

An Overview on Semiotic Activities in Austria and Jeff Bernard's Role in the Semiotic Community

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Abstract: Though Austria cannot compete with Switzerland with regard to a founding father of Semiotics, there are certain well-known scholars like Karl Bühler or Ludwig Wittgenstein — to name but two — who contributed to the theory of signs and sign processes. However, semiotics in the sense of a real enterprise developed only in the late 1970s starting with the foundation of the Österreichische Gesellschaft für Semiotik—Austrian Association for Semiotics ÖGS/AAS in 1976. Some thirteen years later, in 1989, the Institute for Socio-Semiotic Studies ISSS followed. Together they organized larger and smaller conferences, published several book series and two journals and initiated research projects.

Following the subtitle, the major part of my contribution is dedicated to the late Jeff Bernard who initiated, or was at least closely connected to, these activities. The final parts of the paper will deal with his role on the international semiotic scene as shown by the close collaboration with other semiotic groups (especially in the neighboring countries) and by the twenty years of fulfilling different functions in the Bureau of the International Association for Semiotic Studies IASS. The contribution ends with an overview on Jeff Bernard's (mostly socio-) semiotic research and the major models.¹

Keywords: Austria, History of Semiotics, Socio-Semiotics, Austrian Association for Semiotics, Jeff Bernard

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Over the years, several reports and overviews on semiotics in Austria have been published (Bernard 1986, 1987b–d, 1996; Bernard & Withalm 1988, 1993, 1994, 1998); in one of the first, Annemarie Lange-Seidl opened her observations on semiotics in the German speaking countries with a remark that is still valid:

More than is usually done in present practice, we should distinguish between the history of semiotics as a scientific discipline, and the tradition of reflecting on sign concepts, sign use, or sign constitution, in a given country or culture. (Lange Seidl 1986: 177)

Accordingly, my paper starts with some short remarks on the latter aspects. The major part of the contribution will present an overview on the activities of semiotic organizations in Austria, mainly arranged with regard to the role of Jeff Bernard.

1. Semiotics in Austria ... *avant la lettre*

For most historical overviews, thought and research on sign related topics started in Austria in the early 1800s with the logician Bernard Bolzano. The next scholar in the list would be Ludwig Boltzmann with his philosophical side, followed by Franz Brentano who dealt with psychology and phenomenological fundamentals; Alexius von Meinong, known for his theory of objects; and their disciple Christian von Ehrenfels, a founder of *gestalt* psychology.

Three more names from the turn of the last century who should not be forgotten in this context are: the philosopher of science and positivist Ernst Mach (*Knowledge and Error* 1905), Fritz Mauthner who is best known for his critical study of language (1901–02), and Adolf Stöhr with his philosophy of language and *Theory of Names* (1869).

In the 1920s and early 1930s the members of the *Vienna Circle* (also known as the Ernst Mach Society) met on a weekly basis, and these scholars are even more closely connected to the history of semiotics in the strict sense. The group we can characterize by the term *logical positivism* (or *logical empiricism*) was chaired by Moritz Schlick; other protagonists were Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath; the latter two were among the authors of the 1929 programmatic paper on *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*. Otto Neurath's ideas were part of several publications and scientific events of the Institute for Socio-Semiotic Studies in the 1990s (cf. for instance Bernard & Withalm 1996; Bernard & Stadler 1997). With these two scholars, we have reached semiotics proper. Both Neurath and Carnap had close connections to Charles Morris: the three of them edited the initial volume of the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* in 1936.

At the same time, yet another scholar worked in Vienna until he emigrated. He definitely has to be considered a semiotician: Karl Bühler. He developed his *Organon* model of language in the 1934 book on *Theory of Language*.

Finally, Ludwig Wittgenstein has to be added to the list of course.

Due first to Austro-Fascism and then National Socialism, intellectual and cultural life in Austria came to a violent halt; luckily, some artists and scholars were able to emigrate and survive in other countries, among them Carnap, Neurath, Bühler and Wittgenstein. This intellectual diaspora created a gap that hindered Austria to catch up with international currents in philosophy, linguistics and semiotics for decades. However, the published overviews remind us of some scholars who joined universities in the 1960s and early 1970s that need to be named as related at least to semiotic questions. In philosophy there are the Austrians Wolfgang Stegmüller who was professor at the University of Munich; Rudolf Haller (University of Graz); and Paul Weingartner (University of Salzburg). Another colleague from Salzburg, who dealt with legal philosophy and had influence on the development of the semiotics of law, was Ilmar Tammelo. Finally, there is the field biological or ethological research, represented by Karl von Frisch, Konrad Lorenz and Rupert Riedl (University of Vienna).

