

# HOW CAN “THE PLAY OF SIGNS AND THE SIGNS OF PLAY” BECOME AN ATTRACTIVE MODEL FOR DEALING WITH EIDETIC AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH?<sup>1</sup>

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The title of this presentation encompasses three issues: (1) an enigmatic theme (the play of signs and signs of play); (2) a model of doing something, such as unraveling a puzzle; and (3) a methodology dealing with a probable case. Considering that the order of analysis runs in the opposite direction to the order of experience, my first task is to reverse the title. Then, its three parts become: (1) an eidetic and empirical conjunction that implies a taste for evidence; (2) a rigorous model of analysis that implies a relationship between ontology (what I know) and epistemology (how I know); and (3) a case that brings an enigmatic theme. My title, based in the theme of our 42nd Annual Meeting, provided an experience peculiar to a non-native English speaker: how to interpret and use the word “play”. I really felt like I was a living exemplar of one of Professor Lanigan’s favorite examples: what dictionaries and encyclopedias say or do not say. Lanigan said that “dictionaries tell you how to use the words (forms, ideas) but not what word to use” and “encyclopedias tell you what facts to use (structure, experience), but not how to use them” (1992: 208–209). That was my situation with the word “play”. Webster’s dictionary gave me around fifty different meanings for the word “play”. Which one should I choose? I am sure that I made the best choice, as I will demonstrate throughout this presentation, organized around these three ideas that in an inverse order would be theory, method, and case.

## **Eidetic and Empirical Theory: A Taste for Evidence**

The relation between eidetic and empirical theory brings forth the old problem of how to move from idea to fact or from fact to idea; and therefore, we

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are faced with the problem of evidence and meaning (Lanigan 1988). A good way to clarify this research problem is with the undeniable bodily movement between fact and idea. Damasio (1999: 184) in his well thought out book *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, said that gravity managing now appears to be crucial in the building of the mental self that imbues our minds with consciousness. Damasio indicated an important contrast between the pathways of sensations (vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell) and reactive devices of responses (emotions). The senses work by nerve activation patterns that correspond to the state of the external world. In contrast, emotions are nerve activation patterns that correspond to the state of the internal world. The fusion of external and internal input as a phenomenological appearance occurs in the brain that collects and collates feedback on bodily states and acts, as a way of perception and expression. Thus, the bodily movements are primordial for conscious human constitution, manifestation, performance, and extension. As I will show later, the conjunction between affection (body), cognition (thinking) and conation (communicational gesture or words and their implications) is not new and has been with us since the days of ancient Greek philosophy, centuries before the term 'psychology' started being used by European thinkers in the sixteenth century.

A human communication theory must justify how it articulates an empirical appearance with an eidetic structure. It must be able to explain and anticipate, while keeping its perspectives open to the emerging experiential flow. These are the concerns and purposes of semiotic phenomenology, currently named communicology, which may be explained by means of four concepts: embodiment, human intension, human extension and discourse. Embodiment is the role that the body plays in shaping the mind, the interplay between body and gravity that shapes consciousness (Damasio 1999). Human intension, drawn from French Semiology, refers to all the qualities and properties that a concept signifies. In communicational terms, human intension is the phenomenal capability to understand or generate signs, to make meaning, to construct structures, and to constitute rules (Lanigan 1994). Human extension is the application of a sign, idea, concept, i.e., expression and observable behaviors (Catt 2014). The essence of French semiology is discourse as a sequence of signs that makes conversation possible (Foucault 1969). These four concepts define the appearances and structures studied and explained by semiotic phenomenology. They give us the configuration and boundaries of research objects.

Bondi and La Mantia highlighted a growing interest in the conjunction of semiotics and phenomenology in recent years. For them:

The study of relationships between semiotics and phenomenology seems to be entering a period of renewed vitality and creativity. For a variety of theoretical and historical reasons, there has been a constant osmosis between phenomenological and semiotic methods. (2015: 7)

They justify their assertion, saying that phenomenology “has provided essential tools to semiotics” by, for example, explaining relations between Greimasian semiotics and the perception theory of Merleau-Ponty (Bondi and La Mantia 2015: 1). They further state that phenomenology “is engaged in describing the activity of language and, in particular, the speaking activity (*prise de la parole*) of a subject which is a ‘being-in-the-world’ (*être-au-monde*) and a ‘being-in-the-language’ (*être-au-langage*)” (2015: 1).

