside of some kind of minimal semiosis there could be no knowledge of the world at all. Deely does not make the mistake of assuming that everything is or could be part of semiosis. Peirce, of course, in his drive to both abject the unconscious and domesticate the world, wanted to convert all orders into members of some kind of pansemiotic pluriverse in which human sign users could eventually converge on the crystalline thirdness that would make the world fully transparent. But isn't this its own kind of narcissism in which the self admits no true otherness that could haunt it and remind it of its finitude (death)?

To summarize Deely's project thus far, we see that the hidden things of the world, which need not be material, appear to us in the form of objects which are themselves rendered intelligible through the relational web of semiosis in which the world of experience converges with the objective world as semiotically transfigured. But what makes the human order of semiosis unique? It is at this juncture that the specific differences between zoösemiosis and anthroposemiosis must become clarified. The key linking term here is that of the *Umwelt*. The obvious translation from the German is the term 'environment'. Yet Deely makes it clear that such a translation says very little. Like Sebeok before him, he relies on the initial work of Jakob von Uexküll, the German biologist writing in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. In his own research in the sphere of zoösemiosis, von Uexküll discovered that animals participate in a species-specific order of signification that makes instinctual action efficacious. Yet unlike their human counterparts, animals cannot understand the distinction between sign and object, or even come upon a rudimentary conception of the sign per se. Hence there is a distinct sense in which the *Umwelt*, the finite locus of pre-thematic signs, is bubble-like. This bubble is, however, more opaque than transparent. An animal of one species cannot make an imaginative leap into the unique *Umwelt* of another.

Using somewhat constructivist language, which should give pause if not modified by some sense of the sheer inertial power of instinct, Deely links the *Umwelt* to species-specific modeling:

13. The Umwelt is thus a 'model world' from the point of view of possibility, one of the infinite variety of possible alternatives according to which the bare physical furnishings of the environment can be arranged and incorporated into an architectural superstructure of possible experiences, supposing especially this or that biological form. (p. 45)

Left alone, this passage would seem to suggest that there is a great deal of semiotic play in moving from possibility to actuality within semiosis. Yet it is precisely at this juncture that the transition from the animal order to the human begins to clarify itself. As human and as animal/biological we share in *Umwelten* that are pertinent to our species. Yet we have the additional potency that we can open up our own bubble-like *Umwelt* to the play of semiosis in which the physical and antecedent conditions of our being are not so much canceled (whatever that would mean) as modified in the direction of some kind of finite developmental teleology. Of course, semiotic play, like Peirce's 'interpretive musement' is a rare surplus value that is less often exemplified by our species than many semioticians seem willing to admit.

There is very little such play within the orders of zoösemiosis, but the transfiguration of the objective within anthroposemiosis opens up the ontology of possible semiosis, that is, there is the possibility of otherness between the human sign and its physical or environing antecedents. Deely places a great deal, perhaps too much, emphasis on the importance of language in distinguishing anthroposemiosis from other forms. There is a direct correlation between language and human experience, such that we move toward an ontology of textuality within the heart of the sign using self. Humans are primarily text users and text creators. This makes us unique in the known semiotic universe:

Accordingly, to create a text is to proceed in the use of signs freely to structure objectivity in a contour and manner accessible only to a conspecific in the precise sense of another organism able to share understanding of the contrast between objective being and physical surroundings (between 'unreal' and 'real') and to grasp signs fashioned on its basis, that is, encoded according to patterns neither reducible to nor accessible within the perceptible dimension, the physical being, of the sign structure as such. Text creation is a function of musement, for the understanding of which function two terms must be clarified: code and idea. (p. 58)

Note some of the key terms in this description: 'freely', 'contrast', 'text creation', and 'musement'. As Deely drives the wedge between zoösemiosis and anthroposemiosis some idealistic elements begin to appear that clash with the earlier affirmation of what could be called a semiotic naturalism (although not named as such). Suddenly we go from the

opacity of the animal *Umwelt* in which species-specific habits are constricted in signs that are so wedded to their referent that the animal cannot pry them apart, or even imagine what it would be like to do so. As the animal *Umwelt*, which we still participate in, becomes transformed into a human *Lebenswelt* (Husserl's term), there is the dramatic ontological shift to possibility in which the real and the unreal become for the first time antagonists within semiosis. Language, perhaps the single most overrated semiotic phenomenon, incarnates itself in the *corpus*, the textual body that holds up and defines the parameters of the *Lebenswelt*.

This textual corpus is fully embodied in signs that should know that they differ from their objects. This abyss created by language frees the human sign user to engage in musement in which textual possibilities play across and through the objective order of experience. Animals have instincts; we have instincts and texts. And the latter reality seems the more important. We have a free play of semiosis that opens out and reshapes text after text, idea after idea, code after code. What are ideas and where are they located? For Deely, ideas belong in the *Innenwelt*, namely the inner world that marks the particularity of human experience. Codes belong in the *Umwelt* where they shape the species-particularity of the human community. Deely notes that Peirce did not develop a conception of semiotic codes, although his understanding of the role of the growth of interpretants may come close. On the other hand, many semioticians, most notably Eco, place entirely too much emphasis on codes as if they somehow unlock or encompass the mysteries of semiosis. In any event, Deely wants to reshape the notion of code within the context of the zoösemiotic underpinnings of anthroposemiotics.