2. Organizational Steps.

2.1 The Austrian Association for Semiotics ÖGS/AAS

After the initial legal steps in 1975, the Austrian Association for Semiotics ÖGS/AAS was founded in October 1976. Among the founding members were Tasso Borbé (the organizer of the Second Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies in Vienna in 1979) and Erich Fries, a multimedia artist.

Soon, two other scholars joined the board, Jeff Bernard and Wolfgang Pollak. The sociolinguist Pollak was the head of the Institute for Romance Studies, and together with Bernard and Fries he shaped the orientation of semiotics in Austria, emphasizing didactical, emancipatory and social aspects of semiotic theory (Pollak, Bernard & Fries 1982). In his own publications in the semiotic book series, Pollak analysed the linguistic identity of Austrians with regard to the bigger and more influential variation of German spoken in Germany (1992, 1994).

Over the years, a number of scholars from different universities were or still are members of the board of the Austrian Association for Semiotics: Wolfgang Bandhauer, Peter Grzybek, Erika Kanduth, Friedrich Lachmayer, Herbert Muck, Wolfgang Pollak, Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager, Franz Seitelberger, Robert Tanzmeister, Manfred Wagner, Josef Wallmannsberger, and the author.

2.2 ISSS Institute for Socio-Semiotic Studies

The ISSS was founded in 1989 as the research institute and publication unit of the Austrian Association, as such it has taken over and increased the publication, organization and research activities of the former section on “Applied Semiotics” of the Austrian Association for Semiotics. The objective is to promote and represent semiotics and neighboring fields both on a national and international level. Since there is (still) no university institute of semiotics in Austria, one of the tasks of the ISSS is to set forth semiotic research and to introduce semiotics to the academic sphere. The ISSS is open for all semiotic traditions, schools and approaches. It serves as a platform for discussion, confrontation, and cooperation. An important task of the ISSS is to act as a mediator in the field of science and research as well as on a science-political and on a geographic level.

The name iss programmatic with regard to the main focus of research. With the notion “Socio-Semiotics” particular research fields are emphasized: the societal dimension of sign systems and sign processes and their integral role in communication and interaction.

Initially, the board had the following members: Jeff Bernard, Rudolf Burger, Gloria Withalm, Wolfgang Bandhauer. In June 2010 a new board was elected: I am the new chairperson, deputy chairman is Anton Furlinger (Austria’s most prominent bio-semiotician), the film semiotician Gabriele Jutz is the Secretary General, and literary semiotician Theresia Klugsberger is the Treasurer.

Among the members and collaborators are the co-editors of *S – European Journal for Semiotic Studies* from Perpignan (Gérard Deledalle and Joëlle Rethoré), Budapest (János Kelemen) and Madrid (José Romera Castillo), together with their editorial committee members, and a few Austrian scholars like Sonja Kral (Romance Studies and literary semiotics), Friedrich Lachmayer (the main Austrian law semiotician), the Peircean philosopher Ludwig Nagl, the semio-historian Hans Petschar who is now the director of the picture and graphics department of the Austrian National Library, the literary semiotician Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager, and the historian and film semiotician Georg Schmid.

The three latter together with Theresia Klugsberger, Gabriele Jutz, Carl Aigner (a specialist on the semiotics of photography), and Severin Heinisch were also the main protagonists of another group called *SIGMA – Salzburg Society for Semiology*. established in the early 1980s. In 1986 Georg Schmid edited the collective volume *Zeichen der Historie [Signs of History]* that presented their work. In the early 1990s they carried a research project together with colleagues from the *Équipe Sémiotique Cognitive et Nouveaux Médias ESCoM* at the *Maison des Sciences de l’Homme Paris* (cf. Stockinger 1993, Stockinger de Pablo, Fadili & Stockinger 1998). Though the group and its members — as indicated in its name — are more French oriented, they closely collaborated both with the AAS and the ISSS: they presented papers at the conferences and published articles in the journals and collective volumes (Jutz 1987, 2004; Schmid 1990, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2010; Schmid-Bortenschlager 1987, 1994, 1995, 2004) and the 1987 congress was a joint event (Bernard, Klugsberger & Withalm 1989).