The arguments of Bondi and La Matia may be suspicious because they are editors of a journal dedicated to philosophy, specifically to phenomenology. However, how does one interpret the same trend coming from a journal of biophysics and molecular biology? In a special issue, the editors proposed putting to debate the gap between the two great fields of knowledge, science and philosophy (Simeonov et al. 2015). They assume that both fields are vital to humankind—but the question is why are they assumed to be so far apart, when not intrinsically in opposition to one another? How and by what means could there be an approximation between them to serve as a template for an effective collaboration?

The special issue included contributions from leading figures in a broad array of scientific and philosophical disciplines. A brief look at the summary is sufficient to note the pertinence, necessity, and promises of a rapprochement between science and philosophy, noting the marked presence of semiotics and phenomenology in this endeavor. I will cite a few articles to substantiate my argument. As the title of Rosen’s 2015 article implies, he attempts to explain why natural science needs phenomenology. His starting point was the discipline of physics, as a paradigm model to all other natural sciences and even many social sciences, to show that the “objectivist philosophy must be left behind and a philosophical stance adopted that unites subject and object” (2015: 268). For him, this stance is phenomenology, and his arguments are based on Merleau-Ponty (1961; 1964). Singer wrote an article titled, “‘Menaced Rationality’: Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on the Crisis and Promise of Science”, arguing that “only a phenomenologically grounded science can be consistently ‘scientific’” (Singer 2015: 245). Brier’s articles (2015a; 2015b) were very suggestive for communicologists. The title of his first article asks: “Can biosemiotics be a ‘science’ if its purpose is to be a bridge between the natural, social and human sciences?” (2015a). He answered this by saying that “the explicit goal of a Peircean semiotically based biosemiotics is (also) to model

living systems as cognitive and communicative systems working on the basis of meaning and signification” (2015a: 276).

In the second article, “Finding an Information Concept Suited for a Universal Theory of Information” (2015b), he was concerned with a trans-disciplinary scientific framework to integrate phenomenology, cognition, communication and information. Brier reaffirms that a transdisciplinary proposal must contemplate aspects of subjective experience and meaningful cognition, integrating nature, culture, life, and mind. Since science cannot be limited to mathematics, logic, and computational rationality, it must include perspective, interpretation and meaning; i.e., communication. A last example could be Zalamea’s 2015 article “Peirce’s Cenopythagorean Categories, Merleau-Ponty’s Chiasmatic Entrelacs, and Grothendieck’s Résumé”, where he highlights the connection between semiotics and phenomenology. In short, semiotics and phenomenology are being understood as ways to narrow the relations between science and philosophy. A starting point for consideration of this approach is to apply the semiotic phenomenology’s method to look at evidence and meaning, crossing first- (*capta*) and third- (*data*) person perspectives.

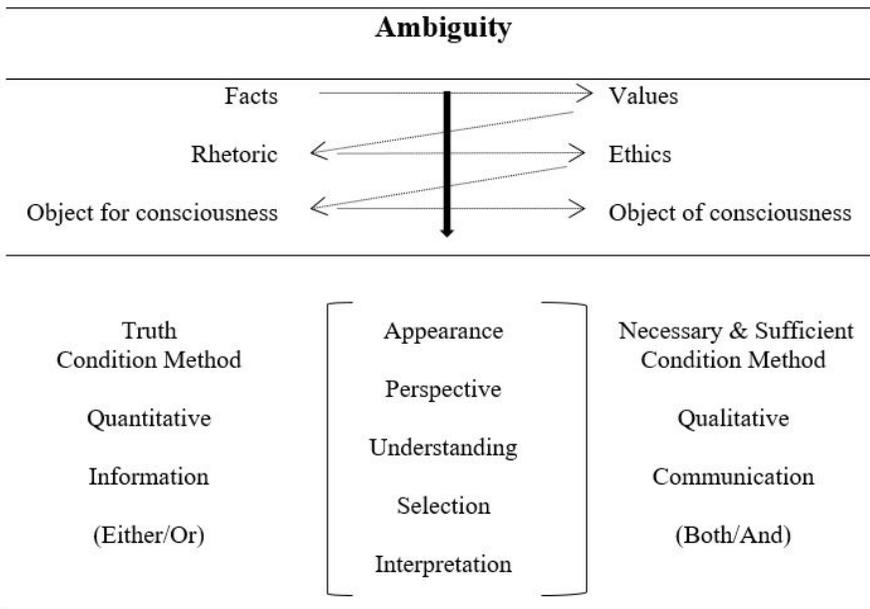
Semiotic phenomenology has a taste for evidence, but what it finds between evidence and meaning is the serious challenge of ambiguity (Lanigan 1988). The great revolution phenomenology brought to philosophy was to redefine the relation between consciousness and its content (see Sokolowski 2000: 9). In the philosophical tradition up to the time of Husserl, consciousness was understood as an egocentric instance, directed towards one’s own feelings, desires and ideas. There was a parallelism between consciousness and world. Phenomenology reviews this concept and shows that the contact of consciousness with the world is open and straightforward.