Codes are the horizon within which texts can be sustained. Yet Deely privileges the idealistic elements of anthroposemiosis in which the free play of linguistic musement takes some precedence over antecedent codes and their constraining influences. Does Deely, in spite of himself, de-biologize the human by putting so much stress on musement? Is there a kind of heroic anthropology at work in his perspective that makes us sign shapers far more than we are sign assimilators? Does his perspective downplay the waste and utter drift, not to mention semiotic entropy, of the human process? In answer we can say that all texts, not a term of fully generic import, are far more subject to spoliation and deposition than they are to a complex reweaving in which some kind of semiotic plenitude is triumphant against the sheer indifference of nature.

Codes, according to Deely, enable us to reshape the objective world and to bring it more and more into line with our personal and/or species interests. This heroic conception of our semiotic prowess is clearly affirmed:

244. This partial element of discursive critical control of objectification, introduced within the objective world by successful stipulations resulting in codes, is what makes of the objective world itself as dwelt in by human animals a text to be rewritten as well as merely interpreted through perceptual relations as such established through social interaction as such together with biological heritage. The human animal not only makes use of signs, but knows that the signs it makes use of are signs, not merely extensions of objects to be sought, avoided, or safely ignored. (p. 104)

One of the key terms in *this* passage is 'stipulation', which denotes the process by which the sign-using self can shape all incoming material and give it the parameters needed to sustain a particular text-in-process. We stipulate the code of the *Umwelt* that in turn governs the ideas of the *Innenwelt*. The play, and what else could it be for Deely, between idea and code frames the entire *corpus* of the text that we are. Put differently, to be a person is to be an incarnate text that arises through heroic and willful semiotic acts in which the zoösemiotic side of our *Umwelt* bends before the anthroposemiotic power of the stipulated code and the ideas of the *Innenwelt*.

Here we see a larger convergence between Deely's Medieval emphasis on the priority of act over being and the heroic obsession with code making through the free play of musement within the specifically human. The universe itself is heroic in actualizing itself against the opacity of 'mere' being, while the human rides on the wind horse of the self-othering being and participates in its momentum. Our stipulated codes are as heroic as nature itself. Semiosis thus plays across 'a web as vast as nature itself' (p. 115). Surely we can do no less than nature when we muse on our self-chosen texts.

While Deely makes a great deal of otherness in this text, one is compelled to ask: just how 'other' is his otherness? Is it really something that stands in naked silence over and against semiosis, or is it some kind of quasi-Hegelian otherness that is never very far from home? One of the most telling omissions in this text (not to mention Deely's other works) is the issue of the unconscious. After 133 pages of closely written text, expressed in 311 numbered paragraphs, and 39 additional pages of 'Paragraphal glosses', one looks in vain for any discussion of the unconscious. It is astonishing that a generic exploration of anthroposemiotics would ignore what is perhaps the single most important semiotic fact about the human; namely, that our semiotic processes are deeply tied to a kind of direct otherness that cannot be easily rendered into the concepts of 'code', or 'idea', or 'textuality'. While these concepts can find some purchase in the unconscious, they must be profoundly altered before they

can become part of a robust anthroposemiotic. It is precisely here that Deely's heroic reconstruction of the self reveals its most serious weakness.

In a recent essay, Deely probes into Peirce's dual, but incompatible, images of 'glassy essence', and 'bottomless lake'. Strangely, he does not take Peirce's bait but fails to understand how radical the latter term becomes for the mature Peirce. In one of his few references to the unconscious, Deely completely strips away its intrinsic otherness:

Conscious semiosis, then, is a particular process, or sub-process, within the semiosis we call the universe. The unconscious is a precipitate, rather than an antecedent, to this subprocess, and the objective world, including especially the whole of language and culture, is similarly constituted by this process as the subjective centers of consciousness objectively overlap in the intersubjective constitution of community. (Deely 1993: 158)

Following Peirce, but not understanding his intent, Deely sees the unconscious as the result of antecedent conscious experience, i.e., the image of debris falling into the lake where it then takes on an underwater residence. The unconscious on this reading is a storage tank for the residue of the objective world of experience. It is subject to either spoliation or recall, but it is not a great governing power in its own right. Insofar as the unconscious intrudes on the surface of the lake, it merely augments the current textuality that shapes the self-in-process.

I have chosen this aspect of anthroposemiosis because it has profound effects for Deely's general enterprise. For some reason, North American semiotics got off on the wrong foot on the issue of depth psychology, preferring instead to derive its inspiration from anthropology, information theory, or aspects of the neo-Darwinian synthesis. While none of these emphases are without great value, they remain incomplete, especially insofar as they abject the unconscious. Deely's heroic semiotics can only function within the context in which the dangers of genuine ontological and psychological otherness are ignored.

