A Sounding of Signs

Modalities and Moments in Music, Culture, and Philosophy

Edited by Robert S. Hatten, Pirjo Kukkonen, Richard Littlefield, Harri Veivo, Irma Vierimaa
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Essays in Honor of Eero Tarasti on his 60th Anniversary

Edited by
Robert S. Hatten, Pirjo Kukkonen, Richard Littlefield, Harri Veivo, and Irma Vierimaa

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CONTENTS

In Honor of Professor Eero Tarasti ........................................................................................................... 9

SEMIOTICS OF MUSIC AND MUSICOLOGY

Márta Grabócz
Classical Narratology and Narrative Analyses in Music ................................................................. 19

Robert S. Hatten
An Interpretation of Expressive Meaning in the First Movement of Schubert’s String Quartet in A Minor, D. 804 .................................................................................................................. 43

Kai Lassfolk
Conceptualizing MIDI .......................................................................................................................... 56

Raymond Monelle
The Absent Meaning of Music .............................................................................................................. 67

Lewis Rowell
Gesture and Meaning in the Musical Languages of India ..................................................................... 90

Anne Sivuoja-Gunaratnam
Parsifal as the Undoing of Kundry ....................................................................................................... 104

Leo Treitler
The Immanence of Performance in Medieval Song .............................................................................. 139
SEMIOTICS OF CULTURE

Stefania Guerra Lisi and Gino Stefani
SemioSynaesthesiArts ............................................................. 155

Pirjo Kukkonen
Silence, Language, and Experience .................................... 168

Pekka Pesonen
Does Imatra Represent All of Finland? .............................. 190

H. K. Rikonen
In the Footsteps of Matias Alexander Castrén ..................... 204

Peeter Torop
Identity of Cultural Texts and Creolization of Cultural Languages... 223

Vilmos Voigt
Icons of the Mind (1614) ................................................... 237

SEMIOTIC THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY

Kristian Bankov
A Sociosemiotic Model of the Standards for Discursive Validation 253

Anne Hénault
Quelques titres de problèmes en sémiotique existentielle .......... 275

Jean-Marie Jacono
Une étrange absence – Jean-Jacques Nattiez face à la sémiotique d'Eero Tarasti ............................................................ 269

Altti Kuusamo
The Surplus Value of the Mythic in Iconography – and in Style .... 287

Eric Landowski
Façons de faire................................................................... 302

Dario Martinelli
The Ethic Imperative in Eero Tarasti’s Semiotic Path ................ 321

Ilkka Niiniluoto
Semiotics and Philosophy – Comments on John Deely ............. 338

Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio
Existential Semiotics as the Basis of General Semiotics and Special Semiotics .......................................................... 347

Sami Pihlström
The Transcendental Method in Metaphysics......................... 354

Contributors ........................................................................ 371

A Selected Bibliography of Eero Tarasti’s Publications through 2007 ................................................................. 372
A Sociosemiotic Model of the Standards for Discursive Validation

The Sociosemiotic Model

In recent debates I have tried to clarify some methodological observations, concerning the theoretical status of biosemiotics. I have introduced the expression “standards for discursive validation” (although there are some common aspects, it should not be confused with Habermas’ use of “discursive validation”), which I now shall try to develop further into a general sociosemiotic account regarding some principle requirements for different kinds of intellectual work.

