Semiosis & sign exchange: design for a subjective situationism, including conceptual grounds of business information modeling

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Chapter 8 draws the constructive design in this treatise to an end. It completes the explanation of meaning as a social process (started in Chapter 7) from largely psychological characteristics of participating sign users (see Part i).

Taking the ideal dimension of semiosis seriously, a sign engineer by definition projects his interpretants onto the sign. He assembles a cause aimed at achieving a motivationally effected response from the observer. Any response by the original observer would of course immediately place him in the position of an engineer. But as a sign observer, by definition he develops interpretants from the sign.

It is already impossible to establish with certainty that the sign as the engineer believes to have emitted is indeed what the observer holds for the sign in their exchange. Leaving this problem aside, and assuming that at least the sign is common, the difference between cause and effect that underlies the difference between engineer and observer makes for different representational structures. For both the engineer and the observer, the sign stands for what the engineer wants from the observer. The anatomy of meaning according to subjective situationism is captured by the slogan every sign is a request for compliance. As the engineer builds his specific cause from his will, the vital difference is that the observer can only make such an interpretation guided by his own will as background interpretant, too. Every participant’s uniqueness makes the difference.

With different representational structures of the sign outlined for the engineer and the observer, Chapter 8 moves to a short discussion of conditions for compliance. First of all, compliance requires attention oriented at the overall relationship between the persons who, in this particular instance of sign exchange, act as sign engineer and sign observer. Their relative power and trust are therefore important determinants of both compliance and how their
relationship develops further under the impetus of the particular sign exchange.

What does all this mean for conceptual information models? They certainly are not value-free blueprints. As signs, they are political instruments (see Chapter 7). An information model is also a request for compliance, just as any reaction to it is, positive, negative, or otherwise. When such is the nature of conceptual information models, ignorance about it goes at the expense of quality. Some stakeholders gain in the short term, and often for much longer, from upholding the dispassionate character of models. But others lose, which endangers constructive relationships. Professional modelers especially, as they are directly involved with stakeholders and through their involvement become immediate stakeholders themselves, must be aware of the politics underlying their work. Information modeling scientists must include compliance as an important theme in their teaching and research.

The last paragraphs of Chapter 8 have actually already moved from developing an anatomy of meaning to offering recommendations that are based upon it. After Chapter 8, you can skip to Chapter 13 which is the final chapter of this treatise. As an epilogue Chapter 13 is more generally occupied with some of the problems that subjective situationism can solve, and opportunities it can create, with respect to conceptual information modeling.

Chapter 9 through 12 are in a philosophical sense all critical, rather than constructive. They boil down to the conclusion that the language action paradigm popular for information modeling is too limited. It needs to cut its limiting linguistic (read here also: semantic) roots. But first Chapter 8 continues to present an anatomy of meaning erected from radically different grounds.
chapter 8

REQUESTS FOR COMPLIANCE

The last paragraph of the previous chapter presents a progression of engineer-based structures of signs. Escalating from grunt to (more) comprehensive representation I have demonstrated that a sign-as-object depends on the sign engineer’s expectation of the exchange situation. For my further development of an anatomy of meaning only the conceptual result of that progression counts. This chapter continues from the so far most elaborate structure as shown in Figure 7.5.6.

8.1 from prospects to suspects

I emphasize my axiom that every sign, regardless of its expansion, stands for all those engineer-based prospects. For example both the single grunt and the elaborate scientific treatise are analyzable from exactly the same structure. The actual sign-as-object of course differs according to what the sign engineer wants to achieve for himself on the one hand, and what he considers a priori present as interests and knowledge in the sign observer on the other hand. According to VOLOSHINOV (1929, p 96):

The outwardly actualized utterance is an island rising from the boundless sea of inner speech; the dimensions and forms of this island are determined by the particular situation of the utterance and its audience.

Anyway, the observer always develops his own (also read: subjective) interpretation. What the observer suspects from the sign about the engineer’s prospects is therefore governed by an observer-based structure of signs.

The distinction between [a] engineer-based sign structure and [b] observer-based sign structure is precisely why my anatomy of meaning is more radically
dialogical that VOLOSHINOV’s philosophy of language. As one of the propositions outlining his theory eclipsing both abstract objectivism and individualistic subjectivism he mentions (p 98):

*The structure of the utterance is a purely sociological structure. The utterance, as such, obtains between speakers.*

I understand this as the assumption of a *single* structure, i.e., without regard for what I propose as the essential difference between [a] a self pursuing interests through an other and [b] a self being confronted with interests of an other, and thereby being expected to comply with them. Assuming, instead, *two* sign structures that are characteristic for the *different* roles engineer and observer play in sign exchange is a decisive step in arriving at an anatomy of meaning with sufficient explanatory and behavioral variety for postmodern life. VOLOSHINOV is already adamant that (p 99)

> [t]he theory of passive understanding precludes any possibility of engaging the most fundamental and crucial features of meaning in language.

However, does he also take the next step? Does he conceive of understanding by an observer as an activity that is essentially different from the activity of sign engineering? My impression is that VOLOSHINOV indeed does for he writes that (p 102)

> each of the distinguishable significative elements of an utterance and the entire utterance as a whole are translated in our minds into another, active and responsive, context. *Any true understanding is dialogic in nature.*

What VOLOSHINOV doesn’t design is the concept of *structurally different* contributions to communication. Through characteristic sign structures I fundamentally acknowledge the difference between engineering and observation in sign exchange.

I take it that the observer-based sign structure envelopes the engineer-based structure. The latter is thereby of course transposed to the observer’s frame of interpretation. For added is a superstructure that actually establishes the sign observer’s interpretation frame. The complete observer-based structure is outlined in Figure 8.1.1.

I repeat that the engineer-based structure does not appear *as such* in the observer-based structure. For it is now all about the observer’s interpretations. To avoid cluttering the model, no feedback relationships are shown. The cardinality of nodes is also omitted. They are all the same, or similar, to what Figure 7.5.6 shows in those respects. The substructure of the observer-based structure corresponding to the original engineer-based structure is indicated separately.

The resulting observer-based structure of signs is even more elaborate than the engineer-based structure. The extension reflects a deliberate choice on my part. It is of course possible to extend the engineer-based structure in a simi-
lar manner. That is, the engineer then takes his interpretation of the (potential) observer’s extrabody objectified reality into account. No doubt, that interpretation includes the observer’s interpretation of himself, i.e., of the engineer. From complete absence to enlightenment, his sign also stands for that extension of scope.

