Time and Translation

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Rubber Pencil

American philosopher and semiotician. theorizing which honours the uncanny detail of lived affordance" (2002; 2, emphasis added). "Anecdotal to 'read' that account for the theoretical insights it afforded, in order to produce theory with a better sense of humour, theorising which honours the uncanny detail of lived experienc..." To apply that principle here, I will begin with a story about John Deely, the contemporary American philosopher and semiotician.

Rubber Pencil

About ten years ago, I was editing a volume of conference-proceedings with John, and I visited his office with the camera-ready manuscript I had typset. John is meticulous about such things and while we were arguing about something on a page that he claimed wasn't centred, I told him he was wrong, that what he perceived as off-centred was just an optical illusion. Then I added, "You know, like a rubber pencil." He gave me a strange look of non-comprehension and I was sure he inferred that ‘rubber-pencil’ was just an optical illusion. John is meticulous about such things and while we were in the course of decoding.

The Hand of Decoding

Decoding is not really possible, and its "end," in the sense of a goal of some kind, is seldom considered in semiotics since it necessarily serves as a strategic "myth" (in Roland Barthes’s sense) for the existence of semiotics as a discipline (or whatever it is). There is undoubtedly an end, a purpose, a remainder behind the concept of "decoding," as it enables a belief in the "success" of semiotic analysis - the ability, in other words, to "crack" the code of a given signifying entity.

But, nevertheless, decoding is surely nothing more than what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call a "literalization which fixes the differences of a relational system" (1985: 114). Or, perhaps one could modify this to read: which endows, if possible.

A apt illustration of this is found in the common belief (Peirce, Eco, et al.) that "infinite semiosis" is not truly infinite that a signifier ultimately refers to a transcendental signified, carries with it "the possibility of fixing a meaning which underlies the flow of differences" (1985: 112). Signs, in effect, don’t refer only to other signs, this argument maintains; some sort of end -understanding or knowledge or even truth - will be the eventual, progressive outcome. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that a signifier ultimately would impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning," they suggest. "Every relation of representation is founded on a fiction: that the presence of a certain level of something which, strictly speaking, is absent from it. But because it is at the same time a fiction and a principle organizing actual social relations, representation is in the terrain of a game whose result is not predetermined from the beginning" (119). This argument is not very compelling, however. (In fact, the same contention is also found in reader-response literary criticism that maintains that the reader can’t do just whatever she wants with a text; that the text, in effect, exerts some control of some kind just by virtue of being a text.) Yet this view of semiotic restriction provides an opening for further consideration of the concept of decoding.

A hyperbolic example of this phenomenon can be read as follows (as to elevate the monomous deontology) of a word, look up its definition in a dictionary (Ruhl; Simpkins 2001). Then look up the definition of each word in that definition. Rather than leading to an absurdly pointless exercise, eventually some sort of "definition" of that first word will emerge - a sense of what that word means to someone, in effect, through a process of what Gilbert Ryle (1968) and Clifford Geertz (1973) discuss as "thick description."

For semiotics, acceptance of the viability of "decoding" arguably serves as a rationale to justify itself. If semiotics can provide an outcome for decoding a sign vehicle, leading to the equivalent of a sum or remainder, then something it has an end purpose. But, as numerous examples can show, it appears that nothing of any certainty or finality can ultimately be gained from decoding texts without accepting that these results are manufactured (or to use Nietzsche’s term, "invented," [1873] by the apparatus employed. Ultimately, then, any decoding would simply be a new encoding even further "away" from the truth of a signifying entity. And the process of semiotics carries on, endlessly.

Humans, Nietzsche maintains, have arranged an epistemological “peace treaty” which “brings in its wake something which appears to be the first step toward acquiring that puzzling truth drive; to wit, that which shall count as ‘truth’ from now on is established. That is to say, a universally valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth” (1873: 889). This is how we “invented knowing” of the “truth.” “Truth and the material conditions of our belief to have been illusions” (891). Decoding, accordingly, could be viewed as a “nudity of a metaphor” (1873: 891) or a “conceptual crap game.” “Only by forgetting that primitive world of metaphor,” Nietzsche concludes, “can one live any repose, security, and consistency” (893).

Given the unarguably human, impersonal, even fabricated component of what we call decoding, Nietzsche’s perspective actually holds positive consequences for semiotics. It acknowledges that decoders don’t just passively decode sign vehicles: they make them anew. Otherwise, if semioticians continue to pretend that decoding is a disinterested process with no “stake” in the textual event, then this is similar to some components of the scientific method, they are not being honest or even accurate about what happens in the course of decoding.

This is understandable, after all, for as Stanley Fish notes, the illusion of materiality, or consensus, or reproducibility of results, is undeniably seductive. Fish emphasizes the immense seduction of the materiality of the page in this regard. While he averts that “the objectivity of the text is an illusion,” it nevertheless is “a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The illusion of sufficiency and completeness. A line of print or a page or a book is so obviously there - it can be handled, photographed, or put away - that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it” (1970: 82). The text, along these lines, then, is
essentially equivalent to the convincing sight of the rubber pencil. Such dishonesty or inaccuracy, however, is accompanied by an underlying ontological reDefinition, of course. No longer is decoding a fraudulent enterprise, a hat trick, an act of lamentation, a tremendous con job—a rubber pencil. Yet, a practice based on a lie remains usefully loosely defined, and the lie compromises that undo whatever progress is seemingly accomplished.

Jonathan Culler argues that accepting certain strategic compromises (decoding, for example, or in his case, naming) constitutes a literal act that is necessary in order to establish a profession or discipline.

The claims of schools and universities to offer literal training necessarily entail a certain alienation of the accomplished. No longer is decoding a fraudulent enterprise, essentially equivalent to the convincing sight of the world do not suffice to make someone a perceptive and knowledgeable reader (Cummings, 1985: 36). This clear short circuits any conventional 4-poetic text that, in turn, reveals an underlying structure and so on. This clearly short circuits any conventional characters in any conventional sense in the poem, just by e. e. Cummings (titled “anyone lived in a pretty how code to endow it with consistency” (1985: 36).