As Chouraqui reminds us, the question of ambiguity remains present in philosophical reflections:

The question concerning truth has a privileged relationship with the problematic of ambiguity because the phenomenon of truth escapes the alternative of the true and the false, the empirical and the intellectual, and instead opens up a space beyond these dichotomies where these dichotomies are explicated. (2014: 9)

It is impossible to talk about ambiguity without mentioning Merleau-Ponty, who said: “By definition, it seems there cannot be any consciousness of ambiguity without some ambiguity of consciousness” (1951–1961: 331). His statement format bears the same ambiguity embedded in the title of our 42nd Annual Meeting. Thus, it is easy to understand the matching of words in Figure 1 between facts and values, rhetoric and ethics, the object that presents itself to the consciousness and the consciousness that I take of this objects. They

are ingredients that may lead me to bad or good ambiguity—but ambiguity always will be with me. In the center of Figure 1, I synthesize what are to me most crucial in the semiotic phenomenological method: my direct communication with me, with you, and with the world. The implications revolve around what appears to me, from what perspective, how I can understanding that, what selections are being decisive for my understanding, and what has been the possible rule for my own understanding. Therefore, the method requires both (1) necessity and sufficiency condition, and (2) truth condition. That is the reason I combine in my studies both quantitative information and qualitative communication (Souza, Gomes, and McCarthy, 2005). As the mythical tradition tells us, experience gives rise to philosophical thinking. It is what the Greeks called *thauma* (awe, wonder, perplexity) (Kennaan 2011). Philosophy, then, begins when something awakens our admiration, astonishes us, or captures our attention. That is the point of empirical research, as I will show in the third part of this chapter.



**Figure 1:** Ambiguity appears at the center, pointing to our cognitive unveiling (interpretation), between the mediations (information/communication—scientific methodology) that can distance us or bring us closer to the justice, which our knowledge is indebted to the world of experience. (Source: Author)

### Rigorous Model of Analysis: Ratio Ontology/Epistemology

Taking appearance as evidence requires ontological clarity (what it is) to raise hypotheses (abduction) about how it is (epistemology). My readings on the

history of psychology have suggested to me to master the conjunction of what I know and how I know as a relationship between ontology and epistemology. Considering that psychology is a much-segmented field where you have situations in which one theory is the opposite of the other, I used to initiate my lectures for psychologists with a classical exposition on the ontological fields that you know so well (Figure 2). You may see that the ontological fields are divided into two parts, the symbolic or semiotic and the non-symbolic or physical. In this hierarchy, psychology appears at an intercessional level. With this figure sociologist Norbert Wiley (1994) helped me to visualize an integrated understanding of the psychological field, without disregarding its multiple views and perspectives. In particular, I highlight the Wiley's concept for Semiotic Power, which he defines as "the energies that underlie and empower signs" (1994: 34). I describe the theorizing endeavor in general psychology as energy fields that impulse signals in a complex biosemiotics. Therefore, emotion, as our semiotic power, is the base for cognition, solidarity, and reflexivity.