3. Jeff Bernard (1943–2010) & the Semioticians' Community A: "Local" = Austria & Neighbors

Since the vast majority of semiotic activities in Austria were initiated by, or at least closely related to, Jeff Bernard (*Figure 1*), all the following parts of the paper are dedicated to his memory.



Figure 1: Jeff Bernard, "Europe – Image and Concept in Cultural Change from a Semiotic and Transdisciplinary Point of View", 11th International Symposium of the AAS, 3–5 December 2004 (Copyright © 2004 Atelier Neundlinger)

Talking about Jeff Bernard implies three different aspects. The first one is well known to his fellow semioticians: his research and publications. A great deal of his scholarly work might be subsumed under the heading "socio-semiotics".

Second, there was the organizer of conferences and congresses, the editor of journals and book series, the member of the board of scholarly societies and associations, and last but not least the teacher in seminars; in other words, the science-organizational aspect, the publication aspect, and the educational aspect in his work, connecting those who produced texts with those who received texts, as well as the various groups and semioticians from different countries and schools.

Third, there was an aspect of his life and work which is, most probably, least known to his friends and colleagues in semiotics: *Jeff Bernard's artistic oeuvre* – a way of creating texts which was different from academic text production. In this contribution I will omit this facet of his oeuvre, but you can find some information and visual sources in my biographical essay (Withalm 2004), on the part of my website dedicated to Jeff, and in my contribution to the commemorative issue of *The American Journal of Semiotics* (Withalm 2010; Withalm 2011b).

As already discussed, the Austrian Association for Semiotics was founded in 1976, and almost from the very beginning Jeff Bernard took an active part in the section of "Applied Semiotics" (which he chaired 1978–88). As of 1978 he was elected to the Board of the ÖGS/AAS, first in the function of the Treasurer; from 1979–1995 he was Secretary General, and then the successor to the late Wolfgang Pollak as President of the Association.

In 1989 Jeff Bernard initiated the founding of the Institut für Sozio-Semiotische Studien ISSS, and since the beginning he was the director.

Both organizations collaborated closely in publishing several book series and journals and Jeff Bernard was involved in all of them.

3.1 Working on Open Questions and Problems: Research Projects

I will start with some remarks on the research projects initiated and carried out by the ÖGS/AAS and/or the ISSS. It all began in the early 1980s with a programmatic paper on the emancipatory qualities of semiotics authored by Pollak, Bernard & Fries (1982), and the three managed to convince the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science and Research to finance a project titled *Theory and Practice of Signs* (Bernard & Withalm 1988), carried out 1984–1986. The project had a strong emancipatory and socio-semiotic approach, presented in chapters by Pollak and his closest collaborators (Wolfgang Bandhauer, Robert Tanzmeister), Erich Fries, Jeff Bernard and myself. In a first part, the main members of the Vienna group of socio-semioticians around Wolfgang Pollak presented various aspects of an integrative socio-semiotics (for details cf. Bernard & Withalm 1994). A second part consisted of two rounds of an international experts' survey uniting colleagues from different schools in a modified Delphi inquiry on the status quo and development of semiotics (cf. Withalm 1991a, 1991b). With this inquiry, Austria certainly succeeded to put itself on the semiotic map (Bernard, Enninger, Eschbach & Withalm 1991).

Approximately at the same time, the communications and public relations department of the Austrian Workers' Compensation Board (Allgemeine Unfallversicherungsanstalt AUVA) supported a second large project with the title *Social Rehabilitation and Social Communication* (1985–1987). Apart from the papers dealing with the representation of disabled people in film, print media and public discourses, the aim was to develop strategies to counteract the (unfortunately still) prevailing deficits in the social integration of disabled people. Accordingly, there was not only ink and paper involved but also some parts of the project were action research oriented.

Other large projects dealt with the *Structures of Autonomous Cultural Work in Austria* (Bernard & AutorInnenkollektiv 1990; Bernard, Winter & Withalm 1990; Bernard 1995a, Bernard & AutorInnenkollektiv 1995), or *Cultural Semiotics/Semiotics of Culture in Eastern Central Europe and East Europe*.