As I said, I abstain from including references to such recursion in the engineer-based structure. Whenever its need arises it can easily be added. From the observer perspective, however, I find it immediately relevant to draw attention to what the observer actually recognizes as the engineer’s impression of him in, and especially through the sign, i.e. with the sign as the mean(s) of their exchange.

In the course of his private process of sign use the observer creates his own signs, with his own semiosis following the *internal* enneadic dynamics of the intellect. See Chapter 2 for Peirce’s original triad and my development into a hexad, and Chapter 4 for my subsequent extension of semiosis into an ennead of concepts. Later in this chapter I have more to say about such alignment of different kinds of sign structures (see especially § 8.5). Here I remark that the observer of the original sign is the engineer of all the subsequent signs that originate during his internally intellectual process of sign use (semiosis).
I offer it as an additional hypothesis that every internal transition from one ennead to the next is as much an exchange as what occurs externally between different persons as sign users. For example JAMES JOYCE (1882-1941) reflects on such dynamics through his literary device of the interior monologue or stream of consciousness (BECKSON and GANZ, 1960).

I have not raised this congruence with much emphasis earlier for fear of distracting the reader from my argument on interpersonal exchanges. As I continue with the latter, these remarks on enneadic dynamics are only meant to provide collateral support. But indeed, the same explanation applies. It has the bonus of making the distinction between internal and external less problematic. For it doesn't really matter where the boundary is drawn.

Another point I repeat is that the engineer-based structure of Figure 7.5.6 is by no means supposed to be exhaustive and definitive. It undoubtedly can be augmented, modified, etcetera, on the basis of additional speculation. Earlier in this paragraph I have already provided a suggestion myself. And of course the observer-based structure of signs is equally open to improvement. It might be an improvement in both to, for example, reverse the order in which situation and interest are modeled. But at their current stage of development those models already adequately serve the purpose of more extensive specu-
lation on the anatomy of meaning. Much in the same way as Chapter 7, I explore limits and opportunities. I don’t pretend to offer a completed, comprehensive theory. What follows are primarily necessary preparations.

In this vein I consider Figure 8.1.1 sufficiently representative of the (meta)structure of the configurations of interpretants that a particular observer develops from a particular sign. On those grounds it is all the more evident that many conditions must be fulfilled in order for a sign to be understood in the traditional sense of a priori meaning.

Derived from Figure 8.1.1 is Figure 8.1.2. It shows by everything that is crossed out what needs to be specifically eliminated from analysis. A more subtle expression is that for naive realism the observer apparently brackets most elements of his observer-based sign structure. All that is left are two structural elements that should necessarily match for such ‘objective’ meaning to occur for the observer. Against the background of the overall observer-based structure it may be considered an exception, or a ‘special case.’

Figure 8.1.3.
Interpretation modeled as dynamics of comparisons by the sign observer.

Meaning implies much more than a single comparison, though. Figure 8.1.1 suggests that at least several pairs of structural elements are compared. What interpretants an observer develops from a particular sign depends on the dynamics of all such comparisons. This explains why the same sign can lead to
even widely divergent interpretations with different observers. Even the same
observer, but at different times (and/or situations), arrives at different inter-
pretations of what ‘objectively’ looks as the same sign.

Also derived from Figure 8.1.1, Figure 8.1.3 shows five direct comparisons
supposedly made by the observer during his own process of sign use in obser-
vation mode. They are numbered for convenience. The observer-based sign
structure is now easily recognizable as an analysis tool. It not only highlights
what conditions must be fulfilled for so-called ‘objective’ meaning to occur.
More importantly, it is now possible to analyze in a highly structured way
when and why the interpretative processes of observers take directions that
diverge from expectations the sign engineer holds. Take for example the first
comparison. Does the observer feel that the engineer addresses him properly?
It can make an enormous difference to the – further – interpretation of the
sign.

A systematic exploration of paired comparisons between elements from
the observer-based sign structure is not pursued here. In the course of my
argument, though, I regularly return especially to Figure 8.1.1 and to what it
summarizes about the anatomy of meaning.

8.2 in search of interest compliance

The naive approach to meaning is that a sign has all positive qualities. Positive
labels the belief that an individual sign exhausts in isolation what it stands for.
It is supposed to literally and absolutely represent its object.

I don’t hold that belief. The articulated engineer-based and observer-based
structures presented in the final paragraph of the previous chapter and in the
first paragraph of the current chapter, respectively, might indeed still suggest
the theoretical possibility of independent completeness of a stand-alone sign.
But I doubt whether any such sign is even practically engineerable. I therefore
propose a radical reversal. It is more enlightening to investigate what a partic-
ular sign does not provide when it is studied disentangled from an instance of
exchange. Although admittedly far from comprehensive, first of all the engi-
eer-based sign structure of Figure 7.5.6 is well-suited for such a negative
approach, that is, establishing what is explicitly missing from a particular sign.

Before embarking on such an analysis I point out that its premise is already
contradictory. I mentioned that a sign could be studied outside an instance of
exchange. That is nonsense as ‘study’ is an exchange, too. For it is now the stu-
dent acting as observer. Of course he may conclude that the sign engineer
includes, say, a scientific student-stakeholder in his audience. Or that he even
primarily aims his sign at such an audience. This stresses the importance of
recognizing the observer(s) as targeted by the sign engineer. Is the sign originally directed at the actual observer? Or doesn't this observer count for the sign engineer and is his particular observation therefore beyond the interests of the sign engineer? For example, do I believe that Homer composes his poem for an all-time audience? Then, there still is an immediate message for me in his work. Otherwise, I am observing the remnants of an exchange in which I am not originally intended to be involved. It is similar when I overhear a discussion that is not meant for my ears. In all those cases it is more precise to state that the study should abstract from both the original engineer and whom he originally addressed as observer(s). What the student especially needs to bring to his observation is an awareness of himself, the situation(s) of study, his situational interest(s), and his relevant objectified realities. And then again, responding to a sign for which the sign engineer didn't include the actual observer in his planned audience, the observer turns engineer and brings his interests into play for the engineer-turned-observer. Of course I cannot contact Homer to tell him I find he's written a great poem. Many other persons, however, are within reach of sign exchange where I can (also) act as sign engineer.

Once it is accepted that a sign is practically never completely positive, i.e., always lacks fulfillment in the sense of its engineer-based structure, the obvious question is: Why? The equally obvious answer is, at least from my Schopenhauerean perspective, that interests of the sign engineer determine which of his prospects, and how, are given expression in the sign. That is, a sign is always essentially political. See also the previous chapter. But the engineer's politics may be preintellectually as well as inadequately expressed. The former happens to the extent that the intellect is not involved in producing the sign. And the latter because the intellect may not contain a reliable interpretant of the engineer's will and constituting interests.