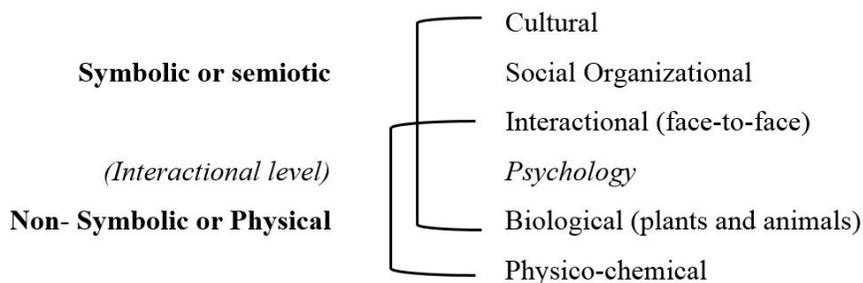
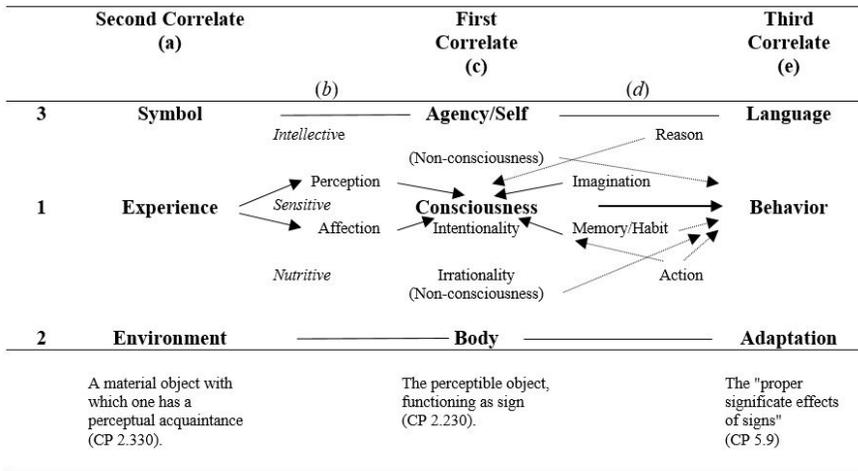


Figure 2: The ontological hierarchical levels as suggested by Wiley (1994: 135).

I can start my argument with the tripartite concept of the soul in Plato and Aristotle: nutritive soul, sensitive soul, intellectual soul. The tripartite concept of the soul may be considered as the basic proprieties of our psychological life, beautifully defended by Hilgard (1980) as affection, cognition and conation. The ontological difference between Plato and Aristotle was in the way these souls intertwine. For Plato (*Theaetetus*, 151D–E) there was a division between souls, on one side were the nutritive and sensitive souls, and on the other the intellectual soul with its remnants of past lives. In contrast, Aristotle (*De Anima*, Book II) talked about the existence of a continuum among souls that function in harmony. With St. Augustine the concept of consciousness as inner life and personal truth takes shape (*On the Trinity*, book 10, chs. 10–11). For him, consciousness manifests itself through intentionality, intermediated by intelligence, memory and will. In this concept, the relation between consciousness, experience and behavior is already given. These components

of the human cognitive system have been defined and redefined since the time of the Greeks, and will become the subject of controlled experiments in modern psychology. This scenario was strongly modified first, by the theory of evolution that will prioritize the notion of functionalism, and second by the influences of romantic and structural trend that will defend descriptive, narrative and argumentative methods, sometimes with an anti-scientific perspective (see Hearnshaw 1987). This biosemiotics configuration to the psychological field can be visualized in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Psychology ontological field in a semiotic triadic relation.



(Source: Author)

Three horizontal and three vertical lines, whose terms appear in bold, make the Figure 1 central core. The horizontal lines indicate the three well-defined systems of psychological thought. Line 1, in the middle, shows the philosophical conception of psychology with the triad experience, consciousness and behavior. The triad was practically abandoned in the first half of the twentieth century, due to the prevalence of unconscious and behavior theories. Fortunately, cognitivists in the second half of the twentieth century retook the interest to consciousness, in a confluence between the remnants of Gestalt psychology and behaviorism, revitalized by computer science, and now flourishing as cognitive neuroscience. Line 2 brings the relation between environment, body, and adaptation, the basic functionalist paradigm that served behaviorism and influenced psychoanalysis. Line 3 presents the triad symbol, agency, and language, whose influences had derived from romantic arts and literature, represented by French psychoanalysis, structuralism and existentialism. Phenomenology came and remained in the center line (line 1), influencing and being influenced by the upper and lower lines.

Interestingly, columns ‘a’, ‘c’, and ‘e’ show intriguing ontological affinities between them. Column ‘a’ shows the ontological connection among environment, experience, and symbol that is the function of perception; column c with body, consciousness, and agency that is the function of phenomenal structure; and column ‘e’ with adaptation, behavior, and language that is the function of expression. In Peirce’s terms, we have the first correlate in column ‘c’, that is the *representamen*, the perceptible object, functioning as sign (CP 1910: 2.230); the second correlate in column ‘a’, that is the *sign*, the world material objects with which we have perceptual acquaintance (CP 1903: 2.330); and the third correlate in column ‘e’, the *interpretant*, the “proper significate effects of signs”. As Peirce said:

In order to ascertain the meaning of an Intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the meaning of the conception. (CP 1907:5.9)

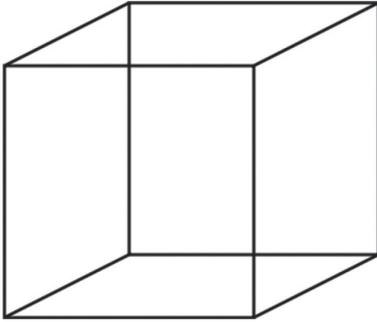
Between the main columns are column ‘b’, highlighting the original tripartite vision defined by Plato and Aristotle, and the means of sensory apprehension (affection, the semiotic strength; perception, the felt sense); and column ‘d’, with cognitive processes that substantiate the flow of consciousness. Table 1 still recognizes the semiotic power of irrationality (unconscious) over reason and behavior. In addition, Table 1 clearly depicts what has been recognized as upward (line 3) and downward reduction (line 2), which are the two cultures of psychology defined as human and natural science. Some theories say that they are interactionists, because they integrate the horizontal and vertical ontological positions (psychoanalysis, behaviorisms), but they are very limited in integration, because of their epistemological constraints.

In my view, to be sure of what one is doing, ontological levels cannot be discarded in a rigorous analytical (deduction) endeavor. One must look for methodological resources capable of going and coming (abduction), exploring different perspectives (induction), and working with alternative methods (adduction). Now, I am ready to address the case of ‘the play of signs and the signs of play’. I hope to demonstrate that playing with signs is learning as an embodied semiotic experience (Eicher-Catt 2016).

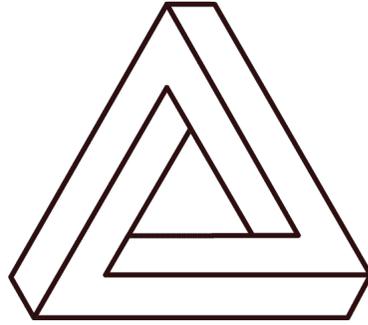
### **The Play of Signs and the Signs of Play**

A suggestive way of playing with signs is through ambiguous or multi-stable figures. The concept of multi-stable figure comes from the Swiss naturalist Louis Albert Necker (1832: 336) in his historical description of a “sudden and involuntary change in the apparent position of a crystal” (Figure 3). What

struck him was that the figure changed its shape on repeated observations, resulting in “an involuntary change in the adjustment of the eye for obtaining distinct vision” (1832: 336–337). Romanyshyn (1981) interpreted this phenomenal experience as resulting from a physics of nature and a physiology of the body, today understood as situated embodiment.



The Necker's Cube  
(Necker 1832)



Penrose's impossible triangle  
(A seemingly impossible three-dimensional object)  
(Penrose and Penrose 1958)

**Figure 3:** Ambiguous figures

Therefore, how about complicating things a little more and playing with signs in an ambiguous short film? I am talking about a phenomenological experiment that my students and I use to help college students deal with the semiotic phenomenon of appearance, using short films or vignettes. In order to describe the experiment, I have to say a word or two about experimental phenomenology. It is a methodological approach, mainly developed in Italy, to study visual perception of shape, space and appearance. For Albertazzi (2013), all conjunctions involved in the process of phenomenal appearance should be considered and examined, including neurophysical concomitants (largely unknown) and non-visual concomitants of psychological activities (logical, mnemonic, and affective). You can easily recognize that this approach contemplates the ontological configuration (Table 1) of the psychological field. What is more interesting is that experimental phenomenology responds to a real demand for technological impositions on several disciplines, in whose interest is the implementation of qualitative aspects of artificial agents such as embedded robotics, virtual reality, human-computer interfaces, and computer graphics. That means new technological facets that affect and are affected by the phenomenal experience of users: for example, in architecture, lighting projects, and human reaction to three-dimensional spaces.