The first step is to show how, from a human being’s inner perspective, the confrontation of a researcher/author is lived out in accordance with different standards for discursive validation. Far from imposing any methodological dualism in Dilthey’s sense I insist that the whole pluralistic multitude of communities of inquirers could be positioned in a virtual space, at two polar extremes. On the one extreme position, the emblematic situation would be the following: Aristotle and Galileo are disputing the speed of falling bodies. Aristotle insists that the heavier the body is, the higher its acceleration. On the contrary, Galileo insists that all bodies fall with the same acceleration. The bet is made, and we all know that the experiments proved themselves, in an irrefutable way, that is, with a “yes” or “no,” according to the evidence, as to who was right. So, on this extremity regarding the validation standards of the theoretical discourses lies the empiricist ideal of scientificity. It works like a pole of attraction. The empiricist, positivist ideal of scientificity, from the Enlightenment on, has assumed the monopoly over truth and much science today is still produced under its influence.
At the polar opposite of this space regarding the various standards of validation, the one towards which would be reasonable to position a philosophical or semiotic or literary criticism paper, we can imagine those discourses, which do not presuppose the direct sanction, the strict consideration, or the resistance of external facts. An emblematic candidate for the flag of this pole would be Plato's metaphysics. Although he probably made a bet with Aristotle over the validity of his doctrine — and I think this was the very moment when Raphael pictured them — there were no grounds for, or at least no objective certainty and evidence, to determine which of them was the winner. Throughout the whole history of philosophy there have been armies of followers of them both, since the nature of that kind of discourse allows parallel existence, whereas after Galileo's experiments there are not very many, who still believe Aristotle's hypothesis on falling bodies. We can refer to the one extremity regarding the standards of discursive validations loose, and the other rigid.

What is important to stress here is that the standards for discursive validation always depend, although to a different degree, on the community of inquirers, on their social relations and communication. Truths can exist within a single mind, at least temporarily, uncommunicated to the others, but the standards are social and conventional, like languages and codes. The other thing is that, although I have mentioned only leading figures of Western culture until now, the standards apply to anyone aspiring to contribute in an acceptable way in a given area of inquiry. We can imagine the pluralistic communities of inquirers, and their respective standards for discursive validation, organized as leopard spots, though not static, but with changing dimensions and tending to move continuously, to merge or to subdivide into smaller groups, to appear and disappear and even to destroy each other (Fig. 1). Networks of synapses should be imagined, linking the spots and representing what we call "interdisciplinarity." Of course, a single researcher could be part of more than one community of inquirers. What I developed elsewhere (Bankov 2004) as a hypothesis — from a semiotic point of view, of the different kinds of truth with which the different discourses operate — was focused on an account of the entities which produce discourse and those which are subject to such a discourse.

The kind of "anti-dualistic" conclusions of those reflections claimed that theoretical discourse and conscious aspirations for truth could be produced only by culturally "trained" human beings: persons, who are introduced within well-determined practices, through long-lasting schooling and education, acquisition of knowledge and skills, which are communicated in a context of cultural conventions, mainly languages; that is to say, a hypothesis, which could be immediately refuted if someone demonstrates a reliable record of theoretical discourse produced by another kind of being.

Thus it seems that there could not be theoretical discourse at all without human being(s) behind it, without a community (society), provided with languages and other cultural conventions. The simple proposition is that when objects of theoretical discourse (description or modeling, or explanation) serve also as a constituent of some of the entities that are necessary for the production of discourse itself (mind, society, language, culture, memory, etc.), the kind of truth achieved is not independent of this fact. The theoretical approach influences the object of its description, insofar as it partially constructs it. The eye cannot see itself seeing. The "theoretical eye" is constituted by elements which deprive it of the possibility to see them independently. Moreover, the output of a theory about the mind could influence the mind's working, a theory about society could change
By the way, Hitler's minister for propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, knew this pragmatic aspect of truth concerning social phenomena quite well and he employed his "1000 time repetition" principle on many issues. He constructed truths, which were then spread and believed to be real and not constructed truths. This is because society, mind, culture, language, and the like, do not represent a genuine resistance to a human being's descriptive efforts in the same way as factually physical objects of the environment must and do. These cultural entities exercise a relative resistance (which is the same as saying that these phenomena, society, culture, impose some criterion of truthfulness), which is the resistance of habit, of convention, of common sense, of common usage, of ideology, of power relations, of logic, of rhetoric, of legislation, and so on. All these entities, at the same time (in principle), are also discursively constituted, and subject to transformation, due to the discursive (including social interaction) activity of the interested community.