An article in the New York Times (January 14, 2009) titled “Listening to Schroeder: Peanuts’ Scholarly Find Memory” contains a short passage on the bottom of the front page (declaring “Peanuts’ Decoded”) that seemingly reinforced the aforementioned belief that such an action can occur. (Grammatical errors are universal in discourses of this nature—a description of the article titled: “Deciphering the Peanuts Gang” [A3].) At first glance, this sense of “decoding” appears to mean that someone believed there actually was a way to crack the code of this American comic strip, but instead, the article focuses on William Meredith’s work as the director of the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Media and Popular Studies at Arizona State University “When Schroeder” – the boy who plays piano in the comic strip – “poured on his piano, his eyes clenched in a trance, the notes floating above his head, the droplets of ink spots dropping to the key of G, we are told from Meredith’s perspective. Schulz carefully chose each snatch of music he drew and transcribed the notes from the score. More than in illustration, the music was a soundtrack to the strip, introducing the characters’ state of emotion, prompting one to ask a question or punctuating an interaction (C1). Accordingly, instead of detailing the final “decoding” of Peanuts, the article explores how one analyst adds yet another layer to the reader strategies already in place in the analysis of this comic strip. In the case of thick description, this would merely be one more approach to the text. It is clear, however, that the reference to Schulz’s “careful” use of musical interjections is not an extension of companies’ ability for a encoder to create a type of monospece control into a signifier that presumably, in turn, can be located and decoded “successfully” if equal care is exercised by the decoder (in a manner similar to “close reading” in literary interpretation).

Nina Auerbach, for example, argues that codes create a stable and coherent signifying construct. Regarding one of the main characters in Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park, for instance, she asserts that “the coincidence underlying Edmund’s authoritative vocabulary tells us that the word ["ought"] recurs amusingly in his speech, "for there is no objective code to end it with consistency" (1985: 36).

A far more rudimentary form of this conception of decoding can be seen in the ingenuous poetics analysis by Tanya Reinhart (1978) of a famous poem by e. e. cummings (“titled "anyone lived a pretty low town"). Read in a (theoretically posited) conventional manner, the poem appears self-contradicting and relatively opaque, if not at least translucent, in terms of determining the exact line of action of the named characters. What numbers in any conventional sense in the poem, just vaguer references to “someone,” “no one,” and so on. This is why e. e. cummings circuits any conventional methodological analysis devised for the poem. Literature semiotics and seems to beg for the discovery of a decoding grid that “naturally” fits as an overlay to the poetic text that, in turn, reveals an underlying structure of intelligibility that otherwise remains entirely invisible.

What Reinhart offers is a completely systemic overtake for the poem which posits, for instance, that “someone” (given a capital “A” now) is a character named “Anyone.” She does this with four sets of “characters”

(Anyone, Someone, Noone, Everyone) and furthermore creates character-type corollaries (protagonists and antagonists, specified “team” units (Goffman), and a story/plot. But, as she says, she has to code these characters through the one typographical feature in particular that cummings usually avoids (in fact, he went so far as to actually print the spelling of his name in lower-case letters, although Reinhart also changes his name to “Cummings.”). The point here is that whatever gains Reinhart makes, comes with an at least equal if not greater downside, especially after all; she is altering data to fit her hypothesis.

The same situation can be found right now on the American television show “House, M.D.” in which a gifted medical student trains young doctors through group “diagnostic differential” to crack the code of each new week’s puzzling malady. During the differential, he and his team throw out diagnosis hypotheses based on a sick person’s existing symptoms with the way that specific medical problems present themselves. Often, though, one member will propose excluding one or more symptoms in order to consider a potentially “valid” hypothesis. If we leave out the hypertension... This usually leads to a sarcastic denigration of that hypothesis proposal since it doesn’t include all the data. The second week, Reinhart proposes at least two potentially fruitful results based on what has happened on the episode up to this point. Either this will lead the group to dismiss the proposed dishonest hypothesis, but in the process, they will see the situation differently and come up with something (and this happens almost every week) that does include all of the symptoms. So in the case of Reinhart’s patient, who is suffering from two different medicalities at the same time, and thus the second set of otherwise excluded symptoms actually matches up with those characteristic of the second malady, Reinhart concludes: “But House, it turns out that the patient withheld some key information that House or his team can literally uncover to produce a substantiable diagnosis. (Everybody lies),” is Dr. House’s motto, and this is exactly for medical semiotics as it is for semiotics as fundamentally the study of lying (1978:6).

People Watching

Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Man of the Crowd” (which appeared in the journal Atlantic’s Gask (1840)), portrays a related detection scenario through a narration by a man who, while reposing himself on his ability to perform a typological decoding of the passers-by in the crowds of mid-nineteenth century London, discovers to his own surprise that he has repeatedly used this skill successfully over and over again on those who walk past him. At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in the crowd and the place of them in their aggregate relations,” he notes. “Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable various expressions of face, gait, visage, and expression of countenance” (507).

The initial reference to the narrator’s health (“For some months I had been ill in health, but was now convalescent”) (1840: 507) merits commentary at this juncture. Reinhart explains his leisure activities of people watching, but it may serve as a type of “sick” denominator for his decoding/re-encoding activity, too. In this sense, his especially acute abilities, along with his pursuit of decoding the character of the stranger, could be viewed ironically in the end, not unlike when readers recognize that a narrator of the story is himself the one to be revealed. House, it turns out to be (as in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper”). Accordingly, through this signification by way of wearing a black veil.

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Hooper" (1836: 38). The “one thing remarkable in his appearance,” the narrator adds, is “Swathed about his shoulders and hands, and never to be shaken by his breath, Mr. Hooper had on a black veil.”