In the middle of the 1990s, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Health and Consumer Protection commissioned a research project dealing with *Drugs, Media, and the Public*, which unfortunately, was never published. After changes in the Ministry the critical stance toward the drug policy in Austria was no longer appreciated... Though we were not officially allowed to diffuse the results, Jeff Bernard talked about it at the Guadalajara Congress in 1997 (Bernard 2000a+b, 2005).

The last project so far was dedicated to questions of the *Public Construction of Europe*. The project was situated within the research focus *New Orientations in Democracy in Europe* >node< of the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture; it was carried out by the Institute for Political Science, University of Vienna, under the direction of Andreas Pribersky, who invited the ISSS to cooperate. "Public construction" aimed at analyzing the political discourses, political campaigns and advertisements related to the EU (in particular the then new member states to be).

3.2 Writing on Semiotics: Book Series & Journals

There are three book series published by the AAS and ISSS — Jeff Bernard was the general editor of all three.

One of the early volumes of the book series “Angewandte Semiotik” appeared in celebration of the first 10 years of the Austrian Association for Semiotics: *Semiotica Austriaca* (Bernard 1987a) was the first collective volume presenting more than forty Austrian scholars plus a few colleagues who lived abroad, like Peter Stockinger or Erika Freiberger-Sheikoleslami.

Most of the books in the series “Angewandte Semiotik” present the proceedings of the national symposia (Bernard 1983, 1995b; Bernard, Klugsberger & Withalm 1989; Bernard & Withalm 1998, 2001, Bernard, Grzybek & Withalm 2000; Bernard, Wallmannsberger & Withalm 1997); in addition there is one monograph (Tanzmeister 1987), two volumes that show various aspects of semiotic research (Borbé & Krampen 1978; Handl 1985) and a special volume on the Polish School of Film Semiotics and Poetics (Osadnik & Bernard 2001).

Two more series are published by the ISSS.

“S – Addenda” is — as the name suggests — an addendum to the journal *S – European Journal for Semiotic Studies* that will be discussed below. There are a few edited volumes (Lachmayer, Withalm & Fries 1995; Harauer & Bernard 1994), many of them documenting the close collaboration with Hungarian semioticians (Bernard & Kelemen 1990; Bernard & Neumer 1994; Orosz 1997; Neumer 1998), but the majority of the books are monographs, like those written by our Romanian colleague Mariana Neț (1997, 2000, 2002), the print version of the habilitation theses of Josef Wallmannsberger (2002) and Robert Hepp (2000), or the volume by Wolfgang Pollak (1992) already mentioned dealing with the Austrians and their language awareness.

As indicated by the sub-title, the volumes of the second series “S – Labor” are Semiotic Pre-Publications, somehow smaller in size. They range from my monograph on self-reflexive television (Withalm 1995) to Robert Tanzmeister’s booklet on the Italian right-wing and separatist Padania movement (2000), Jeff’s collection on East-European semiotics (1997), or Pollak’s second book on Austrian German (1994), this time in view of our entering the EU.

Since 1978, when the journal of the ÖGS/AAS first appeared, Jeff Bernard was the acting editor of *Semiotische Berichte* (*Semiotic Reports*). The journal began on a rather small scale as a sort of bulletin appearing irregularly; in the early 1980s, however, it started to be published in annual volumes of four numbers.

Semiotische Berichte had many open issues, but the number of issues on special topics increased steadily, for instance with “In Memoriam Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (Bernard & Withalm 1985), or the double issue dealing with Austria’s past “1938–1988” (Bernard & Bandhauer 1988); some of them were guest edited, like *Zeichensetzungen* (presenting artistic texts by the Graz Authors’ Assembly, 1990) or “Text & Theory” (Helbo 1989), and, finally, *Semiotische Berichte* also presented proceedings of smaller symposia like those on pictorial language, the symposia organized together with the Hungarian Semioticians, or the Open Border conferences.

In 1989, with the founding of the ISSS, a second journal was started: *S – European Journal for Semiotic Studies*, which was co-edited by four groups or centers: the ISSS, the Perpignan group around (the late) Gérard Deledalle, Spanish colleagues (first from Barcelona, then from Madrid: José Romera Castillo), and our Hungarian friends (János Kelemen). The

journal started with an issue on *Signs, Language, and Meaning*, presented both at the 4th IASS Congress in Perpignan, and later in Vienna at the Wittgenstein House.