The continued emphasis on the predominance of interests serves to shift the attention to the stage of preparing for a sign, rather than to the sign itself. Suppose that John's back itches once again. Because of an injury he cannot possibly reach the irritated spot himself. Then, a person whom I have already introduced as Bill, but who is still completely unknown to John, appears on the scene. Of course it takes a real John and a real Bill in a real situation to learn what will actually happen. Again, VOLOSHINOV has already indicated this clearly (1929, p 85):

Expression-utterance is determined by the actual conditions of the given utterance above all, by its immediate social situation. [...] The word is oriented toward an addressee, toward who that addressee might be [... p 86] Word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addressee and addressee. Each and every word expresses the “one” in relation to the “other.” I give myself shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point
of view of the community to which I belong. [...] Above all, [whatever kind of utterance] is
determined immediately and directly by the participants of the speech event, both explicit
and implicit participants of the speech event, in connection with a specific situation. That sit-
uation shapes the utterance. [...] The immediate social situation and its immediate social
participants determine the “occasional” form and style of the utterance. The deeper layers
of its structure are determined by more sustained and more basic social connections with
which the speaker is in contact.

With subjective situationism so far explained, it is by now familiar ground that
the axiomatic nature of – the concept of – community is denied. As relevant
background I favor the particular relationship of stakeholders, or what H.H.
CLARK (1992) calls the “arenas of language use.” I also believe that it is
because VOLOSHINOV practically concentrates his interests on “the word”
that he probably implicitly assumes it offers (p 68) “the normative identity of
a linguistic form.” I find the more general concept of sign theoretically liberating.
Otherwise I strongly recommend the responsible way VOLOSHINOV treats
(p 99) “meaning [as] one of the most difficult problems of linguistics.”

Commenting on the meeting of John and Bill I add an assumption. John is
feeling uncertain about the stranger whose name he even doesn’t know yet.
Now John can immediately go all out directly for his own interest and request
the stranger to scratch his back. Because of his uncertainty, he probably does
not. What he basically wants to learn first is an orientation at the stranger’s
interests. Does he directly inquire after those? Most likely, he doesn’t either.
He might wait for the other person to produce a sign, let Bill actively deal with
the uncertainty. (I am abstracting here from the obvious idea that already
many sign exchanges takes before the first words are spoken.) Suppose John
does take the initiative in speaking. Then he probably tries to avoid any explic-
it mention of his interests, or an immediate inquiry after those of the other.
He may simply start with a general greeting, such as “Hello.” The reaction of
the stranger already provides him with much information. Suppose that Bill
returns the as yet impersonally designed greeting. VOLOSHINOV (1929, p 94):

The actual reality of language-speech is [...] the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance
or utterances. Thus, verbal interaction is the basic reality of language. [...] Any utterance [...] is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication. [...] Verbal communication can never be
understood and explained outside of this connection with a concrete situation. Verbal intercourse is inex-
tricably interwoven with communication of other types.]

John may next provide, as a separate sign too, his personal introduction. What
is happening is that a chain of signs gradually supplies information as postu-
lated by the engineer- and observer-based structures. These may now also be
recognized as overall structures whose gradual fulfillment governs the strate-
gy of the collection of specific sign exchanges. Each separate sign can be laid out
against such structures, too.
After John gives his own name, at least in Western society Bill already has a much easier task of establishing the continuity of his partner at meaning. In general, the series of exchanges receives an impulse for constructive continuation whenever a sign decreases uncertainty. Of course, this raises the question as to what constitutes a series. I propose that a participant dynamically adjusts, based on his interests and the potential of their fulfillment, the extent of his involvement with other participants. It is seldom a one-sided implementation to continue or end a particular series of exchanges, however. Given enough freedom one participant may actually want to stop, but could feel forced by others to continue.

All individual signs contribute to the establishment of the exchange participants’ relationship in the objectified reality of John (and, of course, of Bill too; for the time being I mainly follow John as the sign user of interest, that is of my interest as a student of their exchange). With that relationship in mind, John interprets the next response sign by Bill, John prepares and executes his own next sign, etcetera. My conclusion is that the extent of what is missing from a particular sign is determined by the memory that the sign engineer has of the relationship between the participants in the series of exchanges. As their relationship develops different areas of the overall exchange-oriented sign structure receive emphasis.

The uncertainty at any stage of any relationship is far beyond my expertise to properly model in detail. However, for the sake of explaining an adequate anatomy of meaning I feel it is sufficient to add that the sign engineer entertains an ongoing estimate of the chances of compliance. Will the observer, with his behavior, comply with the interest(s) the engineer holds? I believe uncertainty about compliance explains the anatomy of meaning. For signs are engineered with the purpose of eliciting, first of all, reactions that should inform the engineer about the potential of compliance by the observer. Only when the engineer is confident enough about the observer serving his particular interest will he shift the emphasis of the (next) sign to that interest itself. Often, of course (more) certainty about possible compliance can only be gained by informing about the interest in question, too. For the sake of simplicity of my exposition, though, I will maintain that the engineer’s prospects pertinent to his immediate interests are discernible, and are indeed also addressed separately.

I underline that, one way or another, every sign is a request for compliance. This assumption lies at the core of the anatomy of meaning.

The anatomy is an integrated part of the ontology of subjective situationism. The scope of this treatise is the design of this ontology, that is, an exercise in speculative thought. I therefore also don’t pretend to offer any empirical, but only anecdotal, support for compliance seeking as the essence of
signs. I don’t believe it can be positively proven, anyway. It necessarily remains a speculation, a fiction. I design it as a ground for (further) explanation. And I add that other theories of meaning are likewise unempirically grounded. So fundamentally, I exchange one or more traditional systems of meaning-determining axioms for a more productive one.

There exists a tradition of functional explanations (BÜHLER, 1934). Usually, there are two or three such functions distinguished. Often, as one of language’s functions, a volitional function is included (G. MANNOURY, 1948). J.O. HERTZLER (1965, pp 38-57) even compiles a classification of twelve “major general functions of language.” However as far as my research shows, what I call request for compliance has so far at the most been classified as one among several functions of language. When at all included, its importance in a functionally articulated system varies according to different theories. In some cases it does indeed appear predominant, but still not radically as the single function. Not surprisingly, volition (also read: will) receives emphasis in psychoanalytic orientations. For example psychotherapist H.C. SHANDS writes in Speech as Instruction: Semiotic Aspects of Human Conflict (1977, pp 9-10):

[I]t is my conviction that every sentence uttered by any human being has as a principal function the instruction of another or others.