Nothing of this kind happens to rocks, planets, light, molecules and other "inanimate" entities. Indeed, the principles, which govern their existence, are independent of mind, society, language, culture, etc. Theories in any case, are made of human discourse, languages, symbols, etc., and are mind and culture dependent, but this does not influence "the things in themselves," the objects of description. Natural limits exist, that is to say, natural objects' resistance is genuine; nature gives constant (regular, persistent) answers to our intentions. Goebbels could not influence the course of nature. New theories could reveal new aspects of reality and change our minds, but not the regularities and the persistence of their phenomenological appearance and concreteness. The inanimate things of this world and their course neither care what we are thinking about them, nor about our desires, ideologies, battles, quarrels, or congresses. What results is that the rigid pole of the standards of discursive validation is dominated by theories concerned with the genuine resistance of reality and the loose pole of the standards is dominated by theories about mind, languages, society, culture, and the like.

It is important to remind ourselves again that according to the present model there are no pure discourses, presupposing only one kind of discursive validation. Such a model denies the existence of two definite objective standards - one for the natural sciences and one for the humanities. The sociosemiotic pretense of this approach underlines the unavoidable inter-

mediation of the community of inquirers and the gradation of the weight of the observable facts for various discourses. In the same way, the nature of the truthfulness of our theories gradually changes. It concerns the human factor of the whole model. Truth is a human matter - it is not part of things in themselves. Truth requires assertion, which is a discourse. Only a statement (assertion) can open the human enterprise of grasping objectivity from the external world. The closer a theoretical discourse is located to the rigid pole of the standards of validation, the more the community of inquirers is able to base its reasons for the acceptance or lack of acceptance of it on mind, society, and culture - independent of facts.

Is there truth without human beings?

And here is the crucial point. The community of inquirers is not an ideal entity. It is made of real people with relatively sufficient competence, which enables them to be the main point of reference for truthfulness. Positivists like to dwell on the example that "The Earth revolves around the Sun" as a fact, whether or not people believe it, and that it is an absolute truth. But with this example, we have a tacit shift concerning the community of inquirers. In singular cases like the question of the Earth revolving around the Sun, the community of inquirers is expanded to all of humankind. It is a matter which concerns all humans, and today it requires a very basic competence to enable anyone to realize it. But would this be truth without the extended "community of inquirers"? Would this be truth without the existence of humankind? We can think that it has been and will be truth, whether or not humans inhabit the universe. But this is a wrongly formulated scenario. In the case that humans did not exist, truth, as such, would not exist either. I have no doubts that what we humans now call Earth and Sun could exist without us, that one would continue to revolve around the other, but is it the same with the truthfulness? What would the situation be without the entity that accounts for the movement of the celestial bodies? We simply do not know because what we are doing now is a discursive projection or construction of possible worlds with claims for truthfulness. But this truth will die right along with the last of the humans, and this will not depend on the course of things (Earth and Sun), but on the status of truth, which is a product of the human way in which to account discursively for the surrounding world. In the case that humans no longer exist, there will
be no truth "consumers," where the truthfulness of the statement that the Earth revolves around the Sun will be as useless as a signal from the US probe Pioneer 10, reaching Earth after the end of humankind.

So, the claim that certain truths are eternal introduces an illegitimate passenger in the rocket for eternity - the discursive part of truth, its unavoidable dependence on someone asserting something. And this seems to me the only way to raise objections against the positivistic use of "truth" and "fact," with all due respect to valid scientific theories. Claiming that truth is discursive is not a social constructivism or relativism, because it assumes that the theories are subject to infinite resistances and the sanction of a mind-independent reality, but at the same time it avoids the naïveté of considering facts and truths as being totally independent of any community of inquirers.