As a rule, *S-EJSS* published issues on special topics, edited either by a member of one of the four editorial groups or by a guest, with titles like: *Film: Signs & Discourse* (1990; Jeff Bernard & Gloria Withalm), *Dialectics, Semiotics, Materialism. In Memoriam Ferruccio Rossi-Landi* (1991; Jeff Bernard, János Kelemen & Gloria Withalm), *Semiotics & Mentalities* (1994; Mariana Neț), or *Semiotics in Biology* (1997; Manfred Laubichler). Many issues presented the research done in a country or region, starting from *Semiotics in Bulgaria* (1989; Malina Stefanova); others were *Semiotics in Romania* (1990; Mariana Neț), *Czech & Slovak Semiotics* (1992; Jarmila Doubravová), *Semiotics in Spain* (1998; José Romera Castillo), *Rio de la Plata Semiotics* (2000; Fernando Andacht), or *East-Asian Semiotics* (1998; Gérard Deledalle & Janice Deledalle-Rhodes, Kim Younghae); but also smaller groups and research centers got the chance to publish their texts like as for instance with *Peircean Semiotics in Perpignan* (1989; Gérard Deledalle Joëlle Réthoré), *Berliner Beiträge zur Kultursemiotik* (1990; Günter Bentele, Ivan Bystřina & Michael Kuper), *Semiotic Studies in Bari* (1999; Susan Petrilli), or *New Tartu Semiotics* (2000; Jeff Bernard, Igor Černov, Silvi Salupere & Peeter Torop). Sort of “open issues” were titled first *Semiotik Interdisziplinär* then *Trans-scientific Semiotics*. Finally, some issues presented the proceedings of symposia, like the one on the *Signs, Music, Society*, organized in Vienna in March 1999 (2001&2002; Jeff Bernard & Gloria Withalm).

3.3 Talking About Semiotics: Conferences & Symposia

As mentioned with regard to the various proceedings published in the book series and journals, both the Austrian Association for Semiotics and the ISSS organized many scholarly meetings.

Let us start with the national semiotic congresses of the ÖGS/AAS. The first three, held in the mid-1970s presented many well-known international colleagues, like Martin Krampen, Jean-Jaques Nattiez, Jerzy Pelc, Roland Posner, or Tom Sebeok, but there were hardly any Austrians among the speakers. The situation changed after the 2nd IASS Congress held in Vienna. It was decided to organize the national conferences every three or four years under a specific topic, starting in 1981 with the 4th on the “*Didactic Implementations of Sign Theory*”. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the venues changed in order to intensify the collaboration with the various groups at the Austrian universities, and so did the topics: “*Signs/ Manipulation*” (1984, Klagenfurt), gender and/vs. sex (1987, Salzburg), identity (1990, Sigharting), “*Modelling History and Culture*” (1996, Graz), or “*Myths–Rites–Simulakra. Semiotic Viewpoints*” (2000, Vienna).

Unfortunately the difficulties to get financial support increased and thus the 11th was, so far, the last one; it took place in 2004, and dealt with “*Europe – Image & Concept in Cultural Change from a Semiotic and Transdisciplinary Point of View*” in close connection to *Public Construction of Europe* project.

As it would be too exhausting to present each and every one of the other events organized over the years individually, I just want to mention the conference and seminar series:

There were five symposia on *Picture Language – Visualization – Diagrammatics*. The series started in 1991 as a tribute to Otto Neurath, thus the first two were held in the Austrian Museum of Society and Economy, founded in the mid-1920s by Neurath.

In 1989 Friedrich Lachmayer began his Seminar *Semiotics of Law* that brought together international and Austrian scholars. Originally a university seminar at the Faculty of Law of

the University of Vienna, the ISSS became gradually more involved until it was held entirely at our premises after Lachmayer retired from teaching.

Finally, the close collaboration with the Wiener Volkshochschulen/Viennese Adult Education Institute led to advanced training seminars for their teachers, titled “Sign / Communication / Culture: Areas of Semiotic/Semiotic Practice”. Usually, Jeff Bernard introduced the group to basic aspects of semiotic, followed by two guest speakers who presented special topics.

With regard to the relations between Austrian semioticians and colleagues from neighboring countries, two more series need to be mentioned.