Again, my hypothesis reads that what SHANDS calls “instruction” is in fact not “a principal function” but the only function of every sign. His approach is reminiscent of VOLOSHINOV’s (and BAKHTIN’s) dialogism. As SHANDS states:

The ancient philosophical idealization of an ultimate monism must, it seems to me, be abandoned in favor of a term that is, as many appropriately human terms are, internally contradictory. The term I suggest is a dualistic monism, to convey the importance of the communication-system as the basic unit.

He continues:

To say that every utterance is an instruction is not to say that each is obeyed. [...] To a very considerable extent, the history of any person’s experience is that of discovering ways of increasing the number of respondents susceptible to ’my’ instruction.[]

Why should an observer comply with an interest held by an engineer? He needs to be convinced that the required action serves his own interest. For the observer is just as much an egoist as the engineer is. That is what I derive from SCHOPENHAUER. The range goes from promotion of an extreme advantage on the one side, to avoidance of an extreme disadvantage on the other side. There are opportunities and risks, respectively, interpreted. The “mathematical approach to idealized problems of competitive conflict or games” is called game theory (J. BEISHON and G. PETERS, 1972, p 319). What complicates matters is that problems of choice among participants are often impossible to compartmentalize realistically (and neatly). A person will have several interests, mostly with divergent positions on the scale between opportunity and
risk. His action reflects how he has weighed them. Only his action does.

The engineer will try to learn what interests an observer has. In what situations do they apply? Next, the engineer should have an idea about what the observer considers specific advantages and disadvantages. When an alignment of their interests seems possible the engineer must choose what (dis)advantage(s) to emphasize, accompanied by arguments.

Power translates into exchanges. A precondition for an observer action in the interest of the engineer, as requested by a sign, is that the observer pays attention to the sign, in the first place. Why is it of interest to the observer to be … observant? He must believe to forfeit advantages, or suffer disadvantages, without such alertness and all it may subsequently lead to. The ultimate rewards and punishments then, are “causes in their narrowest sense” or stimuli. The strongest arguments are physical, bodily. It is in full accordance with SCHOPENHAUER’s axiom that a person’s body is an objectification of the will, with the intellect ‘only’ serving as its instrument.

Meaning is not confined to a separate realm of motives. All three realms, or modes, of causation are intimately connected. Human participants usually interpret any physical cause or stimulus as pertinent to the motivational realm, too. At least between human beings, every act is a sign, notwithstanding its engineer’s primary purpose.

When somebody hits you, you may incur an injury from the blow. But you have also been served with a highly impressionable sign. This integration into an overall approach to behavior is what the interest-based anatomy of meaning achieves. The physical blow is equally analyzable as the strictly verbal insult. And it can be traced how insults may escalate into physical violence or, the other way around, how violence may be tempered and the relationship continued on a (more) semiotic footing.

For a human observer, what counts for his interpretation of signs is not the promise or threat of actual consequences. His objectified reality projecting them does. It also accounts for behaviors as if rewards and especially threats are present for a person long after they have ceased to really exist.

Signs aim on behalf of the engineer at the observer’s interests and subsequent evocation of corresponding behavior. Because the engineer drives the sign exchange from his own interests it should not come as a surprise that many signs are intentionally misleading. They often don’t explicitly represent the interests they are essentially engineered to serve. Those are, of course, the interests of the sign engineer. Unless he is sufficiently sure about their interests’ alignment, the engineer will feel he is taking unnecessary risks by exposing his own interests. Why should he? When the observer notices some misalignment compliance is subsequently all the harder, if not impossible, to secure. An as yet untrusting observer, though, may request that the engineer
provides more information about his interests. When the engineer holds a narrow opinion of his situation, i.e., operates within very limited boundaries of time and/or space, he may unfaithfully reply with what he thinks the observer likes to hear as confirmation. Sincerity is promoted by extended relationships where all participants respect the dynamically evolving power balance.

8.3 meaningful memory of relationship

A particular meaning is not a property of a sign. Rather, meaning is a property of the sign exchange between participants. That is, meaning resides in their relationship. It is the sign that is a property of that meaning, not the other way around. What the sign lacks is still always present in their relationship, including all the complexities resulting from the strictly individual nature of generating interpretants. As VOLOSHINOV writes (1929, p 106):

There is nothing in the structure of signification that could be said to transcend the generative process, to be independent of the dialectical expansion of social purview. [...] There is nothing [...] that could be said to be absolutely fixed.

The concept of – interpersonal – relationship is necessary to remove sign exchanges from the framework of singular encounters. An exchange instance never occurs in isolation. A multitude of exchanges contributes to relationships between persons. How one participant behaves during one exchange is reflected in the distinctive memories of all the participants, to be applied on future occasions. Relationship is therefore the key concept for responsibility, for moral behavior, too.

The observer-based sign structure helps to illustrate what a mature relationship between persons presupposes for their subsequent sign exchanges. I now sketch the picture from the perspective of the sign observer.

The sign engineer is known by the sign observer. It follows that, in direct contact, the engineer's identification already lies in his producing the sign. No further identification is required. When the observer only meets the engineer in a single kind of situation, no reference to it needs to be included at all. As Figures 7.5.6 and 8.1.1 make clear, distinction is required between the situation of the engineer and that of the observer. However, when the observer thinks that these situations coincide or, even, are identical in their relationship, the memory of their relationship contains all the information for the interpretation of specific signs. Please note that (BOWKER and STAR, 1999, p 236)

[i]f all history is in this sense history of the present, then one might surely think of memory as ineluctably a construction of the present. [...] The memory comes in the form not of true or false facts but of multifaceted stories open to interpretation. […] Therefore, remem-
bering what was actually happening is an elusive positivist goal.

What often fails to be explicitly addressed is the particular interest of the sign engineer. When the interests of the observer remain equally unmentioned it is difficult to judge whether or not the sign engineer is expounding on his first order objectified reality. Or does this represent his second order objectified reality, that is, his interpretation of the observer's objectified reality?

Assuming mature relationships and without paying attention to interests at all for analysis, the hypothesis seems plausible that the sign is only oriented at – what all participants believe to be – a shared, intersubjective, and possibly even objective reality. Instead, subjective situationism maintains that all participants at the most fundamental level share is their relationship, at whatever stage of its maturity. And even then they can, and will, have very different ideas about that relationship.

Participants often don't rest continuation of their relationship on agreement on identities, situations, interests, and objectified realities. Rather, it is on their agreement not to put those respective prospects to the test of discussion, that is, by avoiding conflict they continue their relationship (acquiescence: N. Rescher, 1995). Such non-intervening behavior must not be confused with similarity of interpretants and underlying interests that different participants hold. For when participants are forced, by whatever circumstances, to deepen their interest in each other, many relationships do not survive.