As is found in film, the narrator appears capable of zooming in on the minister for “closer” inspection – a noteworthy standpoint for decoding possibility, all this does is increase the semiotic distortion of the sign vehicle, rather than clarifying it. Without detailing how this perspective shift is accomplished, it is implied that “on a single view,” the view “seemed to consist of two folds of crepe, which entirely concealed his features, except the mouth and chin, but, to all appearance, the interpreter had gone further than to give a darkened aspect to all living and inanimate things.” The emphasis on conjecture is clear here, as the narrator refers to these decodings as actions of “semiotic inferences that argue that...”

The narrator continues to freight his description of Mr. Hooper with connotative accretions, noting that he is “walking with this gloomy shade before him...a slow and quiet pace, stooping somberly, as if treading on the ground, as is customarily with abstracted men” (1836: 38). So, now the register here is one of gloom and abstraction, the latter of which appears to refer rather to distance. Either the narrator is engaging in the common technique of reflecting the consciousness of the onlookers instead of providing the reader with straightforward, omniscient perspective or the narrator is merely perceiving Mr. Hooper negatively.

In either case, though, the impression is clearly clarified by his features, or even neutral, perspective. Although Mr. Hooper appears “darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity which his parishioners “repaid him” as he engages in another “cried.” “Our parson has gone mad!”, yet the response from the group is much more significant by its absence, “as a ‘cross dressed’ in this manner. Or, rather, it could be seen that Mr. Hooper’s “one thing remarkable in his appearance,” the “veil,” the “black veil” the “one piece of crepe, to their imagination, seemed to have brightened the features of the guests, which it overwhelmed all others. His frame raised a glass of wine to his lips, wishing that the “starting to observe, how slowly this venerable man became conscious of something singular in the appearance of his pastor,” the narrator notes, “He seemed not fully to partake of the prevailing wonder,” the veil becomes in this instance a “mysterious enigma.” It “shook with his measured breath, as he gave it another glance, delighted in the security between him and the holy page, as he read the Scriptures; and while he prayed, the veil lay heavily on his uplifted countenance; but as he approached entanglement into the realm of symbolism: ‘Did he seek to hide it from the dread Being whom he was addressing?’”

The opacity of the veil’s significant force grows so forcefully that “Such was the effect of this simple piece of crepe, that more than one woman of delicate nerves was forced to leave the meeting-house.”

Then, however, the narrator introduces a directional reversal into this dynamic by speculating on the encoder’s perspective; how the veil, in effect, alters the semiotic effect of those Mr. Hooper sees through this altered “lens.” For, now the consideration turns to the parishes. “Yet perhaps the placed congregation was almost as fearful a sight to the minister, as his black veil to them” (1836: 39). This becomes an increasingly prominent issue as the story progresses, drawing attention as it does to the encoder’s perspective on those to whom he disseminates messages.

The primary consideration remains on the impact on the decoder who finds Mr. Hooper’s transmutations of his face veiled by the veil. Even though he is delivering his usual, “mild” sermon, there was something, either in the sentiment of the discourse itself, or in the imagination of the auditors, which made how careful an effort that they had ever heard from their pastor’s lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of Mr. Hooper’s “veil.”

In order for the townsfolk to satisfactorily decode this following scene (something corroborated by inter­observer agreement), along with a similar development pertaining to a young couple he marries, suggest that, indeed, the veil is imbuing Mr. Hooper with extraordinary signifying capabilities (1836: 43).

After performing the ceremony, Mr. Hooper raised a glass of wine to his lips, wishing happily that the “each member of the congregation, the most innocent girl, and the man of hardened heart, felt as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity which they had on her Black Veil. (44)

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can (including the presumed class of signs deemed transparently ”iconic”).

Mr. Hooper nevertheless endeavours to engage in this very procedure, but the impact of infinite semiotic complexity cannot be controlled by its creator as soon as it is released into circulation among other sign users. Moreover, rather than producing the signified that the minister proclaims the veil represents hypothetically (“I hide my face for a secret sin”), the decoders he encounters necessarily project their own signifieds onto it.

In fact, right after this assertion, the narrator relates that Elizabeth does this very thing: “a new feeling took the place of sorrow” in her eyes were fixed insistently on the black veil when, like a sudden twilight in the air, its terror fell around her. She arose, and stood trembling before him (1836: 47). The minister pleads for an empathic decoding by Elizabeth at this point, providing a linguistic supplement to the non-linguist signifier of the veil:

Have patience with me, Elizabeth. Do not look away the place of sorrow. I am hidden underJealousy’s request to see beneath the veil for one last time, she leaves, and his response is not insignificant: “Mr. Hooper smiled to think that only a material emblem had separated him from Happier than supposedly I was seen here, of course, is that Elizabeth is confusing the materiality of the signifier (like those who get up unset the purely symbolic gesture of flag burning) with the signified I, moreover, associated with an important facet of signification, a signified. As will be discussed later, this becomes essentially what Barthes posits: the signifier without a signified. A signifier that effectively conveys only itself instead of a relational meaning: “No”, said she, and, after a moment’s hesitation, “Come, let us see the face that I am willing to look upon. Come, good sir, let the sun shine from behind the cloud. First lay aside your black veil: then tell me why you put it on” (1836: 45). Here, Mrs. Hooper engages in a bid for mutual encoding-decoding by way of her own smile. Yet this common-
On the upper lefthand corner someone had scrawled the phrase: THE NEXT BUILDING PLAN TO BOMB. Harry unfolded the paper and saw an inked drawing of what appeared to be a sizable train station or some other public structure, perhaps an airport terminal. In the drawing were arched windows and front pillars but very little other supporting detail. The building looked solid, monumental, and difficult to destroy. (1997: 65)

Harry then shows it to other people. The office receptionist says: “You’ve got to take it to the police...This is the work of a maniac. That’s La Guardia there, the airport! In the picture! I was there last month. I’m sure it’s La Guardia, Mr. Edmonds. No kidding. Definitely La Guardia.” (1997: 66)

Harry’s girlfriend: “Lucia examined the soiled paper, her thumb and finger at its corner, and said, ‘Well, Harry, what are you going to do with this? Some nut case did this, right?’” (1997: 68)

At the police station: Sergeant Bursk asked, “Mr. Edmonds, you got any kids?”