The longest and closest relations — dating back to the mid-1980s — are definitely with the Hungarian colleagues, most of them members of the Magyar Szemiotikai Társaság, the Hungarian Semiotic Society, and they all participated in the Austrian-Hungarian Semiotics Colloquia that we organized at changing locations in the two countries. Some of the different topics dealt with were for instance: “*Sign Construction in Cultural Settings*” (1992, Velem / Szombathely), “*Semiotics & Theory of Culture*” (1994, Vienna), “*Re- Presenting the Past*” (1996, Graz), or “*Media Semiotics Today*” (2004, Dunabogdány). As a rule, the proceedings appeared as special issues of *Semiotische Berichte*, though those organized within the Austrian National Congresses were published as part of the conference proceedings.

Another result of this collaboration that even preceded the meetings were two joint journal issues that turned out to be a real test case for many librarians: Two issues of *DOXA* and *Semiotische Berichte* of 1987 and 1988 appeared not only under both titles with a collage of both cover designs but also with both ISSN numbers.

In addition, there were several collective volumes presenting texts written in the two countries (e.g. Bernard & Kelemen 1990, Bernard & Neumer 1994, Neumer 1998).

When we started a new series of small conferences titled *Open Borders* — again meant to bring together Austrian scholars with colleagues from neighboring countries — it was of course the Hungarian connection that initiated the first one in 1997 in Graz (on Péter Pázmány, the Hungarian scholar and cardinal of the Counter-Reformation who graduated in Graz). In the following conferences we welcomed speakers from Croatia (“Borders, Signs, Transitions”, 1999), Slovakia (“Form–Structure–Composition”, 2001), Slovenia (“Text & Reality”, 2003), and the Czech Republic (“Cultures as Signs-Systems and Processes”, 2006).

But there were two single events organized on special occasions that deserve special mentioning. Already in 1990 such a conference was jointly organized by Austria and Hungary — titled *Symbolicity*, and it was dedicated to Thomas A. Sebeok who celebrated his 70th birthday (Bernard, Deely, Voigt & Withalm 1993). With another birthday symposium on *Signs of Power – Power of Signs* held in 2003 the ISSS honored its founder and chairman Jeff Bernard on his 60th birthday (Withalm & Wallmannsberger 2004).

Finally, there is yet another type of events that shouldn’t be forgotten: the large number of guest lecturers who came to Vienna to present and discuss their research. As of the early 1990s, they were organized under the umbrella term *Wiener Semiotische Konversationen / Viennese Semiotic Conversations*. Among the guest speakers of these almost hundred lectures were for instance: Vladimír Biti (Zagreb), Hans Bozenhard (Dresden), Tatiana M. Civ’jan (Moscow), Paul Cobley (London), John Deely (Houston), Gérard Deledalle (Perpignan/Montbazin; *Figure 2*), Jarmila Doubravova (Prag), Dinda L. Gorfée (The Hague), Rolf-Dieter Hepp (Berlin), Rita Sabine Kergel (Berlin), Rolf Kloepfer (Mannheim), Manfred Laubichler

(New Haven), Jürgen E. Müller (Bayreuth), Mariana Neț (Bucharest), Katalin Neumer (Budapest), Magdolna Orosz (Budapest), Ivo Osolobě (Brno), Susan Petrilli (Bari), Augusto Ponzio (Bari), Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington, IN), Victorino Tejera (New York, NY), Ladislav Tondl (Prague), Vilmos Voigt (Budapest), Josef Wallmannsberger (Kassel), Peter Zajac (Bratislava).



Figure 2: Gérard Deledalle (and Jeff Bernard), guest lecture at the ISSS Institute for Socio-Semiotic Studies, 17 November 1995

4. Jeff Bernard & the Semioticians' Community

B: "Global" = IASS Congresses & Other International Events

Jeff Bernard's commitment to the semiotic infrastructure and organization was not confined to the Austrian semiotic community as he was very active in the International Association for Semiotic Studies IASS–AIS and in international semiotics in general.