Many mature relationships just grow. They are the natural product of socialization, education, etcetera. It is precisely because those relationships evolve so gradually into maturity why it is difficult to experience them as the alpha and omega of meaning. An orientation at relationship dynamics, however, is more encompassing and productive. Consciously confronted with the start of a relationship, it becomes much clearer how they develop, and what the role of signs is. At the early stages of a relationship participants are especially moved to eliminate uncertainty about compliance. They therefore dedicate initial sign exchanges to establish individual credentials. Participants learn about each other: Who are you? Authenticity in, and by, signs is an important issue. Figure 8.1.3 indicates that the sign observer not only seeks out (more) certainty about who the sign engineer is. He also wants to gain assurance, see comparison no. 1 indicated in Figure 8.1.3, about the engineer's proper identification of himself.

Their need for rapid assurance makes participants look for short-cuts. One way is to try to find out: Who do you know whom I know? And in what capacity? Such moves serve the purpose of transferring the impression about an older acquaintance onto the new arrival. Here, a form of morality can already be seen to work. The referral to a third person may serve to 'bind' them both to – what they may consider as – the rules of their respective older relationships with that same person.
8.4 the group as personalized abstraction

I consider any group a special kind of third ‘person.’ Actually, it is a personalized non-person. It is not human, but human-like.

Personalization serves the purpose of attributing interests. Only a person can have human interests. Whatever object gets allocated human-like interests must therefore itself first be perceived as human-like. It is established and personalized from the perspective of – some interests of – the participant(s) who promote(s) the personalization. For only when a particular group is personalized in his extrabody objectified reality does a member comply with its interests. But a group really doesn’t have interests, only individuals with bodies do.

What happens when a group is interpreted much as if it is a person. It is then eligible for participation in relationships with the human participant taking the ‘personalized’ interests of the group completely seriously. But a group is always only an instrument, too. It is easy to discover whose interests are really at stake by suggesting non-compliance. Anarchy always causes mobilization of ‘arguments.’ The key interest holders are usually not those applying the arguments along the full spectrum of modalities (causes in the narrowest sense, stimuli and signs) As I just indicated, key figures are the individual persons causing the ‘applicators’ to move. They direct their affairs indirectly.

Why does a person go out of his way to prevent or, when events escalate, counteract non-compliance? A sufficient explanation is not that supposedly deviant behavior is actually detrimental to the well-being of the person who wants to maintain control and has invented or, even more often, has ‘inherited’ the personalized group-concept to do so. It suffices for him to believe that non-compliance is a threat. Most successful at controlling is of course the person who is unaware of the personalized non-person as the invention for his own particular interests. For his actions are the least influenced by his rational faculty.

The enormous variety in actual sign fulfillment relative to its overall engineer-based structure prevents any detailed treatment. And the variety of interpretation by an observer looks even greater. Similar in approach to all but the last paragraph in the previous chapter, my analyses in this chapter have been largely anecdotal. All that I really attest to is that the sign should primarily be considered as a means to promote the interests of the sign engineer.

When limited to a single exchange it is the sign observer who is addressed to comply. This concept of compliance illustrates there are no a priori, universally valid ethics for sign use. Suppose that, indeed, every instance of exchange stands on its own. This amounts to the complete absence of memory in the participants. The scope is then ultimately narrow. With just one shot at a sign, and without the prospect of reward for integrity, or of punishment for decep-
tion, the sign engineer feels ‘free’ to choose the singularly optimal sign strategy.

Again, it extends the scope of this treatise by far to give a detailed overview of sign variety. In ‘normal’ signs the engineer designs a mixture of sincerity and falsehood. All the elements of the overall sign structure are candidates for any configuration. Does the engineer need the observer to trust him? Is his own reputation credible? If not, why should he not forge his identity when he can make the fraud sufficiently believable? He can also try to deceive the observer by for example seduction. When the engineer successfully plays on the observer’s vanity the credibility of the remainder of his sign is greatly enhanced. For he may then expect the observer to apply less scrutiny.

A person can almost count on receiving praise when he also shows a most obvious handicap, is what E. DOUWES DEKKER (1820-1887) – writing under the pseudonym MULTATULI – has the protagonist of his Max Havelaar (1860, pp 139-140, my translation from the Dutch) explain. The novel is originally published as an attempt, not to abolish, but to have an impact on Dutch colonial rule over present-day Indonesia with the purpose of ending the exploitation of its peoples. It survives as an acutely psychological account of human behavior and abuse of power in general:

I believe to know the answer. About the dead, too, we are always told how good they were. They are awarded qualities which were absent while they were alive. I suppose it’s because they no longer stand in anybody’s way. Every man is more or less the next man’s competitor. We would like to have everybody else completely and in everything in an inferior position to ourselves. Good manners and even self-interest, however, forbid us to express this openly. For very soon, nobody would believe us, even when we would speak the truth. So, we habitually find detours [...] It is not looked upon favorably to always criticize – which would be conspicuous – and that is why we like to exaggerate a positive quality. But we do so with the objective being of letting the bad quality stand out. It is only in getting the latter noticed that we are interested, but in doing so we want to appear impartial.

The sign observer can also give misleading accounts of his situation and interests. He may try to establish his objectified reality as the absolute, objective reality. As I said, endless variations are possible. The numbered comparisons in Figure 8.1.3 provide an indication of what an alert observer ponders upon during interpretation.

An effective measure for promoting sincerity is to create continuity across sign exchanges. Memory is then indispensable. It enables the origin, growth, and maintenance of relationships. An advantage gained as the result of one exchange can then turn into a disadvantage at the next. Regrettably, it is not quite as simple as this to secure integrity. The memory that is the relationship in objectified reality may just as well propagate an advantage of one participant to the disadvantage of another. The fear of harm may even receive reen-
forcement through every act of compliance. This is, by the way, exactly why it is impossible to comprehensively and systematically sketch the implications of the sign structures presented in Figures 7.5.6 and 8.1.1. There are many variables involved, each with many possible values. In this treatise I only attempt to provide a taste of a radically interest-based anatomy of meaning.

I return to the group concept. Above, I have more or less suggested that investing authority in an aggregate such as a society necessarily reflects personal interests. Here I position such an aggregate as the implicit participant in all exchanges. When John acknowledges that in putting Bill at a disadvantage he would also take advantage of the ‘person’ society, precisely that realization may prevent him from actually behaving that way. For another of his interests is thereby brought into play. When he does pursue the action that is disadvantageous to Bill, anyway, and society’s interests can be shown to have suffered, John may just be held publicly accountable. Of course, this rarely happens when John involves Bill in an exchange with signs, only (but there are limits to the freedom of speech). The principle of society, that is, of a personalized participant who is implicitly present at every exchange, remains the same regardless of the realm of exchange (also read: mode of causation, i.e., physical, stimulus, motivational).