“Kids? No, I don’t have kids. Why?”

“Kids did this,” Sergeant Bursk told him, waving the paper in front of him as if he were driving it off. “My kids could’ve done this. Kids do this. Boys do this. They draw torture chambers and they make threats and all that. That’s what they do. It’s the youth. But they’re kids. They don’t mean it...That’s Grand Central. In New York, on Forty-second Street, I think. I was there once. You can tell by the clock. See this clock here?” He pointed at a vague circle. “That’s Grand Central, and this is the big clock that they’ve got there on the front.” (1997: 67-68)

The “kid” Harry meets in a bar:

“I know this fucking place...I’ve, like, traveled, you know, all over Europe. This is in Europe, this place, this is fucking Deutschland we’re talking about here...Oh, yeah, I remember this place. I was there, two summers ago! Hamburg! This is the Dammotor Bahnhof.”

“Never heard of it,” Harry Edmonds said.

“You never heard of it? You’ve never heard there, too, man. You have to fucking be there to know about it.”

The kid squinted his eyebrows together like a professor making a difficult point. “A bahnhof, sir, is a train station, and the Dammotor Bahnhof is, like, one of the stations there, and this is the one that the Nazis rounded up the Jews to. And, like, sent them off from. This place, man. Absolutely. It’s still standing. This one, it fucking deserves to be bombed. Just blow it totally the fuck away, off the face of the earth. That’s just my opinion. It’s evil, man.” (1997: 68-69)

And, finally, Harry’s therapist: “This building!...Oh, it’s the Field Museum, in Chicago. And that’s not a theory. It is the Field Museum.” (1997: 70)

The decoding conviction in these semiotic assessments of the text is implicit in all but the last, in which the therapist’s follow-up comment draws attention to that feature of the previous ones, and employs the “lastword” technique to draw out this implication in the others. Significantly, Harry never offers his own interpretation of the found text except to make his own drawing – and this is clearly anticipated by the process of semiotic deferral characterized by some semioticians: “It’s the process of paper and no. 2 pencil. At the top of the pad, Harry writes, ‘The next place I plan to bomb,’ and then very slowly, and with great care, begins to draw his own face, its smooth clear shaven contours, in courteous halfsmile.” (1997: 71).

It is revealing, too, that Harry reconfigures the original drawing and recaptures his own drawing, emphasizing the personal, contributive, constructive nature of decoding by substituting himself for the building in the original drawing and alternately titling his own drawing as “The Next Place I Plan to Bomb,” thereby turning the unspecified link between the original’s drawing and linguistic text into, in this case, a personal decoding rendition signified by “titling” (Simpkins 1980). This is exactly what happens in decoding as well.

Harry is the only respondent, however, who acknowledges this reality of the process of decoding while the other characters seem to (or explicitly say) “objectively” draw upon their personal experience to determine what the drawing represents, injecting biographical frames into the process without acknowledging this. The whither of our presumably similar texts that are blowing about haphazardly at the end of the story (just as they were at the beginning) virtually parodies the endless referral slippage of semiosis in which one of them may again attach itself to yet another decoder, setting off the operation of semiotic interpretation yet again. Additionally, Baxter’s narrator has only limited omniscience, as is suggested by the drawing description, and more importantly the open conjecture about Harry’s subsequent actions at the end where the narrator suggests several possibilities of his next step.

One way that the “communal” decoding standards that Fish discusses can be realized is through public rule dissemination based on the presumption that all institutionally sanctioned decoders agree to act in accordance with these rules. Nevertheless, this is only an artificial distinction and in no way consistent with reality, as Harry discovers when no two decoders offer the same decoding of the text he shows them. As Harry’s actions reveal, it is only when boundaries are constructed and agreed upon that they have any sort of real force. Culler used as an illustration of this in a graduate course on semiotics, the airport security signs that at one time (pre-9/11 in the US) declared that even any apparent jokes about having a bomb, etc. would be decoded as serious utterances. This creates an institutionally constructed and regimented form of what Hodge and Kress call a “reception regime” (1988) which, among other things, delegates the ability to decide whether something is considered offensive to the decoder but not the creator.

A related illustration of this type of decoding strategy is found in Roland Barthes’s apparent assertion that some sign vehicles can only be decoded as signifiers without a signified. Essentially, though, he breaks the magicians’ code of maintaining professional secrecy where he explains the illusion behind decoding by revealing how something that appears to be non-signifying can be hardly transported into the realm of the intelligible through the process of artful decoding. Barthes’s paired decodings offer a striking example, however, as the concluding punctuation does not establish an either/or opposition (e.g., a case of this or that), but rather, an oscillation around mutually inclusive possibilities, with only two among many other decoding options. Additionally, the placement of this example at the end of Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes with no apparent ligature is also puzzling. What exactly is the reader supposed to make of this paradox (if that is what it is)? It is like the abrupt comma in Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” in which the narrator offers a satisfactory, although tenuous, answer to the question posed at the end: “How can one be sure of this?” (1997: 69-70).

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The organization of the volume is chronological. The reader is carefully led through Victoria Welby’s own writings as they develop, and their linkage to contemporary intellectual and scientific streams of thought, by Petrilli’s sensitive “read”. There is also a rich selection from the archives of Victoria Welby’s correspondence and papers, as well as reviews of those, in the closing chapters of the book, which ends with appendices and bibliographies of great value for anyone interested in further studies of Lady Welby and the Signific Movement. The integrated archival material, such as hitherto unpublished letters and/or illustrative extracts from the archives, illustrates the scientific and intellectual development of Welby.