For this demonstration, I chose two experiments (Rosemberg 2008) conducted by my students in our Laboratory of Experimental Phenomenology and Cognition with the short-movie ‘i’ (Zaracla 2006). The film is a trailer with lots of action and music, but no dialogue or subtitles. The idea is to provide the participants with an experience in dealing with appearances, to exercise experiential descriptions, and to use semiotic phenomenological ways of analysis. The synopsis of the film is as follows:

The film begins with a young man paying his fare to a taxi driver. The rear doors of the car open and two supposedly identical men appear on the scene. Next, there is a quick and violent rioting through the streets, where persecutor and persecuted are often confused. The frenzy continues until one of the protagonists climbs up the stairs of an abandoned building. When at the top of the building, he looks down and visualizes his doppelganger walking down the street, well below the point where he is located. After a brief breathtaking moment, the protagonist throws himself from the high terrace of the building towards his opponent. The jump is accurate. The man, who after the fall seems to become one again, stands up and looks slightly to each side. (Gomes et al. 2008: 163)

For the first experiment the instruction was, “Watch the movie that will be shown and write a short text. You are free to explain what came to your mind.” Twenty-six students from the first semester undergraduate Psychology class attended the film screening, ranging in age from seventeen to nineteen. How did the students react? I chose, as an example, two responses titled “A face and an escape”, and “Isolation or running away”.

Example 1: A face and an escape (Rosemberg 2008, *Story 12*: 95)

*He left the circus ring very scared. Afraid to jump across the canvas, he walked down the corridor a few steps in the dark of night until he reached the wagon that sometimes served as a dressing room. He sat down in front of the mirror, wet a handkerchief, and began to undo the makeup mask. When removing the strip that covered one eye, he had a glimpse of the other. He undid some more of the mask, and confirmed his suspicions.*

Example 2: Isolation or running away (Rosemberg 2008, *Story 5*: 91–92)

*Often during our lives, we feel like isolation or running away from ourselves. Unbridled escape. Our own vision, the vision of who we are and how we are sometimes, it is unbearable. As if, it were enough to run. Run faster than one does, as if to leave him behind. Nevertheless, there is no way to succeed. Like magic, illusion, we come across our image again. There is no hiding place sufficiently secure, sufficiently distant from ourselves. The shadow of our double threatens us and will threaten us whenever we try to deceive him. Actually, I*

*do not know if there is a solution for that. Incorporating our double instead of denying it may be the cool, the ease way to live with it. We all have several of them within us and each one is vital for us to be one. Accept the various is the way to reach the full.*

How does one conduct the analysis? Three steps make up the semiotic phenomenological method: description (what I saw), reduction (what are the specifications that characterize the phenomena) and interpretation (what it meant for the research or for the situation in focus). This configuration allows for successive levels of analysis, because each step entails the others. The first level of description was the texts that the research participants had written, as illustrated by the two examples already mentioned. Now, how does one move to the second step, reduction, which can be understood as definition and contrast between the descriptive parts, and what part should be used to clarify the phenomenon? Which part or parties to choose? Based in the imaginary variations suggested by Husserl (1913, §4), the instructions were modified and a new experiment was carried out. Before describing the new experiment, it would be opportune to look at what Husserl said about imaginary variations. Here, I am using Smith's translation:

The eidōs [Eidos], the pure essence [Wesen], can be exemplified intuitively in the givenness of empirical experience [Erfahrungsebenenheiten], in such [givenness] of perception, memory, and so forth, but equally as well also in the givenness of mere phantasy [Phantasiegegebenheiten]. Hence, in order to grasp an essence itself and originarily, we can set out from corresponding empirical intuitions, but just as well also from nonempirical, non-existence-grasping, moreover “merely imaginative” intuitions [“bloss einbildenden” Anschauungen]. (2006: 331)

Thus, I can raise, for example, four imaginative variations for our experiments: (1) look at the classical semiological structure, defining diachronic relations and synchronic correlations; (2) look at the literary style, classifying voice, context, feeling, resolution; (3) look at the existential cries manifested by participants' descriptions; and/or (4) look at codes used to decode the message, clarifying if their written stories were presented as descriptions, reductions or interpretations. The definition of imaginary variations by Husserl contemplated both the non-empirical and the empirical possibility, that fully justified the use of experiments to open space for new perceptions. Interestingly, the experimental experience is able to transform fantasy into facts. Working with the rules of choice and reduction specification, we can choose among the suggested alternatives. Keep in mind that the idea of the experiment was to play with signs as an attractive way to introduce the semiotic phenomenological method.