Especially in a postmodern society, with its characteristically wide variety and high dynamics of situations, diversity needs a counterbalance for the sake of continuity (even of variety and dynamics). Integrity in behavior usually suffers from such diversity because a person may soon believe that he will only be held partially accountable. In order to establish the connection between different situations it becomes increasingly important that the sign engineer is properly identified. When situations are allowed to exist without any ethical continuity it is more likely that aberrations occur (and overall continuity suffers).

8.5 power and trust

Does the distribution of power, perhaps, determine compliance? Yet again, the issue is more complex. For a sign is not neutral with respect to power. In fact, the sign engineer engages in a sign aiming at redistribution of power when it serves his (other) interests. Suppose he believes himself more powerful than the observer, but feels that the observer does not acknowledge it sufficiently. Then the sign engineer may choose to attempt at convincing the observer through sincerity. The observer, on the other hand, may feel himself superior in power to the extent that he doesn’t even notice the engineer’s sign. When he still wants to convince the observer, the engineer has to resort to engineering
something ‘stronger’ than a sign. It may help to get the observer (back) on the
track of sign exchanges, or whatever kind of exchanges the engineer desires.
But actually hurting somebody with physical violence may not be the primary
reason for future compliance. Rather, the blow on the head, for example, is
both intended by its ‘engineer’ and interpreted by its ‘observer’ as a sign that
stands for renewed, more severe injury. Rewards are distributed with much
the same idea; they should promote expectation of future, greater rewards.

Another strategy for the engineer is to appear more powerful than he actually
is. Integrity doesn’t make him successful by definition. His fraudulent ploy
may just work. But then, it may not. With his – attempt at a – Marxist orienta-
tion, VOLOSHINOV draws a similar conclusion (1929, p 23):

Existence reflected in sign is not merely reflected but refracted. How is this refraction of exis-
tence in the ideological sign determined? By an intersecting of differently social interests
within one and the same sign community, i.e., by the class struggle. [...] Various different classes
will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every
ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle.

When “social” is replaced by the adjective individual, and “class” by the noun
individual, what comes out is an outline of my theoretical position. VOLOSHI-
NOV continues:

This social multiaccentuality of the ideological sign is a very crucial aspect. By and large, it is
thanks to this intersecting of accents that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and the
capacity for further development. [...] The very same thing that makes the ideological sign
vital and mutable is also, however, that which makes it a refracting and distorting medium.
The ruling class strives to impart a supra-class, eternal character to the ideological sign, to
extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgments which occurs in it, to
make the sign unaccentual. In actual fact, each living ideological sign has two faces, like
Janus. [...] This inner dialectic quality of the sign comes out fully in the open in times of
social crises or revolutionary changes.

The last sentence predates KUHN (1962) who later distinguishes between nor-
mal and crisis science. VOLOSHINOV is already without illusions about the fate
of an attempt at crisis science when it is evaluated from the perspective of
normal science (p 23):

In the ordinary conditions of life, the contradiction embedded in every ideological sign can-
not emerge fully because the ideological sign in an established, [...] dominant ideology is
always somewhat reactionary and tries, as it were, to stabilize the preceding factor in the
dialectical flux of the social generative process, so accentuating yesterday’s truth as to make
it appear today’s. And that is what is responsible for the refracting and distorting peculiarity
of the ideological sign within the dominant ideology.

Human exchange being essentially political, every sign is also about (re)distri-
bution of power in relationships. See also publications by M. FOUCAULT (for
example 1971) and Language & Symbolic Power (1977-1984) by P. BOURDIEU.
An explicit focus on “interpersonal manipulation” apply R. CHRISTIE and F.L. GEIS (editors) in Studies in Machiavellianism (1970). Commenting on laboratory experiments reported by contributors to their collection they conclude (p 358):

In interpersonal situations which are fairly well structured, in which there is no face-to-face contact, and the affect involved is not irrelevant to task achievement, high Mach[iavellian]s do not outcon and outbargain low Machs. [...] It is in interpersonal situations which are relatively unstructured, in which face-to-face interaction occurs in an affectively complex situation in which there is latitude for improvisation, that high Machs tend to win. Our interpretation is that high Machs tend to read the situation and remain detached from the affective distractions, among them other persons; although low Machs are equally capable of sizing up the situation, they get caught up in the interaction process with the other person(s), and this interferes with “rational” behavior. Sometimes it is not so much that high Machs win as that low Machs lose. [...] The advantage the high Machs have in manipulating others is that they seem more accurate in their views of others’ weakness in general, and that the low Machs permit themselves to be run over and outmaneuvered by the intransigent highs while clinging to their idealistic interpretation of how people should behave.

Leaving the still overly objective conceptualization of CHRISTIE and GEIS aside, the problem is that it is often impossible to factor out exactly what subset of the sign addresses the issue of power. Now suppose that the power distribution between John and Bill is stable for the moment. My guess is that it contributes to Bill’s response to John’s sign. Of course it does. How their relative power positions are integrated in his objectified reality is not the sole determining factor, though. Because of their relationship, succumbing to the power of John may relate strongly to one of Bill’s interests. But he most likely has other interests, too. So, Bill’s (re)action will depend on their balance. His intellect will help him “calculating,” SCHOPENHAUER suggests, but sometimes with detrimental results. The intellect is an all but perfect instrument. It is this essential indeterminacy of the – conceptualization of the – relationship between will and intellect that precludes an exhaustingly systematic exposition of, among others, the anatomy of meaning. Instead of hiding the necessarily prerational axioms from my explanatory apparatus I have chosen, like SCHOPENHAUER does for his conceptual system, to explicitly confront and include such axioms.

Any action by Bill adds to the memories both John and Bill each subjectively maintain of their relationship, including any effects on the power distribution. Another important but equally problematic concept for explaining preintellectually interest-based behavior is that of trust. It is also not a simple variable. Though Bill may trust John, he may not comply with the interests John puts up for gratification. John just doesn’t appeal positively to his own interests, Bill may conclude. Apparently, John also doesn’t hold sufficient power over Bill to secure his compliance with negative appeal.
Figure 8.5.1. Power and trust in the interpretation of signs.