Who was Lady Welby? Lady Welby was born as Lady Victoria Alexandrina Maria Louisa Stuart-Wortley into the highest circles of the English nobility. She was named

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**Time and Translation**


By Anna Cabak Rédei

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In the majestic book Signifying and Understanding: Reading the Works of Victoria Welby and the Signific Movement, Susan Petrilli is returning to the topic, first addressed in her Significa e semiose: La vita e la morte di Lady Welby (1984), of semiotic history and Victoria Welby’s importance for contemporary semiotics. The book consists of a selection of Victoria Lady Welby’s (1837-1912) published and unpublished writings (including her correspondence with important scholars of her time as well as her scientific writings), contributing to modern semiotics on a general level (and in the correspondence with Charles Sanders Peirce in more specific ways). But more importantly perhaps, the selection of writings illustrates Lady Welby’s contribution to the Signific Movement in the 1890s, which eventually flourished in the Netherlands within the Dutch Significa Group.

Petrilli’s ambition with this book is to communicate the theoretical bedrocks of signification and its evolution with a special focus on issues connected to the problem of “signs, meaning and understanding,” i.e., “with ‘language and communication’ (ix).” The organization of the volume is chronological. The reader is carefully led through Victoria Welby’s own writings as they develop, and their linkage to contemporary intellectual and scientific streams of thought, by Petrilli’s sensitive “read.” There is also a rich selection from the archives of Victoria Welby’s correspondence and papers, as well as reviews of those, in the closing chapters of the book, which ends with appendices and bibliographies of great value for anyone interested in further studies of Lady Welby and the Signific Movement. The integrated archival material, such as hitherto unpublished letters and/or illustrative extracts from the archives, illustrates the scientific and intellectual development of Welby.
Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and anthropology and education— to mention a few. Linguistics, mathematics, semiotics, sociology, Sonesson (2000) points out, the limit between ego and “a plurality of selves” (149). Peirce expressed much the semiotic perspective (146). Welby’s understanding of example, Welby discussed the issue of identity, and in Clifford and Mary Everest Boole was important for her. William James, Charles K. Ogden, Bertrand Russell, Rudolph Carnap, Thomas A. Huxley, Henry and a wide range of interests, and many important names appeared in the volume (chapter three). Welby’s text gives a fine articulation of three levels of meaning: Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third. Secondness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second and third into relation to each other. (in Petrilli, 396).

In the early essay “Meaning and Metaphor” (1893) and “Interpretation” (1896) that preceded What is Meaning? Welby was specifically occupied with the problem of signifying processes, as well as the second term in Welby’s triad indicating meaning intention; while “significance” indicates the overall effect, importance and value of signifying processes. (in Petrilli, 264)

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In any case, meaning— in the widest sense as I have understood it—is the only value of whatever “fact” presents itself to us. Without this, to observe and record appearances or occurrences would become a worse than wasteful task. Significance is the one value of all that appearances or occurrences would present in light of the context of discourse which they somehow enter, the terms “person,” “self,” “religion” are signalled as examples. Reference to the larger context in this sense, for the purpose of minimizing the negative effects of misunderstanding and improving the work of conceptualization.

In connection with Welby’s semiotic approach she wanted, on the one hand, to criticize what she thought was the reductive side of the term “common sense” (Simple meaning), and on the other, as something a priori to language. Welby theorized the latter (already present in Lois and Claus from 1881) Welby within the frames of her conception “mother-sense,” or “primal sense” (142). Another substantial contribution to the field was the “Welby Prize” the latter consisted of significs, Mind, which Welby announced in 1896.

The German sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) was granted the prize for his essay “Philosophical Terminology” (1890) and for papers were written by many of Welby’s contemporaries, and notes on the prize are appended, as are the one by Tönnies (125, 245).

In 1911 Welby published her second book Significa and Language: The Articulat Form of Our Expresive and Interpretative Resources. Many of Welby’s essays are published conference papers. Although she was not connected to any academic institution, she was a member of distinguished academic bodies like the Aristotelian Society, Anthropological Institute, and the Sociological Society. Petrilli has mentionend Welby’s scholarly lectures, which deal with issues related to mental evolution and cognition, and are thus important for the history of modern semiotics, as for instance: “Is there a Break in Mental Evolution?” (Sept. 1890) and “An Apparent Paradox in Mental Evolution” (Dec. 1890). Welby also anticipated a specific field of modern semiotics, namely biosemiotics, or “global semiotics” (the latter paper contains references to Darwin, among others), with “her studies on the relation between signs and life, signs and evolution” (129), and she anticipated the branch of ‘semiotica’ of the Bari school, introduced by Petrilli and Augusto Pontoni.

Another genre important for Welby’s mode of expressing significations was the article, as Petrilli has pointed out (141). Important themes, which deal with issues related to mental evolution and cognition, and are thus important for the history of modern semiotics, as for instance: “Is there a Break in Mental Evolution?” (Sept. 1890) and “An Apparent Paradox in Mental Evolution” (Dec. 1890). Welby also anticipated a specific field of modern semiotics, namely biosemiotics, or “global semiotics” (the latter paper contains references to Darwin, among others), with “her studies on the relation between signs and life, signs and evolution” (129), and she anticipated the branch of ‘semiotica’ of the Bari school, introduced by Petrilli and Augusto Pontoni.

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of ‘significance’ (the third level of her meaning), triad, was to be regarded as a ‘practical extension’ of the idea of ‘mother-sense’ as used by Welby, and so forth. This is an argument that Peirce’s comments on the subject of time-space are significant. (Petrilli, 594)

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The connection between Mother-sense and Significs may be put like this: Primal Sense is what takes up and supplies to us the material of immediate awareness, conscious and interpretative. It is thus at once primordial and universal, at all stages of human development [...] (in Petrilli, 574).