Then, let me take the fourth alternative, because the idea was to show the phenomenological semiotic method associated with plainness. This method does not impose something artificial. It works with the usual flow of thought, converting conscious experience into consciousness of experience, which is a mental activity we engage in daily in many different ways. The reduction introduced a distractor, a fantasy converted into fact, to gauge possible changes in the perception of appearance. Would the division of attention undermine the understanding of the film's story and message? The modified instruction was as follows:

Watch closely for what will appear next in the movie, from beginning to end; telling how many times the protagonist appears in duplicate form in the scene. After viewing the short film, you will need to know the exact number of times the protagonist appeared in duplicate. This information will be required to respond, in writing, to two questions about the film: What is the story of the movie "i"? What is the message of movie "i"? (Rosemberg 2008: 56)

The second experiment compared two groups with eleven participants in each, one without distractor and other with a distractor. The participants were psychology graduate students ranging from twenty-four to forty years old. Gender variations were not taken into account. The distractor was to count how many times the protagonist would appear in duplicate in scene. In the movie, the protagonist's duplication occurred eleven times. A standardized psychometric attention test (Cambraia 2003) was used as a concentration ability control between groups.

The interest from standpoint of the semiotic phenomenological reduction was in the appearance of the distractor effect, since it could interfere with the perception of the movie's meaning. The causality here was intentional, and aimed to force the limits of the imaginary variation. The results showed that the distractor did not compromise the message decoding. Why was it not compromised? Our interpretation in this reduction was that the film has an engaging and stark meaning, a contextual appearance that is lacking in the aseptic insulation characteristic of many psychological experiments on attention, perception, and memory. The AC Test informed us that there was no difference in attention between the two groups. Spearman's correlation between protagonist's duplicate appearance a number of times, and the AC Test, reaches the significant level of  $p = .04$  (0.639), that supported the manipulation used (distractors).

The semiotic phenomenological analysis compared the participants' narrative structures (stories), based on two instructional questions: "What is the story?", and "What is the message of movie 'i'?" The two questions, taken together, carry out a communicational redundancy, making room for detailed

replies from respondents, who will follow the instructions more strictly, and for more synthetic replies from respondents, who will immediately jump to the film’s message. The experimentally didactic idea of playing with signs was to highlight the movement from description to interpretation through reduction. I do not mean that the daily consciousness of this movement is peremptorily necessary. It happens automatically most of the time. However, in the face of ambiguous appearances, descriptive clarity is important to do justice to what is being perceived. Thus, in the experimenters’ mind, the first question asked for a narrative (description); the second for a meaning (interpretation). Table 2 brings forth three stories to illustrate the movement between description and interpretation.

The participant who wrote the first story followed the instructions and clearly differentiated description and interpretation, highlighting a new aspect in each response. A brief description of the film was provided for the first question, reserving the understanding of the message for the second question, as requested.

**Table 2:** Three examples of the collected stories

Story	What is the story of the movie ‘i’?	What is the message of the movie ‘i’?
1	They are two people alike and one is running after the other. Until one is trapped on top of the building, he throws himself out of the building, but does not die. Get up and move on.	Run after your true self/ and you will not die
2	It is the story of a man being pursued by himself, <i>or rather a part of himself</i> . The chase ends when the two parts meet and <i>become complete again, they have integrated</i> .	If you chase after your goal/ you will surely reach it
3	<i>A man presents difficulties in facing reality, being in search of its identity.</i>	The human being is constantly searching for his identity

The participant who wrote the second story points to the film’s details as indicating a relationship between description (narrative, general view) and reduction (decisive aspects to support interpretation). In this story, we have an explicit relationship between description and reduction, as indicated in the underlined parts. This is the role of reduction, an old term used to specify or define the constituent aspects for analysis. The interpretation appears complete and synthetic in the answer to the second question.

The participant who wrote the third story let the expected query of redundancy appear prominently. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as

non-observance of instructions. On the other hand, as an early decoding of the message, it is a good communicational synthesis. However, it is worth comparing the two answers given. In the first, the message applies to the film; in the second, it is universal. These three brief examples attest to the relevance of the qualitative power of research. Three examples were enough to support the argument and to point out the diversity that characterizes and enriches human expression and perception.

For the phenomenological interpretation of the two experiments, I will suspend the stories' suggestive and existential thematic to concentrate on the psychophysical and psychological (embodiment) streams throughout Gestalt formation, a negotiation between spectator's perception and expression. The focus will be on the cognitive modes of apprehension of multi-stable phenomenon and on the force that triggers reflection, which is the semiotic power (Wiley 1994). The film brings a Gestalt's ambiguity (character antagonistic doubling), an instability (persecution, flight, duplicity, and isolation), a modality of relation (distance or involvement), and a given interpreted context (serious or mild). The film was a Gestalt figure, contrasting with each viewer's pre-objective experience as background. However, it is a reversible possibility. In the three mentioned points, we have objective experience in the perception of instability, and subjective experience in the choice of relation and context. The film gave instability to the viewer, but the viewer chose how to relate to it and where to place it. It highlighted a universal phenomenology, the objective experience of instability, and a particular phenomenology, the pre-objective experience in the film's involvement. Instability brought the emotional charge that conferred semiotic power to the film's phenomenal involvement. The film decoding is a pre-objective experience, with the viewer at the center. The viewer apprehends time by the present that she/he lives, and perceives others through her/himself, living an emotion that transcends her/himself.