Though likely intimately interwoven, here I simply consider the concepts of power and trust orthogonal. This ordering device already allows me to make some additional remarks. Figure 8.5.1 is drawn from the perspective of Bill, the sign observer in this case. His power relative to John’s is represented on the horizontal axis. On the extreme right, Bill is completely independent from John. And on the extreme left, he is completely dependent on him. The vertical axis depicts the degree of trust Bill places in John. At its higher end Bill’s trust is complete. At the lower end Bill has complete distrust.

Whole-hearted compliance probably occurs in the upper left-hand corner [1]. When Bill is completely dependent on John it is unlikely that some other of his interests may win out. With trust defined as the feeling that the other will not act against the interests of the self, Bill will undoubtedly comply and thus, being positively motivated to do so, serve John.

In the lower left-hand corner [2] Bill complies. However, he does at the expense of interests he would favor without being up against John’s power. Two things may happen. His distrust may turn out to be unmerited, or so he believes, anyway. He then adjusts his memory of their relationship accordingly. Next time around he complies with less aversion. On the other hand, when his distrust is confirmed he probably dreams of, or even prepares for, some significant redistribution of power.

The upper right-hand corner [3] may find Bill complying. It only happens, though, when at present no other interest is more urgent. And in that area he defends, or even improves, his power position. Of course, when Bill contemplates not to comply he has to give more attention to how John might react to his refusal. Will it lead John to distrust him (more)? Could it eventually lead John to instigate changes in their distribution of power?

Refusal of compliance seems certain in the lower right-hand corner [4]. How he does act, or not, is even more dependent on his interpretation of how John places himself relative to Bill in such a power-trust grid than with his
non-compliance in the upper right-hand corner. Will John shift his position? It follows that an unanswered sign of John may lead to the largest changes in their memories as relationship.

On qualitative terms it looks like Bill complies more often than not to an interest-implied sign by John. A quantitative measure might come out altogether differently, though. Again, I cannot refer to empirical research but the personal feelings of the majority of persons probably are that they are both superior in power to and distrustful of other persons.

I repeat that analysis on the basis of such one-dimensional concepts of power and trust is simplifying matters much. I try to suggest a general flavor of the variety of reactions to a sign. I also hope to make a credible case for it that degrees of power and trust are not established by a single sign exchange. They are properties of whole relationships between persons. By and large a relationship evolves through exchanges in all media. Signs are important but then a human relationship incurring only signs would not be fully human. It may happen that the use of signs is abolished for other media (realms, modes of causation). Such revolutions to the worse are common. Revolutions to the better, though not unknown, are indeed rare. Relationships mostly evolve to improvement, rather than suddenly change for the better.

The political nature of all human exchange has been the central assumption underlying the previous chapter. With a related concept, this chapter argues that the promotion of interests through sign exchanges is diplomatic in nature. Like personal politics, personal diplomacy is a key concept for an anatomy of meaning with additional explanatory power. The terminology of diplomacy serves to integrate signs into a larger framework for relationships. For diplomacy is never an end to itself.

Earlier I have already hinted at the increasing variety of sign situations. Even the same set of persons is often involved in (many) different relationships. John and Bill play tennis together. John has an account at the bank where Bill works. Bill visits John as his dentist. And Bill helps John troubleshooting his business and private computerized information systems. Bill also helps John with his private tax papers. John, who is also good at plumbing, has installed Bill’s bathroom. Etcetera, etcetera. Such variety is taken as characteristic of postmodern society. Invariably an individual participant will internally have to negotiate between his interests pertaining to different situations when situations have not been made explicit. So, what is usually known as a conflict of interests is, rather, their confluence. The situational variety compounds issues such as I have introduced in the current paragraph under the heading of power and trust. It is therefore adamant that a realistic anatomy of meaning takes situational variety into account. This is precisely what the proposed engineer- and observer-based sign structures offer. In Figures 7.5.6 and 8.1.1,
and all other figures preceding and derived from them, the concept of situation must of course be interpreted as situational, too. How for example the sign engineer views situations in his objectified reality is dependent on how he views himself as a *situation* that encompasses his intellect, i.e., his subjective instrument for himself as a unique objectification of the will.

### 8.6 limits and opportunities of empathy

The notion of comparison of structural elements constituting a *single* sign has been introduced in § 8.1. Does it imply that all an observer is looking for is whether or not his interpretation of the engineer’s interpretation matches his own original interpretation? Of course, that would be the stake when the observer’s interest is only to confirm himself. But what if the observer is interested in learning? If so, divergence between his original interpretation and what he interprets the engineer to indicate should not cause him to reject the sign but, rather, to embrace it. A serious anatomy of meaning must also support explanation of how an observer’s interpretants can develop with dramatic turns under the influence of signs, and their suspected engineer(s).

Interest in learning from exchange should therefore strongly correlate with empathy. It is the observer taking the engineer seriously, be it positively or negatively. It can now be simply abducted – to use Peirce’s expression for hypothesis – what promotes learning, and what not. It is strongly promoted when the observer recognizes relevant interests addressed in the sign. Those might not be immediately recognizable, though. What empathy achieves for the observer is that his own first-order interests are momentarily suspended. The time lapse should be sufficiently long for an evaluation of interests such as the sign suggests to the observer. Of course, nothing the observer does is interest-less. That is why I propose learning, or empathy, as an interest in its own right. When the observer feels that, after all, relevant interests are implied by the sign, he may proceed to consider what he interprets as the situations, and objectified realities that the sign represents.

Empathy, too, is not without its limits. Evaluation may take so long that the observer’s reaction, when it finally comes, is overdue. It is for example highly empathic to consider what the driver of a car is up to. But when he threatens to overrun the observer, suspension of own interests may be entirely the wrong strategy. It is wiser to immediately jump aside. Another risk is that of loss of investment. At first it might seem that the observer could learn from the sign. But all efforts could also be in vain. Especially when an engineer applies skillful deception, an observer may have to go to much trouble to arrive at the decision that the sign was uninteresting, after all. It also happens
that the a priori estimation of a large investment precludes the observer to actually make it. He is apparently not ready to abdicate a belief derived, probably with much commitment and energy, from an earlier sign or series of signs. What has grown into a conservative attitude of the sign observer is of course a major obstacle for diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1962).

Without immanent danger, the advantages of empathy often outweigh its disadvantages. As Schopenhauer indicates, a person only has extremely scarce knowledge of himself as objectified will. A suspension of earlier known interests, other than desire to learn, may lead to increased self-knowledge at precisely that level of interests. As interests provide the situation for most other knowledge, any improvement in the integration of self-interests in objectified reality undoubtedly has beneficial effects throughout the intellect. Less fundamental opportunities occur at the levels of ‘disinterested’ perceptive and conceptual interprets. Probably most learning as far as the number of adjustments goes, especially at a more advanced age, concerns changing such relatively superficial interprets, rather than interests.