However, as Welby stresses in the same paper, "the greatest of all special gifts, the rationalising Intellect: which has not only to criticize, but also to reason out and construct from, the domain of Mother-sense - its warnings, its insights and insights, its revelations, its swift reading of worth, its penetrative reality" (in Petrilli, 574). If we look at Peirce's discussion in an undated manuscript published in Collected Papers with the title "Forms of Consciousness," we may establish some possible links to Lady Welby:

Feeling is the momentarily present contents of consciousness taken in its pristine simplicity, and might be called primisense; Aloneness is the consciousness of a directly present other second, withstandings us. Malisense is the consciousness of a thirdness, or medium between primisense and aloneness, leading from the former to the latter. It is the consciousness of a process of bringing to mind: [...] Aloneness has two modes, Sensation and Will. Malisense has three modes, Abstraction, Suggestion, Association. (CP 5:55 in Petrilli, 577)

One is tempted to connect Welby’s notions of mother-sense and common meaning through Peirce’s definition of aloneness, and in doing so, establish a link (at least in some respects) between the former term, in its turn, to this triad of Peirce (as mother-sense gives rise to the "rationalising Intellect," also called "father reason," with which it is in a dialectical relation). Petrilli, on the basis of the correspondence between Welby and Peirce, extends these connections, when writing: "Opening the basis of the correspondence between Welby and Peirce, Petrilli has also included some interesting hitherto unpublished manuscripts that Lady Welby wrote between 1903 and 1910 dealing with the issue of selfhood. Petrilli shows that Welby took a similar position in this question as Peirce by regarding the self as consisting of "sign material, verbal and nonverbal" which entails that the subject is in a constant state of becoming, as a result of its signcharacter and therefore in "an ongoing process in the inter-personal and interpersonal dialogic interrelationship with other signs" (610).

In conclusion, Petrilli achieves her aim in this book of giving an outline of Lady Welby’s “thought system” (with a specific focus on Welby’s studies on Significs) on the basis of her selected writings. At the same time, Signifying and Understanding will greatly assist and inspire those who would like to extend this line of inquiry. Petrilli’s work in the archives is priceless for the research field, not only concerning Significs, but also of semiotics and semantics. However, Petrilli’s outlining of Welby’s “thought system” might have gained from a more rigorous editing, as the reader is from time to time interrupted by the many appended texts within Petrilli’s compelling discussions. These appendices might have perhaps be assembled at the end of the chapters, or preferably perhaps at the end of the book.

Anna Cabak Rezko is Research Fellow at Centre for Cognitive Semiotics, at the Centre for Languages and Literature, at Lund University, Sweden. Her research field includes cultural semiotics, pictorial semiotics (especially film), narrativity, translation theory, cognitive science, perception and social psychology.

References


The journal is delighted to be acknowledged as the publisher of this prize-winning essay. It may be found online in the SRB Archives at http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/semiotics/.

This article revisits the idea of animation as a precursor to the cinematic form, drawing on research into the works of one of its historical progenitors, Emile Reynaud. This is a deconstructionist text that references related arguments from the author, providing a deeper excavation of the contentions that “cinema is animation,” while offering a detailed account of Reynaud’s pre-film work. The selection committee was comprised of Tom Klein (Chair), Richard Stamp, Chris Carter, Adam de Beer, and Romana Turina. Dr. Cholodenko is former Head of Department and Senior Lecturer in Film and Animation Studies at the University of Sydney, where he now holds the title of Honorary Associate.

The McLaren-Lambart Award is an annual honour bestowed by the Society for Animation Studies (S.A.S.) to one of its members, recognizing an outstanding contribution made to animation studies in the previous 2 years. Tracing the origins of this prize to a collaborative award with Canada’s National Film Board, it is named for NFB animators Norman McLaren and Evelyn Lambart.
This review essay is a series of musings inspired by a review essay about cybersemiotics by Inna Semetsky. The title of the essay is "Information Enough." The essay explores the concept of cybersemiotics and its relation to Peirce's semiotics, second-order cybernetics, and biosemiotics. The essay also discusses the relationship between science, natural science, and philosophy. The essay is divided into several sections, each focusing on a different aspect of the topic. The author's approach is highly interpretive and speculative, and the essay is filled with rich, detailed descriptions of the concepts being discussed. The essay concludes with a thoughtful reflection on the implications of cybersemiotics for our understanding of the world and our place in it.
human experience per se, would be located precisely at this included middle-in-between what appears to us as two disparate Cartesian substances of body and mind.

As Deely points out, "at the heart of semiotics is the realization that the whole of human experience is the co-determination of matter-structure mediated and sustained by signs" (Deely 1990: 5). The levels in the complex semiotic system are not immediately connected with each other but mediated by the intermediary of the third category: the generic interpretant, either human or non-human; and, it is the very mediation or interpretation that enables the emergence of the whole. Deely uses this triadic model of knowledge structure. I believe that this is what Brier means when he says that "information is not enough". I believe what he wants us to see is that it is a particular input-output linguistic model that is "not enough" and with which he engages in shadow-boxing. It is the included third of the interpreted (in any guise) that, by creating a self-referential feedback, expands the boundaries of our potentialities, filling it with information as such that acquires meaning.

Signs are the patterns of coordinated, interpretive activity comprising "embodied cognition" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 89) analogous to that invoked by Brier (referring to Lakoff and Johnstone). However, in contrast to the coordination of signs, dynamics is the interaction (the included third, the interpretant in the Peircian triad) is a priori information and the dynamic (or sign) systems are "informationally based" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 9): information is what establishes psychophysical unity thereby confirming what Peirce was saying more than a century ago: "The old dualistic notion of mind and matter, so prominent in Cartesianism, as two radically different kinds of substance, will hardly find defenders today" (Peirce CP 6.24, quoted in Brier, 203).

However, and again in agreement with Peirce, old thoughts die hard. In the language of the science of coordination dynamics, a genuine Peircian triad is formed by a configuration of jointly coordinated signs—just pair, in which an interpretant is designated by a symbol of reconciliation, "", and which serves as a common denominator when the signs form a couple. A real sign-faced sign. Coordination dynamics as such offers a "ubiquitous science of life" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 76) permeated with "functional information" (Ibid., 98). Reconfiguring coordination as functional makes the notion that "information is not enough" misleading.