## **Conclusions**

The theme of the 42nd Annual Meeting was an invitation to look at our work as researchers in a fresh and renewed way. It was an invitation to rethink the way we deal with appearances, interpret them, gather signs and recompose structures. Conscious communicative action is vividly illustrated in the reversibility suggested by "the play of signs and the signs of play."

I now return to the original title of my talk, which was put as a question: "How can 'the play of signs and the signs of play' become an attractive model for dealing with eidetic and empirical research?" Sign reversals are an effective way to become aware of something. Such reversals are used in psychological treatments in the form of role-playing, thereby offering new looks to old appearances. The title called for a case, a research model, and a theory. The case

consisted of two experiments that were used as a didactic resource for a living experience with semiotic phenomenological plainness. The first experiment presented an ambiguous situation (a short film), a metaphor for existential crises, whose interpretation was induced to a degree by the title “*i*”. In the second experiment, a distractor was introduced to generate confusion in the capturing of the film’s meaning. But it failed, because the signs of play were properly contextualized and meaning could be interpreted with varied and rich nuances. The distractor worked as an exaggerated play with signs.

Semiotic phenomenology plainness means a method that focalizes the acts of awareness to make consciousness clear and elucidative. Therefore, the case (the experiments) discloses the method that is a rigorous procedure of analysis by its successive sequence of steps (description, reduction and interpretation), where each step entails the others (description [description, reduction and interpretation] and so on). In addition, the case illustrates the pertinence and misinterpretation of evidence, and the method required for doing justice to appearances, by giving them attributes that belong to them.

The unfolding analytical procedure amplifies the plainness of semiotic phenomenology, where nothing is artificial or excluded. Human nature emerges in its wholeness: (1) as a situated body that feels with its implicit intentional force (embodiment), (2) as an intellect that structures an answer in the form of a story (intension), (3) which shows itself as a discourse of the other’s action and (4) as the action of oneself (extension). Looking at different perspectives on same issue keeps our views open to our experiential flow, offering new ways to deal with ambiguities.

The great semiotic phenomenological contribution to theoretical criticism is its consistent concern with the conjunction and disjunction between ontology, epistemology, logic and ethics, namely, the four major axes of philosophy. The coming and going between the whole and the parts, the old Gestalt premise, clearly distinguishes when ethics or epistemology is displaced with ontology or logics. The ontological understanding leads to the precise object description. At bottom, the question involves the permanent dispute between fact and value. For psychology, my field of origin, these distinctions help me to identify ontological hierarchical discoveries and avoid epistemological or ethical antimonies and paradoxes.

I took up the challenge of playing with signs to amplify the signs of playing. To that end, I have turned to semiotic phenomenology, an ascending methodology by its epistemological potential to break the gap between science and philosophy. Semiotic phenomenology interconnects symbolic and non-symbolic ontological levels, offering a biosemiotic view of natural and cultural conjunction. As epistemology, it moves between inclusive/exclusive and systemic/systematic relations. The field of psychology was revised in

synthetic, systemic and systematic configurations to highlight its implicit unit and semiotic structure on the intersection between theoretical trends.

Considering that we are driven by beliefs, which is a strong combination of affection and cognition, I tried to show the way beliefs are aggregated and stiffened into an almost imperceptible movement between appearance, perspective, understanding, selection, and interpretation. Ambiguities will always be with us; it is both the mystery and the beauty of our life. We face ambiguity in our daily life, in our near and distant relationships, or in the symptoms we bring to our therapists and psychotherapists.

The fun side of doing research lies in ambiguity, in the mysteries that we set out to discover, in the innovations we propose to the world. Semiotic power lies in the logical and surprising reasoning it offers to natural and human sciences, and to humanities. Phenomenology is above all a research ethics that help us refresh our way of seeing the world. Signs are before us to guide or confuse. The signs are playing with us all the time, why do we not play with them? Is it not the way we live by?

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