Editorial

Despite their wide differences in subject matter and methodology, the papers in this Issue (20) of *Southern Semiotic Review* share a theoretical proclivity to understand the core nature of signs and the semiotic project, especially as it expands and moves beyond the boundaries of linguistics. We should never forget that the European founder of semiology, De Saussure, engaged in an elaborate linguistic exercise. This was not the case with his American forebear, Charles Peirce, and it was left to Deleuze, using film for case study and inspired by Peirce, to make a robust argument for signs understood as non linguistic by nature. Papers take off, where Deleuze started, in inquiry into a spectrum of examples - drawings, mirrors, media - while also remaining faithful to literature and orality. Is semiotics up to the task it has conceptually given itself - can it provide a toolkit of terms, perspectives and working concepts to rival the intricacies of linguistics - always remembering that there is no universal linguistic theory or approach, anymore than there is, at least for now, no consensual semiotic perspective or tradition.

Fabio Bacchini, in "Are Specular Images Signs", sets forth a quite intriguing study of the spectral, or mirrored image, a topic previously covered by Eco. Bacchini's paper is all the more arresting as it takes the form of a virtual discourse with Eco, qualifying his rejection of mirror as a semiotic device, and setting out the terms by which sign processes occur within the experience of a subject's use of a mirror. The paper uses a quasi logical format to embellish - perhaps overly forthright - its points. Bacchini introduces Eco's argument, on the arbitrary or ambiguous nature of language understood as semiotic in nature (a sign can be defined in terms of its capacity to lie), agreeing that any simplified empirical function is outside the purview of sign processes. While Eco seems intent to set boundaries of semiotics in terms of linguistic semiology, Bacchini gamefully pushes the container or field of signs, allowing questions of authenticity, locality and immediacy. The paper echoes Peirce's themes of replication, imaging and diagrams present in his second trichotomy of signs.

It might have been better for Bacchini to start with Peirce. Then the focus on authenticity and truth, and in particular locality and perception, might have been given more traction. It is true Peirce was intrigued by indirect observation of absent objects - how a moon affects the   i

observed movement of a distant planet, how external symptoms are used medically to measure and test internal body states. Yet as a coastal surveyor he also conceived of the intricate features of coastline seen at a distance - what more appears linear and clear at a distance became a spectrum of graduated inlets, rocks, secluded beaches and islands. The two finger google map phenomenon is at play, as a map is transformed when viewed close up.

The mirror can join the list of surveying tools, camera, telescope and medical testing instrument in order to detect data that are not so much absent as imperceptible to everyday perception. The mirror provides closup study of the viewer's appearance as well as background.. A proximal paradox is at play - the mirror both observes and frames details that is present, and easily overlooked, such as the background or dress of the subject. It also reveals details that are actually absent to our immediate gaze. Humans, like most species (although not all) have one directional vision - there is a clear perceptual gap and phenomenological absence in our everyday experience - we cannot see ourself as others see us.

The mirror is a tool for self consciousness - the specular face in particular becomes a signifying domain for understanding abundant expressions that are usually undetected by their agent. Further, the static act of observation, of a subject before a mirror, is always precipitous of expression, events and acts that are to follow (or that have already happened). In the mirror dress and appearance are tidied, expression rehearsed - the self is engaged in an ongoing interpretative narrative. The framed borders of specular images almost give them a cinemagraphic status, as an establishing shot in a montage that will follow (or have already occurred). It is helpful to regard the mirror as a type of camera.

Gilles Deleuze adopted Peirce's pragmatic semiotics - of observed, present and perceptible signs - and used film as prolonged case study. In itself the mirror can seem incomplete - at best it is a signifying field, that anticipates signified meaning in prospective conversation and actions. The fixed shot is not a substitute for the moving image of a face engaged in everyday activities. It is in that ensuing montage that others become virtual mirrors giving feedback to one person about their facial and postural expression. The mirror image is incomplete - no amount of anxious ii

preparation in front of it can finally substitute for an array of dyadic mirrors in the narrative of events that comprise our daily social encounters.

Bacchini's paper is invaluable in introducing the concept of locality - as present of an argument with and against Eco about the paradox of presence and absence. In its quest for generalized meanings, based on cultural foundation, modern semiotic/semiology, starting with De Saussure, has largely erased local space. The aim is diachronic - to see development of meaning over time spans - rather than the synchronic play of gesture, location and action in localised meaning making. Any mature student of semiotics understands the interdependence of its synchronic and diachronic nature - however there is always the question of emphasis, and priority.

Road signs are a paradigmatic sign types, and often used for teaching purpose. It is true they rely on existing knowledge of implicative rules and laws, including their conventionalised encoding in diagrammatic form. However road signs also demonstrate a high intense degree of site specific interpolation between a driver, other cars and the road system. Signs might be part of a visual rich background beside the roads - scenery, advertising, townscapes. However roads signs are continually foregrounded into the act of driving. Speed limits, directions, traffic lights, street names and warnings (all reproducible on a dashboard screen or attached phone) are all site specific, and can require immediate responses. Driving is more than sensori motor skills of controlling a car - it is a highly interpretive activity of navigation and location. There is no room for error, ambiguity or lying at 110k expressway. Is this rich environment a semiotic field or not? If so, the signs can be seen to have fundamental immediacy, and a radically empirical nature.

Perceptual lacuna, or feedback, is true of road signs as well as the mirror. Appreciable or barely perceptible features of our immediate field of vision are identified, and interpretation occurs at a very visceral perceptual as well as conceptual level. Our immediate vision is extended and intensified. The mirror takes its place in a plethora of digital tools, starting with the selfie inversion of camera/cameraperson relation. It is good to find conceptual fields relevant but preceding digital innovation, and not feel fundamental shift in human perception commenced only recently with recent technology changes.   iii

Bacchini's paper on mirror or specular images can be taken as regarded as a starting point and stimulus for extended inquiry into a contemporary pragmatic or existential semiotics, one that identifies tools and experiences of everyday perception, including a plethora of digital devices and processes, as rich signifying sign fields embedded and embodied in direct experience and interaction with the world and other conscious subjects. Other papers in the current Issue 20 can assist in that inquiry, and further editorial comments on them will be forthcoming.

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