What is surely not enough is our perception of information as solely quantitative or measurable. It is meaningful in a prismatic, Peircian sense as productive of observable effects. Hence, according to Peirce's pragmatic perspective, unity of meaning is real, objective, and a precondition for communication. Language is a type of functional information: it can change the coordination patterns. Functional information is, in short, the very interaction universe by a "co-interpretant" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 101), to self-organize. A sign is not a sign unless it is interpreted; but so is the fundamental stuff in the physical world, including the actually observable, mere, cosmic Secondness - universe: "a photon is not a photon unless it is measured and [our] use(s) information" (Ibid., 101; italics in original).

Applying this "bit" (and intended) of information in our practical life at the level of action - by using it - makes this information meaningful. But the field of potential meanings was always already implicated at the different level of order, which is virtual or implicate. In this sense, it is not that "information is not enough"; rather, it is more than enough. The semiotic codeuality (cf. Hoffmeier and Emmeche 1993) seems to be more patterned on "the fifth postulate: words a dance of particles falling back on themselves" (Deely 1995: 157): analog (virtual) - digital (measured) - and analog again at the level of human actions (actual).

The reference to Leibniz brings to mind yet another of Brier's target: algorithmic cognitive science as a project begun by Leibniz and today continued, within much narrower confines, by David Marr in Artificial Intelligence (AI). And here lies, I feel, the fundamental yet currently missing conception. Leibniz did not present his informational version of "information" as a form of information for the interpreter in the form of meaning. As Peirce said, signs are in fact signs only when interpreted. Still, the information is always already here, embedded in semantic consciousness as its implicit, potential, virtual form. Meaning is "altogether virtual ... it is contrived not in what is actually thought, but in what this thought may be because of its capacity to yield results" (Ibid.: 5, 289). Being virtual, it does not make its potential informational content less real (cf. Deleuze, 1994).

The transference of information between levels is what enables the evolution of signs, the very process of semiosis: a complex system grows, indeed, because 'it learns' by virtue of making the information meaningful. "In natural neural network terminology, would be qualified as a certain 'couple'... which serves as a symbol of reconciliation, '~', and which serves as a kind of unit of information that is not confined to a certain context only, that is, always holistically as parts of a network" (Ibid. 2007:128).

Surely we can hardly grasp this deep knowledge because we habitually stay in the prison-house of verbal language and use the language of propositions that subscribes to the logic of the excluded middle, to yes or no, to true or false. A novel language of expression pertaining to them, even if as yet virtual, now begins to contribute towards making it possible for us to say "information is not enough". Such is the would-be informational field [that produces effects, and these can be perceived] (Laszlo, 2004/2007:7,15) implies mind in a Peircian pragmatic sense as a field of the observable, sensible, world in which we live.

Brier asserts that "information... becomes the organizational aspect of nature" (154), but not with regard to information "a fullfledged metaphysics" is underdeveloped. Laszlo (2004/2007) refers to the expression of "field theory" which was Griffith and Mitchell who stated that information "is present everywhere... and has been present since the beginning" (Laszlo 2004/2007:67). This information signifies "as a subtle connection between not one, but different locations in space and events in different points in time. Such connections are..., 'nonlocal' in the natural science and 'transpersonal' in consciousness research" (Ibid., 68).

Physicalist David Bohm emphasized that in holomovement there is no direct causal connection except for the relation of two entities being interwoven into a whole by means of the interconnected network of quanta. Semiosis as such is this interconnected network and the Peircian sign full of implicit information that continuously change their mode of expression in fluctuating between polar opposites. Thereby, among bipolar complementary pairs there should also be a relation described as novely confirmation. The structural coupling of 'matter-energy describing the physical world is necessarily grounded in the logic of the included middle representation and its field which we can state with certainty that 'information is not enough'. Information is just right! It is on the basis of this information that the universe organizes its own dynamical evolution and in the process of doing so, developing realizing potential reality as the computation proceeds.

In the universe perfused with signs information and computation are everywhere: it is all there! The information is potentially active everywhere, yet "it is actually active, only where and when it can form to the "... energy" (Bohm and Hiley 1993: 36). The complex semiotic universe must express itself in a dual mode of matter and energy. Lloyd points out that "most information is impalpable, and to perceive it one needs information (to compactify it, in a way, that is, to make it relatively visible at the level of physical observable world. The basic material elements such as "Earth, air, fire, and water", and non-material ones, which are not quite the same forms they take are determined by information. To do anything requires energy. To specify what is done requires information. Energy and information are by nature incomparable; one cannot be converted into the other. In the Peircian sign, forms in brackets in original). Indeed, as physicist and cosmologist John Archibald Wheeler stated, all physical things are information-theoretically original.

Therefore we may consider matter, energy and information "interwoven" in a self-referential, triadic, relational structure of interdependent action (keeping in mind that the flow of semiosis is unilluminated) with the Peircian triadic sign (Noth 1995: 90/91)

Recently, systems theorist Ervin Laszlo (2004/2007) posited the informational field - that is, a public space - as an ecological interpretation relevant to what the ancients called the Akashic field. The word Akasha in Sanskrit means the all-pervasive space that encompasses, in addition to the four elements of physical nature, also the fifth, quintessential, element. It is appropriate here to recall Deely's assertion that, at some point, "the physical universe ceases to be merely physical [that is, conforming merely to its classical description]" (Deely 2001:621, brackets mine) it is perfused with signs, indeed. The fifth quintessential element is a field of information from which emerges all that we can perceive, at our levels, of the Peircian Secondness. It is a semiotic field. As Merrell points out, semiotics alter a traditional understanding of the term "information" about meaning engendered when signs are in their act of becoming signs, a becoming that includes sign interpreters as participating agents in the very semiotic process of becoming" (Merrell 1995: xii).

As Laslo comments, this invisible field named "emergence" (Ibid., 19) of virtual particles – a zero-point-field also called the quantum vacuum – is everywhere while the observable visible world just floats on its surface. Vacuum or nothingness does not make the quantum world mysterious. According to Merrell (1995), the three Peircian onto/logical categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, require the existence of a field that is holding them together, the as yet undifferentiated "field within which semiosis plays out its drama" (Merrell 1995: 217), acknowledged by Peirce as pre-Firstness or nothingness. Still, it is a present nothingness as a virtual potential informational "field [that] produces effects, and these can be perceived" (Laszlo, 2004/2007:7,15) implies mind in a Peircian pragmatic sense as a field of the observable, sensible, world in which we live.
generic terms, signvehicle, sense, and referent, the path of mediation, represented by a dotted line between a signvehicle and a referent, must be present.