But the Earth revolving around the Sun is a limit case. No other scientific assertion could involve humankind in such a way. The enormous numbers of scientific theories does not benefit from such a fundamental condition of incontestable acceptance. On a primary level, their truthfulness or validity starts being decidable within a more restricted community of inquirers. And those communities are specialized. Nowadays the quantity of scientific knowledge is beyond the capacity of any single individual, which is something new with respect to the first two centuries of the history of science, when certain idealizations were launched on its homogeneity of method. To be an expert in a given field means that you have dedicated your intellectual capacity to a certain matter, and in such a way that makes you better at it than many others who are acquainted with the problem, but dependent on people like you and me to carry the inquiry further. The impossibility for anyone to be the expert in all sciences serves as justification for the "leopard spot" structure of my representation of the communities of inquirers. This sociological fact has its own set of epistemological consequences, known as "the loss of unified science." What remains common for scientists is probably the ideal of scientificity, which is represented as a pole of attraction in the model, but which is not realizable in practice. We can imagine exceptional cases of scientific contribu-
tion, fulfilling the ideal of scientificity, for example, with the invention of a procedure which arrests aging, valid for anyone, or the exact prediction of earthquakes. Why? Because it is interculturally accessible (as understandable) to anyone and (if it works) universalizes its truthfulness. But real science is far from such levels of omnicomprehensible revelation. Even the Nobel Prize winners' contributions are difficult to be realized and accepted unanimously, requiring high levels of theoretical competence.

The standards of theory-making gradually vary from community to community. Within the sociosemiotic model, the incommensurability between theories can assume far less dramatic impact than the Kuhnian shifts between paradigms. It is a question of the impossibility of universal expertise, combined with the unavoidable element of creativity in the scientist's approach to problem solving.

Now this account of the standards of discursive validation could be summarized in a few points. In our consideration of the matter, the validity (truthfulness) of a theory is made up of two components - discursive and empirical. The discursive part is dependent on the social structure of the community of inquirers and the (flourishing) debate within the contemporary philosophy of science reflects this aspect. But the empirical part, which is subjected to the objective resistances of the surrounding world, keeps the whole scientific enterprise firmly grounded. And this grounded "stability on earth" is the criterion which determines the horizontal positioning of the various communities of inquirers in our model. As mentioned earlier, the dependence on empirical and experimental observations varies among different communities. Communities of inquirers concerned mainly with physical problems are likely to rely, on a general level, more firmly on measurable and observable facts, than, say, immunologists or economists. My suggestion is that this gradually varying reliance on facts provokes an increasing pluralisation of hypotheses and the penetration of the social dynamics in those communities of inquirers, where the reliance on facts is weaker. This means that the sociosemiotic model goes against the idea of strict limits between natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, preserving the relative autonomy of the various communities to establish their own standards, which are nevertheless objectively derivable from the different kinds of resistance, which their objects of study impose on them. In other words, social constructivism and relativism have fewer chances for being employed where the theoretical discourses are concerned with empirical evidence, and they not only have more chances, but they play a predominant role in the theoretical discourses on culture, society, and the like. We can add that, in a single community of inquirers, there is never any complete agreement and the levels of dependence on empirical
observation vary to a certain extent, in accordance with internal relations of power, competence, and external influences. This variety of standards within a single community is more typical for disciplines of the central areas of the model, some social sciences, and economics in particular.

**The Science Wars issue**

And here we come to a point of departure. Different theoretical discourses impose on their authors different standards of theorization which are decisive for their acceptance in a particular community of inquirers. One of the inspirations to write these lines was the story of the so-called Science Wars (Ross 1996; Sokal, A. & Bricmont, J. 1998), where, according to the sociosemiotic model, from a theoretical (and not from an ideological) point of view, the controversy comes across as a mutual misunderstanding. Indeed, after the passionate phase of attacks between “hard scientists” and “postmodernists,” the final accounts (as it is represented in various encyclopedias) note that there was a mutual inability and unwillingness to understand the point of the other. Actually it was a political confrontation between the academic left and conservative scientists, and it may be assumed that the positions are even more polarized and irreconcilable after the “war” than before it occurred.