Many difficult problems rely for their solutions on activation of empathy. Suppose John cannot solve a problem he experiences. Bill can only genuinely help John to solve it when he puts John’s interests first. As this is impossible, with priority, Bill needs to address an interest of himself. It works when Bill’s interest does not conflict with the interest of John underlying the solution. Sufficient empathy is often acquired through the prospect of a return service. It is in this respect, too, that the personalization of community or society is influential. Then anyone may return the favor. Or compliance is offered as a commercial service. In that case in return for a monetary reward Bill suspends his other interest in favor of supporting John’s interest. Such relationships are pervasive in (post)modern society. They culminate in professionalism where professionals and their clients are largely interdependent.

Closely related to empathy is cooperation. It can be seen as a relationship where compliance is felt by each participant to occur fairly balanced. Because cooperation is a relationship, too, it needs maintenance in order to continue functioning properly. The sign structures from the previous and from this chapter clearly suggest what aspects signs must treat. Without proper maintenance, the quality of a relationship may deteriorate to the point where participants no longer suspend their own interests but, instead, concentrate on them immediately. That is the annihilation of cooperation.

With all participants sufficiently motivated, i.e., with their interests being served, joint efforts at problem solving may be undertaken. Contrary to popular wisdom – and to several main currents in science, too – the anatomy of meaning presented here supports the view that participants don’t have to share identical meaning. Rather, the key concept is role. What role(s) do(es) a
particular participant optimally play in the overall scheme of cooperation? There doesn’t even have to exist a master plan of roles. Cooperation continues as long as everybody is convinced of the adequacy of both his own role(s) and the roles others play. Participants are often only dimly aware of other persons and their particular roles, or even not at all as in the proverbial ant colony. Each person is perfectly happy with his own role as the world.

Empathy in cooperation can be promoted through – more awareness of – interdependencies. But it still doesn’t imply that participants should become more similar, identical even, in their interests and knowledge (N. RESCHER, 1995). They can achieve most together when they especially address their role distribution. Then, for each role, the particular incumbent should be left to perform it how he sees fit.

It may nevertheless be attempted to arrive at a joint model of reality. That model theoretically starts with a sign that is the aggregate of participants’ signs. As it is practically prohibitive, even to create a single positive sign as the complete fulfillment of the engineer-based sign structure (see Figure 7.5.6), merging such signs into an integrated sign is especially out of the question. Attempts at modeling – what is assumed as the – shared reality usually take the turn of isolating the structural element of the extrabody objectified reality. It is treated as the one-and-only objective reality. In fact, this is precisely how I proceeded myself in Chapter 4 where I introduced the modeling technique of the metapattern. However, it should always be kept in mind that such an isolated approach assumes alignment of all other structural elements of the engineer- and observer-based sign structures.

So, whenever the jointness of the model doesn’t materialize it is necessary to pay explicit attention to all other structural elements, that is, to the subjectivity of the participants’ objectified realities. It is most likely for a joint model that further elaboration is ‘situated’ within specific roles. Whoever holds a role provides the description of situational behavior of relevant objects. Especially when highly specialized descriptions are required it is impossible for any role incumbent to completely understand what an incumbent for another role specifies. What is traditionally called shared meaning is therefore particularly inappropriate when different specialists are involved to solve a problem. Again, optimal cooperation is achieved at the level of role differentiation. This emphasis on necessarily very limited understanding of contributions by others requires from each participant that he trusts other participants highly. Is this realistic?

With specialization automatically comes uncertainty about what (other) specialists contribute. A person who doesn’t consider himself a specialist probably feels especially dependent, i.e., uncertain about support of his own interests. But everybody within the scope of cooperation – a scope estab-
lished of course with wide enough boundaries in time and space – deserves to be labeled a stakeholder. The interests of all stakeholders need to be taken seriously for they are, by definition, all important to secure the benefits of cooperation. Change is all too often obstructed, successfully or not, when benefits are experienced to become (more) unevenly distributed. And the less-powerful stakeholders usually even feel worse about oppression when they are never openly told.

8.7 focal dynamics and structure types

A sign is engineered, I propose, from an engineer-based structure. And it is observed toward an observer-based structure. I sometimes refer to those structures as metastructures. They are thereby distinguished from the, say, normal structure of a sign. How a sign is normally structured follows, in this treatise, from the irreducible ennead (see § 4.5). With the metapattern, a sign is modeled (also read: structured) as a collection of nodes and their relationships. Nodes in a model are especially engineered for focus. With focus, the observer interprets the node in question as a particular signature. It determines both a particular context and a particular intext. With different nodes in the sign, the observer can shift his focus, leading him to develop different background and foreground interpretants from what he experiences as an encompassing sign.

As an intermediary remark I want to emphasize that the metapattern can be taken literally, or figuratively. In its figurative sense, any sign can be attributed a structure that only appears highly formalized in literal metapattern applications. So, for example this treatise, too, is full of nodes. For each node, what can be fruitfully considered its context, and what its intext? Precisely because a text as this one is not formally structured as the metapattern prescribes, the reader is left much to his own devices. But there are benefits from a more flexible format, too. The engineer may want the observer to experience greater freedom to pursue his own interests, with the observer indeed happy to do so. Anyway, when I continue to write about signature, context, and intext, I am referring to a formal model that has been engineered with – the rules of – the metapattern. Those must be easier to imagine for the reader.

A sign (also read: model) of some complexity requires many shifts of focus by the observer for his thorough comprehension. Now, the observer-based sign metastructure can assist the observer where to direct his focus. He may want to ascertain the identity of the engineer. Does the sign contain sufficiently reliable information about its originator? Etcetera.

A particular sign only has a single actual structure. Or, approached the other
way around, from the engineer-based metastructure a particular sign may be produced (or from an observer-based metastructure interpreted). An instantiated structure does not provide insight into the anatomy of meaning. It is too detailed. And the metapattern as technique is too general. In fact, the metapattern is also used to model both the engineer-based and the observer-based sign metastructure.

Here, anatomy is supposed to entertain an abstraction over sign instances. An intermediary abstraction may then be assumed to occur between actual signs and modeling technique. It is best explained with characteristic means. Such are the proposed metastructures, i.e., for engineering and observation, respectively.

In an admittedly idiosyncratic fashion, in Part ii I have so far developed an anatomy of meaning as my original creation. But is it? In the remaining four chapters I enter into a critical discussion comparing it to some established theories of meaning and/or communication.