His first appearance at an IASS event dates back to the 1979 Vienna Congress. Within the artistic program he had an exhibition at the university, presenting two of his performances that were clearly semiotic multimedia art: *To Be or Not to Be: No Question* and *The Medium is Form, Contents and Interpretation*. The official involvement in the IASS–AIS began in 1984 with his election to the Executive Committee as one of the Austrian representatives, and 1985 he started both as the co-ordinator of the Presidential Office, run at that time by Jerzy Pelc, and as the co-editor of the *IASS–AIS Bulletin*. In 1989 at the Perpignan Congress he was elected to the Board of the Association as Vice Secretary General working closely with the then Secretary General Gérard Deledalle (as already indicated by the editorial committees of the *S–EJSS*, the relations to the Perpignan group). From 1994 on until the 8th Congress of the IASS–AIS in July 2004 in Lyon Jeff Bernard was the Secretary General of the IASS–AIS.

Both inside and outside the IASS–AIS he had close collaborations with many centers and groups, among them for instance the Bulgarian semioticians who organized the Early Fall School in Semiotics on a regular basis, and, of course our friends Augusto Ponzio and Susan Petrilli from the University of Bari.

Throughout his years in office Jeff Bernard worked for the stabilization both of existing cooperations and of the position of semiotics, as well as for the development of closer relations on a truly globalized level — from the two Americas and several African countries to East Asia (Figure 3) with Korea, China and Japan. And it was very satisfying to him, that finally the IASS decided to hold *this* 11th World Congress in Nanjing.



Figure 3: Jeff Bernard & interpreter at the Plenary Lecture, 2nd East-Asian International Semiotic Seminar, Shanghai, China, 19–23 October 1997 (Copyright © 1997 Xu Zhong Hua)

No wonder that due to his board functions, he was always involved in the preparation of the IASS world congresses, indeed excessively in the case of the 7th Congress in Dresden 1999 when Jeff and I more or less shaped the entire program.

In most of the IASS Congresses he not only presented his own papers, but also organized (sometimes together with colleagues like Susan Petrilli) sections on particular topics, often related to socio-semiotics, emancipatory aspects of semiotics and the theories of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi.

To complete the story of his relation to the IASS it has to be mentioned that he was elected one of the five Vice-Presidents in Lyon in 2004, a function he fulfilled until the 10th Congress of the IASS held in La Coruña in September 2009 on “Culture of Communication, Communication of Culture”. And I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Secretary General of the IASS, José Luis Paz Gago, that he dedicated the Proceedings of the Congress to Jeff Bernard and to the Argentinian semiotician Juan Angel Magariños de Morentin who passed away shortly after Jeff in early April 2010.

5. Jeff Bernard & the Semioticians' Community

C: Research Theories & Models – Summarized

After dealing with the organization oriented aspect of Jeff Bernard's role in semiotics, another moment should finally be discussed briefly: the main paradigms guiding his work, and the topics of his research, mostly related to particular societal groups and their position within society, to the entire field covered by a socio-semiotic approach.

Jeff Bernard studied architecture at the Technical University of Vienna, and there he was also first confronted with semiotics: One of his professors was Günther Feuerstein, who wrote a dissertation on architecture and meaning (especially about archetypal forms). He was one of the few to present the ideas of Umberto Eco, Max Bense or Roland Barthes in his courses as early as in the 1960s.

Though Jeff Bernard was above all a socio-semiotician, I will start with an aspect of his work that is most probably least known: he was very much interested in the history of semiot-

ics or, more precisely, the depiction of this history, the inclusion or omission of scholars in the various overviews on the pre-history and history of semiotics as well as in the various encyclopedia and handbooks, as in his contribution on Barthes at the 2005 conference in Bari (Bernard 2005). The most complete synchroptic chart on the history of semiotics was presented in Imatra in 2005 (Figure 4) and John Deely who recalled his paper asked me to include it in the *Memorial Issue* of *The American Journal of Semiotics* (26(1–4)2010) that appeared in 2011 (Bernard 2011).