But what is relevant in this example for the sociosemiotic account of the matter is the ignorance of the existence of different standards for discursive validation. Once this consequence of the sociosemiotic model is accepted, it becomes clear that a great deal of the epistemological aspect of the controversy was due to intrusive projections of their “own” standards onto the standards of “others’” fields of research. The general tendency was (and still is) to have the postmodernists considering only the discursive part of science (the text), and to draw conclusions irrespective of the fact that the “hard” scientific discourse is subject to empirical constraints, which makes this discourse secondary with respect to the more important dimension of experimental practice. In this way it was easy to launch accusations to the effect that the scientific discourse, with its pretended neutrality and objectivity, was treacherously affirming patterns of domination in society.

On the other side, we have accusations of inconsistency, of leftist attacks hidden behind senseless and irrational word games, serving among other things to fascinate and (in the process) to divert students from honest academic work.

One of the main reasons underlying this misunderstanding is the gradualness in the changing dependence on the “brute facts” of various communities of inquirers in the huge field of academic research. Awareness of the different nature of our disciplines is compensated by the common denominator of the word “science” and the idea of scientificity. But, as mentioned earlier, scientificity is a pole of attraction and a large part of the discourses are quite a distance from it. Another factor which encourages the use of a common term for entirely different standards of intellectual work is the basic requirement for whatever research to correspond to certain general standards of argumentation, such as rationality, prose, logic and other. An academic research paper cannot be expressed in poetic form and cannot contradict itself. But this is highly insufficient for guaranteeing scientificity. One of postmodern authors’ favorite objects of attack is exactly this tacit requirement, identified with the onto-theological order of accomplished metaphysics, i.e., the contemporary technological Western world. But, as it is noted more than once, authors such as Derrida use complicated lines of argumentation, which, in order to be understood in the deconstructing of rationality, requires an extremely rational and sharp interpretative attitude on the part of the reader.

These two tendencies of putting different kinds of intellectual work under the same common denominator are incorporated into the academic institution itself, in its historical foundation. When the first universities were founded there was no differentiation – this was the place for the learned people. Many centuries were to pass before the institution was to improve and, although the specializations were proceeding, the sharp distinction between the work of learned people and those outside the university was great. But today it is not so and it seems that the label of scientificity is used for the institutional distinction and identification of certain realities, rather than as a reflection of their real difference.

Nevertheless, when the question concerns scientificity or a scientific attitude, it seems that the presumption of a common standard of theoretical validation is generally accepted. This could be illustrated with two examples, deriving from the two opposing sides of the sociosemiotic model – Alan Sokal and Umberto Eco. On the one side, we have the basic assumption of Sokal, with which he legitimizes his attack on a certain way
of producing theory, the “fashionable nonsense,” irrespective of “reason, evidence and logic”:

We believe that the scientific attitude, understood very broadly – as a respect for the clarity and logical coherence of theories, and for the confrontation of theories with empirical evidence – is as relevant in the social sciences as it is in the natural sciences. (Sokal & Bricmont 1998: 193, emphasis added).

On the other side, we have Eco’s very systematic descriptions of “scientificity” in his book dedicated to academic research (Eco 1977). According to him, there are four rules, which, if applied, can provide scientificity for any object of study. They are as follows:

1) The research should refer to a recognizable object, which is defined in such a way that also could be recognizable for others.
2) The research should say things about this object that have not yet been said or should, from a new point of view, re-examine things that have already been said.
3) The research should be useful to others.
4) The research should provide the elements for the verification and falsification of the presented hypothesis, and should therefore provide the elements for its public continuation. (op. cit. 37–41, emphasis added).

