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Introducing Semiotic: Its History and Doctrine. By John Deely.
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982. Pp. xvi +
246. \$8.95.

Whenever a new discipline emerges it must wage a campaign on two fronts. On the first front, it must establish a historical lineage which will legitimate its contemporary standing. On the second front, it must secure sufficient scope to validate its claims to comprehensiveness. John Deely's general introduction to semiotic, the systematic analysis of signs and sign systems, takes both of these tasks seriously. In the first half of the text he gives an account of the evolution of semiotic reflection from the Greeks through the medieval to the modern period. In the second half, he lays out a general theory of the logic behind the semiotic process. This systematic account takes a number of cues from the historical account, with particular attention to Latin contributions, and makes some suggestions for further research.

Deely, differing from Eco, places his emphasis on general logic rather than on the concept of the sign. Like Peirce he affirms that semiotic is itself equivalent to the general logic of inquiry and that it functions as a foundational discipline for other forms of human query. In his rereading of the Western philosophical tradition, Deely highlights those turning points in which the general theory of signs began to emancipate itself from more provincial concerns. Augustine is cited as the first figure "to enunciate a pure semiotic standpoint." (p. 17). His distinction between signs and things paves the way for an analysis of signification and its relation both to nature and human conventions. Later Latin elaborations on the distinction between formal and material logic, based in part on Aristotle's *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, provided other conceptual tools for dealing with the problem of signification and the status of universals in any sign system.

Of particular import for the historical evolution of an autonomous and generic semiotic was the 1632 work of the Spanish thinker Poinset. In his *Tractatus de Signis* Poinset argued that the proper function of a sign is, in Deely's words, to "bring something other than itself into the awareness of an organism" (p. 60). This emphasis on intentionality, rather than on the perceptual traits of the sign itself, enabled the general account of signs to give proper scope to natural and extra-linguistic structures. That to which a sign refers is not simply an object in itself, a concept rejected by Deely, but that object in relation to a sign-using organism. By shifting to the signifying dimension of signs, Poinset outflanked that kind of methodological solipsism which would

see the sign as pointing merely to itself and not to something modally other.

Deely modifies the contemporary semiotic tradition which stems from Ferdinand de Saussure. This tradition places too much emphasis on linguistic signs and thus blunts the generic drive of semiotic. The Peircean tradition, more sensitive to the problems of non-linguistic signs, provides a more encompassing horizon within which to locate the realm of linguistic artifacts. Further, it has a much healthier respect for natural sign systems as they have emerged from within the evolutionary structures of organisms. Deely's obvious friendliness to the Latin tradition, broadly conceived, does not blind him to the generic power of Peircean semiotic and its superiority to that of de Saussure.

One wishes that more could have been said about the key texts in the history, or perhaps, proto-history, of semiotic. It should be mentioned that Deely has fulfilled some of this need by recently publishing a full translation, with commentary, of Poinso's masterwork on signs. No doubt, this translation will serve to vindicate some of Deely's claims for the importance of the Latin tradition. It is clear that he correctly shows the importance of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* for later semiotic reflection and thereby points toward that unique semiotic trajectory which finds a preliminary fulfillment in Poinso. Now that Deely has provided us with a skeletal structure of Western semiotic, it is possible to flesh out the picture and attain greater completeness.

Turning to the systematic half of the book, the account of the general logic of signs, we find a number of claims and assertions that bear careful reflection. Of primary concern is Deely's striking assertion that semiotic will serve as the fundamental unifying discipline for all of the forms of human interaction. One could envision semiotic as the method of methods in which all forms of query are articulated and rendered self-transparent within one parent framework which will both locate subaltern disciplines and provide principles of unity for cultural evolution. This generic framework must, however, emancipate itself from that kind of linguistic idolatry which marks so much contemporary reflection. Deely insists that the current bias toward artificial languages is based on a profound underestimation of the Protean power of natural language to signify dimensions and orders of nature. Natural languages can grow and allow for the inclusion of pre-human communication channels. Thus, even within human languages per se, there is a recognition that the orders of nature support and help to define the true depth speech of a culture. Deely strives to broaden our understanding of language while at the same time locating even natural language within a much vaster semiotic horizon.

While Deely rejects the dyadic tension between idealism and realism

it is clear that he embraces what might be termed a naturalistic perspective. By this is meant that the sign process, particularly the key dimension of signifying, is part of natural processes which both antedate and encompass the human. As noted, Deely does not speak of an object in itself nor does he speak in terms of the self-encapsulated structures of pure consciousness. Rather he insists that the sign process is an articulation of the object in its specific relation to an organism. Signs, words, and thoughts all stand for something beyond themselves. What is important to note is that signs point both to the interpreter and to the complex being interpreted. While signs may refer to other signs, the entire process receives its validation and inner movement from the unlimited orders of a nature fraught with meaning and lines of signification.