What makes the unconscious so problematic to many semioticians is that it straddles the ontological difference between the semiotic and the presemiotic. The presemiotic dimension is rooted in the unconscious of nature itself, and this makes it much more capacious than any consequent structures that enter the bottomless lake. The otherness of this dimension of the unconscious is different in *kind* from the otherness separating one sign from another, or a sign from its object, or an object from its thing. For Deely, otherness is tied to distinctions within experience as we differentiate one item from another. He also invokes a sense of secondness as when something comes into awareness with brute force. Yet this is a particularity, that is, *a* second that emerges from out of secondness.

There is no sense in this account of what one might call 'sheer secondness', a notion that is latent in Peirce but not developed. That is, sheer secondness is a primal kind of otherness that is not localized in any seconds or indexes within the web of experience. This nascent understanding of sheer secondness in Peirce can be radicalized to show the force of the unconscious within anthroposemiosis as it correlates to the inversion and transfiguration of experience.

The presemiotic (manifest as sheer secondness) and the semiotic are deeply entwined in the unconscious. Whenever we encounter specific unconscious contents we encounter semiotic seconds that also manifest firstness and thirdness. Yet when we probe into the provenance of the unconscious itself we encounter something like a presemiotic 'ground' that envelops any and all contents of the unconscious. This appears to us as a shattering of boundaries, as an abyss that is *sheerly* other, and not confined within the direct web of semiosis. This dimension of the unconscious, precisely because it *is* presemiotic, cannot be domesticated by semiotic theory. Idealism, which is almost always heroic and anti-naturalistic, abjects the unconscious because of a justifiable anxiety that the scope of its imperial semiotics will be sharply curtailed. To privilege act over being is to reenact Peirce's panpsychism that tried to outrun the unconscious by converting the world to something analogous to consciousness. The irony here is that Deely sees through panpsychism but falls prey to the same anxiety that would strip the unconscious of its uncanny power by flying from origins (being) toward quasi-Larmarkian goals (act) (cf. p. 73).

Another indication of this deep abjection in Deely's text is his deep ambivalence about the status of the infinite within semiosis. He has some brilliant analyses of the role of the infinite within the shaping of the objective world of experience, yet he also wants to put brakes on its operation within the self. This is understandable on one level. No one wants to live within the world of Hegel's bad infinite in which the mere return of the repressed, or the reiteration of the same, locks the human animal into a cycle from which it cannot escape. Deely accepts the Latin tradition when it denies the search for all antecedent causes of a given phenomenon, '*Processus ad infinitum absolute repugnat*'. Yet he also goes on to talk about current processes of semiosis that envelop the sign-user:

Semiosis as such is an infinite progression, yes, but it is not an actual infinity of significations simultaneously given as such. Semiosis proceeds rather through a succession of significations only some of which are simultaneously achieved, while others are achieved successively and with many duplications, lapses, and overlaps. The infinity of semiosis, in other words, is a *syncategorematic* infinity, in Poincaré's

apt expression — a prospective and virtual one, not one actually achieved at any given moment or in any sequence or sign system. (p. 96)

On the surface, this is an obviously valid analysis of what the sign-using animal is capable of at any given time. We assimilate and manipulate a finite number of signs in the actual infinite, while weaving our web out of the prospective infinite that holds open our semiotic space. Deely's distinction between the 'actual' and the 'prospective', (used in a similar way in Corrington 1994) helps us to see how we are lured past current semiotic configurations toward a fuller encounter with interpretants, especially as we move toward the final interpretant.

The problem emerges when we probe into the adequacy of the prospective infinite if it is not embedded in something much more primary; namely, the presemiotic unconscious that is the origin and goal for all forms of semiosis. Logically it makes perfect sense to deny the value of a search for an infinite of efficient causes (or signs). But there is a parallel psychological logic that moves in the exact opposite direction. The unconscious is a full and attained infinite, both in itself and for consciousness. This is not a bad infinite or an infinite regress so much as it is an infinite spawning ground, perhaps Peirce's 'ground' itself, for everything that envelops anthroposemiosis. In fearing or abjecting the infinite, in whatever form and for whatever reasons, we also abject the unconscious. After all, what moving infinity, which is both actual *and* prospective, is closer to us than the unconscious? And, by the uncanny logic of abjection, what infinity is farther removed from semiotic theory?

How can anthroposemiosis begin to approach the unconscious in such a way as to help complete the kind of enterprise that Deely has so forcefully undertaken? The irony here is that the word 'complete' will have to be withdrawn. The unconscious can be approached through indirection, e.g., through dream material, ideation, somatic states, cross-cultural studies, and artistic contrivance. In this sense, semiosis can become open to the form-destroying and form-creating abyss underneath it. Yet it can never envelop that which has no ultimate shape or contour, any more than it can reign in the processive infinite or draw a circle around the actual infinite. What is envisioned here is a profound humbling of the semiotic enterprise insofar as it encounters the 'bottomless lake', combined with a simultaneous expansion of its possibilities when it lets the presemiotic rhythms of the unconscious permeate its phenomenological description of the human process. For Deely it is the human use of signs that is uppermost, while for a semiotics of ecstatic naturalism it is the rhythm of the unconscious of nature that grasps theory and brings it closer to the heart of the self.

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