The first three points provide the necessary basis for any theoretical research and are complementary to what I have called above “the basic requirement for any research whatsoever,” which means that they do not concern the essence of the object. But even the fourth point, which Eco himself calls “a fundamental requirement” (ibid.), does not introduce any distinction in the nature of the examined object. On the contrary, Eco explains this requirement exactly in the way one would need to argue against a presumed diversification of the modalities of theory-making. He further claims that it is up to the methodological choices of the researcher to attribute scientificity to his or her research and the 14 pages that follow are dedicated to some examples, none of which concerns the so-called historico-theoretical objects which, according to our sociosemiotic model, would regard standards of discursive validation closer to the loose pole. The mention of such objects of study is dominant throughout the whole book, except in the part where their scientific treatment should be demonstrated concretely. The most extended example concerns the transformation of a topic of current affairs – Free radios from 1975 to 1976 in Italy – into a topic of scientific research. The choice of an object from current affairs immediately opens a large front for the provision of “empirical evidence,” although, as it turns out, the criterion of choice of the patterns of classification of various observable and measurable parameters are still located entirely on a subjective level. In this way, the scientificity is achieved only on a superficial level, behind which there is the possibility for an infinity of arbitrary choices – something which becomes more and more problematic, if the research regards genuinely resistant facts (see above), which determine the whole theoretical construction, according to easily determinable standards of validation. We cannot blame Eco for coming to such conclusions, because his methodological considerations completely fulfill the purposes of his book, but we can underline that even for such a seminal author it is not easy to provide criteria of scientific rigor for research in philosophy, semiotics, literary criticism, cultural anthropology and the like.

Indeed, even Alan Sokal, whose entire critical approach would make sense if there were commensurable criteria for confrontation with the empirical evidence both in the social and the natural sciences, makes an “unexpected” turn when it is time to provide analogous examples:

We shall start by sketching our attitude toward scientific knowledge (note 51) limiting ourselves to the natural sciences and taking most of the examples from our own field, physics. We shall not deal with the delicate question of the scientificity of the various social sciences. (Sokal & Bricmont 1998: 52, emphasis added)

So it turns out that this presumably possible general scientificity is constantly used as an argument against certain authors who, irrespective of the potential exigencies for empirical evidence, are producing fashionable nonsense. But at the same time, when Sokal’s own accusation needs some supportive evidence, he only gives concrete examples from his own field. And when he is asked (by Michael Bérubé) a question of principle precisely about this contradiction, “is the distinction between ‘brute fact’ and ‘social reality’ itself a brute fact or social reality?” (Sokal 1996: 142), Sokal is forced to answer that “I assume ‘social reality’ refers to humans’ beliefs about various things. These beliefs are the proper subject of empirical statements, and thus constitute facts (of sociology) in their own right” (145). And instead of continuing this line of thought and admitting that we are
facing entirely different standards for discursive validation, Sokal reconfirms his basic assumption: "Nor it seems to me intrinsic in the nature of the social sciences and humanities that the intellectual standards should be lower" (143).

I would not insist on the "lower/higher" evaluation scheme, but I will try to give some examples which should illustrate that the standards are very different and that the best way to account for this difference is to consider the instance of the resistance of brute facts as the main element of the implicit agreement within various communities of inquirers.

Let us take the case of Professor Woo Suk Hwang, who claimed in a breakthrough 2004 Science magazine paper to have been the first to succeed in the creation of a stem cell line from a cloned human blastocyst. This claim turned out to be fraudulent. Of course this fraudulence was not ascertained following a textual analysis by some postmodern literary critic, but was discovered by way of a very concrete series of actions, prescribed by the existing standards within the specific community of interested scientists. Let us look at an excerpt of the text, illustrating the nature of the procedure:

To check the veracity of the 2004 paper, the committee collected 23 samples of the cell line supposedly described in the work, which the team called NT-1. Twenty samples came from Hwang’s lab, and one each from the Korean Cell Line Bank; MizMedi Hospital in Seoul, where several collaborators worked; and the lab of Hwang’s collaborator at SNU (Seoul National University), Shin Yong Moon. The committee said it asked three independent labs to test the DNA from all 23 samples, and all three labs reported identical results.