Since the linguistic model is insufficiently generic to encompass all sign functions, even in its modified form as recommended by Deely, semiotic must push outward toward an understanding of the rich variety of sign functions within the orders of nature and culture. Deely argues that such a move requires a profound realignment in our understanding of the concept and reality of experience. Rejecting Humean atomism, he argues that so-called sense-data are already semiotic and governed by intrinsic structures. Even bare sensation, in which nothing is produced or contributed by the organism, has semiotic elements. These elements are the building blocks which later can animate perception. In perceptual experience the organism contributes its own semiotic stock to the sense material and aligns that joint stock with specific interests. William James, in particular, carefully worked out the details of this process in his *Principles of Psychology*. On the highest level, that of understanding, objects are seen as being independent of their given relation to a knower. The realm of experience is fulfilled when the reality of intentionality is grasped by the self. Many semioticians derive their general account of signs from an analysis of understanding and then read the particular framework backward into the earlier layers. This produces an anthropocentric bias which limits the drive to understand the genuine differences which prevail between and among the levels of experience.

To outflank this bias Deely distinguishes between several levels of sign function. Biosemiotic sign systems, pertaining to all living things, are subdivided into zoosemiotic sign systems found operative in animals bodies no matter how simple in configuration or evolutionary attainment, and phytosemiotic sign systems found operative in plants. Anthroposemiotic sign systems are those exhibited in persons and most akin to the structural properties of language. By demarcating these levels or dimensions, Deely makes it possible to find distinctive frame-

works which will be appropriate for each sphere. At the same time, this perspective shows that the traits of anthroposemiotic are rooted in evolutionary structures which provide the grounds of intelligibility for fully conscious human sign systems. This phylogenetic and naturalistic framework serves to overturn that kind of solipsistic text-mongering that marks contemporary French reflection on signs.

In defining the traits of anthroposemiotic, Deely makes an important distinction between linguistic systems and post-linguistic systems. Underlying these levels is that of pre-linguistic sign systems. Linguistic systems are unique to the human orders and can play no role in the semiotic life of other organisms or systems. Post-linguistic systems, on the other hand, emerge from human cultural transactions and yet descend back into the sign networks of the animal kingdom. For example, the human transformation of a habitat for the purposes of cultural expression can effect the behavior and subsequent gene makeup of animal species. In so far as the destroyed habitat renders certain genetic expressions useless, it will potentially favor others. No account of zoo-semiotic systems is adequate if it does not include the possible intrusion of post-linguistic systems.

Sign systems thus have different traits in different orders of nature. Deely's effort to keep these spheres separate prevents him from falling prey to that kind of pan-semiosis which sees all sign processes as to some degree mental. Such a global view tends toward panpsychism in which all natural complexes are seen to be funded with some kind of rudimentary consciousness. In so far as Deely separates anthroposemiotic from other forms, he avoids falling into panpsychism. Given many of the excesses in contemporary semiotic, this is highly commendable.

Unfortunately one cannot avoid an uncomfortable feeling concerning some of Deely's claims for the discipline of semiotic. He argues that the paradigm of signs as they function within human experience can be utilized to critique all other accounts of experience, and, one would infer, of nature. A fully articulated semiotic theory could encompass all other forms of human query and even take over the duties of general metaphysics. In Deely's well-conceived strategy to broaden semiotic beyond linguistic and subjective structures, he seems to extend its scope too far. What needs to be addressed is the question whether or not semiotic is more properly seen as subaltern to some more properly generic perspective or method.

A very strong case could be made for the view that there are natural complexes which are not signs and which could not even be called degenerate in C.S. Peirce's terms, or potential signs. Nature, as "innumerable natural complexes" in the words of Justus Buchler, is unlimited in scope and complexity and cannot be adequately under-

stood solely in semiotic terms. Rather, semiotic theory must be defined and located within a general metaphysics of nature which would enable us to distinguish between those orders which are constituted by some form of sign function and those orders which are not. Further, the correlation between experience, nature, and culture, cannot be sufficiently worked out in purely semiotic terms. Human experience is certainly to a large degree semiotic but it is not clear that every dimension of it must be. Nor is it clear that the human process is graspable by a categorial model which derives from only some of the traits of experience.

Before semiotic can achieve the scope and precision desired it must recognize that it is itself encompassed by metaphysics and by the infinite complexity of the World. Semiotic can merely use traditional metaphysical categories for its self-articulation or it can take on the more radical task of placing itself in the service of a perspective which locates it properly within those natural processes which are not semiotic. Deely's project would thereby be forced to be more reticent about its claims for comprehensiveness, but it could at the same time derive new meaning and value from a categorial clearing of greater scope.

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