The coordinating relation (akin to the dotted line) is ubiquitous. Kelso and Estrin constitute, however, points to the theory of complementation, like physical laws in general, are matter-independent, they are function- and context-dependent; they govern (hence make relatively predictable) "the flow of functional information" (in Saks et al. in italics in original). It is the coordination that produces meaning (or "sense" in Norrlöf’s triad). This means that natural, Neo-Platonic, ‘equation’ of God represents itself relationally to the framework of science of coordination dynamics; it is expressed in the form of another complementary pair, unity–diversity. Kauffman (2010) goes an example that unites one and the other. One band, which appears to be a parastructural or not for understanding that it is the perspective of an observer and context that produce a paradox.

This also means that our very sentence is an emergent property and not rule-based, that is, it cannot be founded on merely propositional thought and logocentrism. Perhaps this is what Brier is getting at when he argues against computational art. The attention to different regimes of signs becomes imperative and Leibniz’s unfinished project must be completed. Kelso and Estrin indicate the non-logistic origins of intentional action. The project begun by Leibniz reflects the intersection of knowledge representation. In analytic philosophy the representational system presupposes a class of things represented which are not representations themselves, hence ‘outside’ language and our immediate thought. On account of this, poetic or pictorial, metaphorical, paronomastic, which ‘represents’ symbolically or indirectly via mediation, cannot be ‘objective’ in describing reality. But the reality is habitually taken as an empirically observable physical reality induced as such to the level of Peircean Seconness ignoring the fact that: the Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem - for every fine argument is a poem and symphony - just as every true poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it rather with a painting - with an impressionistic seashore piece - then a Description of Quality in a Premise is one of the elementary coloured particles of the Painting... The total effect is beyond our ken but we can appreciate in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole (Peirce, CP 5. 1.19 quoted in Brier, 384).

The make the total effect "our ken" we will have to realize Leibniz’s project and to learn the signs’ “silent discourse” (Semetsky 2010a).

To conclude, I would like to refer to the project of transdisciplinarity addressed by Basarab whose book Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity was published in 2007. The Ph.D. program of Niccolò’s Center for Transdisciplinary Research should become a valuable complement to any research project in semiotics. Niccolò advocates overcoming the split between sciences and humanities and claims that the term ‘transdisciplinarity’ was initially coined by Jean Piaget in 1970 to indicate something across and between the disciplines. Transdisciplinary knowledge belongs to what Niccolò specifies as ‘in vivo knowledge’ that exceeds scientific knowledge of the external world as to what Nicolescu specifies as ‘in vitro’.


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The Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem - for every fine argument is a poem and symphony - just as every true poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it rather with a painting - with an impressionistic seashore piece - then a Description of Quality in a Premise is one of the elementary coloured particles of the Painting... The total effect is beyond our ken but we can appreciate in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole (Peirce, CP 5. 1.19 quoted in Brier, 384).

The make the total effect "our ken" we will have to realize Leibniz’s project and to learn the signs’ “silent discourse” (Semetsky 2010a).

To conclude, I would like to refer to the project of transdisciplinarity addressed by Basarab whose book Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity was published in 2007. The Ph.D. program of Niccolò’s Center for Transdisciplinary Research should become a valuable complement to any research project in semiotics. Niccolò advocates overcoming the split between sciences and humanities and claims that the term ‘transdisciplinarity’ was initially coined by Jean Piaget in 1970 to indicate something across and between the disciplines. Transdisciplinary knowledge belongs to what Niccolò specifies as ‘in vivo knowledge’ that exceeds scientific knowledge of the external world as to what Nicolescu specifies as ‘in vitro’.


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<td><strong>IN VITRO</strong></td>
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<td>Limited to the objective knowledge of external world (cf. spectator theory of knowledge)</td>
<td>Correspondence, analogy, conversation, sympathy as a relation between the external world of objects and the internal world of subjects</td>
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<td>Static knowledge of facts</td>
<td>Dynamic understanding of meanings</td>
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<td>Analytic conceptual thought – separation between mind and body; mind observing the world; disembodied cognition.</td>
<td>Synthetic holistic intelligence – harmony or correspondence between mind and body; mind participating in the world; embodied cognition.</td>
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<td>oriented towards power, possession and separation from, and control over the ‘other’</td>
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Wikiileaks provides a familiar glimpse into the future of networked knowledge. It is an effect of the slow erosion of the distinction between classified and declassified information. This erosion is the consequence of the manner in which documents are stored and accessed and the inability of their keepers to make guarantees about their security once digitally archived and networked. This is both familiar and startling at the same time.

The Dutch cultural expert Geert Lovink (2010) put it well last August. Wikileaks is more of a quantitative leap than a qualitative game changer. It provides the leaked materials as content courtesy of the state, the “cyberprofessionals” frenzied commodification of information. They want in on this.

The interesting part of this story is the universities. The universities, too, want in on this 2010), can’t control themselves and seek frontier justice. As an organization it is vulnerable. Certainly, Assange has made some deals with the state agencies which lament their loss of control over time.

The breakthrough into the world of classified information that Wikileaks has provided will need to be followed by more robust and sophisticated qualitative and, ultimately, actionable assessments of the dataset and the consequences of these interpretations will be the measure of this unfolding lesson for the sons and daughters of Wikileaks.

Gary Genosko is editor of The Semiotic Review of Books.

References


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The Semiotic Review of Books is a multi-disciplinary journal publishing review articles and original research. It endeavours to monitor those domains in the Humanities, the Social and the Natural Sciences which bear upon symbolic and communicative behaviour, culture and innovation, cognitive systems and processes, and the study of information, meaning and signification in all forms.

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