Those results suggest that Hwang and his colleagues falsified much of the data in the paper. Hwang’s team claimed that NT-1 was an exact genetic match with cells of donor A, but the committee found that the line 'is quite distinct from what was reported in the Science article.' The committee reported that 11 of Hwang’s 20 samples matched the DNA of a cell line derived at MizMedi from an embryo created through in vitro fertilization. The other nine samples from Hwang’s lab, as well as the three samples from outside sources, all shared a signature that could not be traced to any other known cell line.

The signature of those samples is somewhat puzzling. It is a very close match with the DNA fingerprint of a second woman who donated oocytes. This suggests that it could not have come from nuclear transfer. For 40 of 48 nuclear DNA markers tested, donor B and the NT-1 samples matched. But for eight markers, donor B was heterozygous whereas the cell line was homozygous. The mitochondrial DNA of the woman is a perfect match with that of the cell line. [...]

At SNU, the report will now be taken up by a disciplinary committee. Korean media have also reported that public prosecutors could begin an investigation as early as this weekend into Hwang’s allegation that his team’s stem cells were deliberately swapped with. (Normile et al. 2006: 156–157).

Now, can we say that theory-making in natural sciences is the same kind of intellectual work as theory-making in social sciences and humanities? If I write a paper, claiming that I have discovered that Plato is an empirio-criticist, could there be grounds for a committee to investigate the possibility of fraud on my part? Could I have troubles with the public prosecutor over it? My long experience in editing and publishing papers within the humanities suggests to me that such a paper could either be accepted or rejected, according to the level of its discursive qualities, or to my capacity to invoke well-known authors, as well as the exactness of the quotations and my preparation and ability to suggest that I know the major contributions in that matter. This is not an easy task and could be seen as an effort to overcome a resistance, but this resistance has a completely different structure from that which betrayed Professor Hwang’s claim.1 Maybe Peirce expressed better than anyone else what the resistance of the brute fact means:

A court may issue injunctions and judgments against me and I not care a snap of my finger for them. I may think them idle vapor. But when I feel the sheriff’s hand on my shoulder, I shall begin to have a sense of actuality. Reality is something brute. (Lowell lectures, CP 1.24, 1903).

As I mentioned above, the resistance faced by theory-making within humanities is different because the object (Plato’s empirio-criticism for instance) is not independent of the discursive approach that the theoretician chooses. In this case the empirical facts cannot send their sheriff after us, because we belong to a different body of legislation. Continuing with this figurative analogy, we can imagine that in the humanities we benefit from the advantage of people studying at Greek universities, where, by
law, no policeman can step in. In the words of Richard Rorty, "we (philosophers) should relax and say, with our colleagues in history and literature, that we in the humanities differ from natural scientists precisely in not knowing in advance what our problems are" (1982: 218), the problems (or objective resistances) of which for them include the cloning of human beings, predicting earthquakes, inventing new energy sources, among a myriad of other empirical issues.* And this "relaxed attitude" (ibid.) is not due to wrong intentions or self-deception, as Sokal believes, but to the complex interrelation between sociological, empirical, and discursive parameters, which constitutes a pluralistic network of an infinity of different standards of discursive validation. But what counts to a greater degree and what, for rhetorical reasons, was partially neglected in the last examples is the gradual change of dependence of the various theories on the sanction of empirical evidence, which makes it almost impossible to establish clear borders between such general fields as social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences, although the comparison of examples of the average discipline within them shows, as we have seen, a profound diversity in the standards for validation.

The American mathematician Andrew Odlyzko has published a series of articles since 1995, in which he argues that the statistical growth of scientific production (every 10 years the number of published scientific papers doubles) will radically transform the whole system of scientific communication (Odlyzko 1995; 2000). His model for the future presupposes the formation of "internet forum-like" communities, gathering people from all over the world with similar research interests and competence and that the paper publication will be entirely substituted by the far better interactive exchange of propositions and comments, which the electronic form allows.

If this will be the case, then the standards for discursive validation will completely fit our sociosemiotic model with the "leopard spot" structure and, what is more important, the premises for such a transformation, according to Odlyzko, are socio-economic, which also coincide with the sociosemiotic approach.

Notes
1. This notion, which will be developed in the following pages, follows Umberto Eco (2001), in the section "The resistances of being."
3. More exactness of the sociosemiotic model of Fig. 1 could be achieved if we introduce also a vertical axis, on which to project the internal logical constraints of the discourse. For instance, the mathematical discourse is not sanctioned by empirical observations, but is strongly determined by the internal rules of its symbolic system. Greimasi semiotics and the interpretive semiotics of Eco are equally (in)dependent of empirical evidence, but the former should be situated closer to the mathematical (north) pole than the latter. Generally speaking cognitive sciences are not stricter terminologically than Greimasi semiotics, but are more dependent on experimental data, so they have to be positioned on the same width, but "west" of it, towards the rigid pole.
4. Here I can add the obvious and easily observable fact that in humanities, compared to natural sciences, there is infinitely more freedom of choice for the proper field of interest and also the freedom to shift from one field to another. And even more, in humanities very often we have full overlap between research interests and hobby or lifestyle. We could say that in natural sciences we have more or less the same kind of "scientist’s" identity, whereas in humanities the choice of discipline and topic is in direct relation to the character and self-realization of the scholar. This is why the phenomena of fashion is very often present in humanities (structuralism, deconstruction, cognitivism) and almost absent in natural sciences. For instance, if I like pets and music, within humanities it will be very easy to establish a discipline like "zoosymbolology," but if I like sunlight and mountains very few in natural sciences will accept my "quantum mountainology" project.

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Anne Hénault

Quelques titres de problèmes en sémiotique existentielle

Eero Tarasti ne s’est jamais contenté d’une sémiotique formelle, au sens un peu caricatural qu’ont conféré à cet adjectif « formel » bien des applications aveugles et mécaniques des vues théoriques de Saussure, Hjelmslev, Benveniste et Greimas. En tant que musicien, musicologue, et sémioticien de la musique, il n’a jamais perdu de vue le fait que « Behind people’s official biographies loom the stream of daily emotions and inner experiences that guide their choices » (Tarasti 2000 : 58). En cela, sa Sémiotique existentielle est en harmonie avec la Sémiotique des Passions (Greimas & Fontanille 1991) que l’École de Paris développe activement depuis 1977. C’est pourquoi nous voudrions offrir à Eero Tarasti, ami si remarquable et si chaleureux, ces quelques questionnements concernant ce que la sémiotique des passions et celle de l’éprouver sont susceptibles de retenir des enquêtes admirables menées par l’illustre poète Yves Bonnefoy à propos des grands paliers existentiels qui ont marqué la progression créative de Giacometti, d’une part, et de Goya, de l’autre. La vertu de l’exemple du vrai poète n’est-elle pas de nous mettre en contact immédiat avec notre expérience sensible intérieure ? L’exemple du poète parle à chacun, évoque directement pour chacun un vécu et lui permet ainsi de le recatégoriser comme un invariant universel de l’expérience. La sémiotique existentielle d’Eero Tarasti relisant Kierkegaard (2000 : 79-81) qui est la pensée de ce qui se tient là, dans l’instant, rejoint la poétique du Bonnefoy des « Tombeaux de Ravenne » (Bonnefoy 1959 : 21-25). La quasi-pratique sémiotique d’Yves Bonnefoy rejoint la poétique d’Eero Tarasti qui interroge le geste créateur au contact de ce qui est vécu et de ce qui s’y renouvelle.

Il y a bien plus que de l’esthétisation du quotidien ou de la rythmisation émotionnelle du vécu, dans la pensée linguistique et dans les œuvres d’Yves