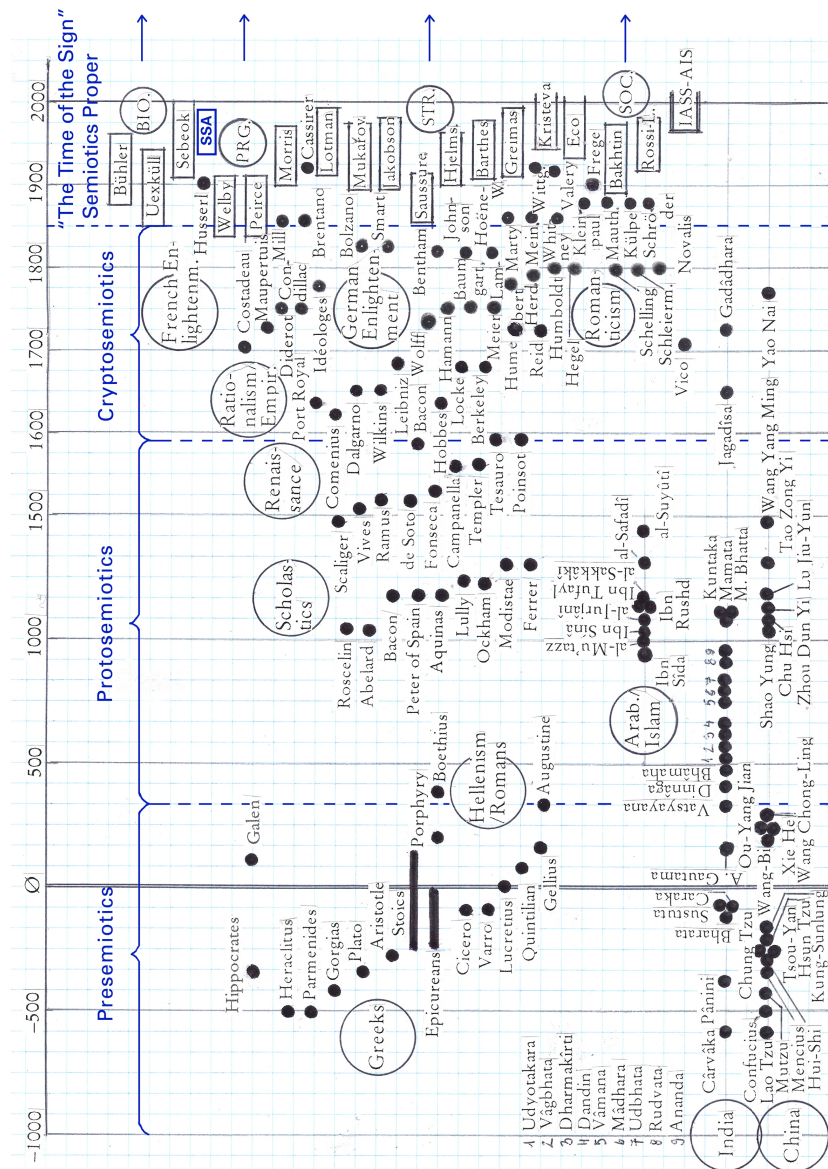


Figure 4: Jeff Bernard, Chart of Semiotic History, drawn in June 2005

When we now turn to Bernard’s other semiotic work we can observe that it can be characterized both as theoretical or general semiotics and as applied semiotics, the one influencing and promoting the other. Accordingly, we find a true the *integration* of theory and practice in his oeuvre as a whole. Moreover, also on the theory side he adheres to an integrated concept combining social and/or socio-cultural theories, in particular advanced forms of subculture theory (in the line of Rolf Schwendter or the works of the scholars of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, like Stuart Hall, whose work he actually considered to form a branch of culture and media semiotics), and socio-semiotics.

Already in 1979 he published an article on the semiotics of deviance studies, and ten years later, at the 4th IASS–AIS Congress, he presented a paper offering “Semiotics as a Theory of (Sub)Culture(s) and Its Material Core” (1992). The socio-semiotically based subculture approach (or as he has preferred to call it: differential theory of culture) was the leading concept in many of his research projects, since subcultures can be open or hermetic, progressive or regressive, etc., and people can be forced into their marginalized position (as it is the case with disabled persons) or deliberately take this societal position. Moreover, Jeff Bernard argued, one can distinguish *liminal zones* between hegemonic culture and subcultures and among different subcultures, zones which are of great theoretical and practical interest and importance. All these components of culture-at-large constitute complex *sign milieus* of different makings, and the emphasis must thus be not on culture but on *cultures* – which opens his theory also to “globalization” phenomena. Among the field research themes related to the subcultural view were: the various works on disabled people as such and on disabled people and/in the media and the development of strategies for an improved communication and interaction in society (e.g. Bernard 1987e, 1992; Bernard & Hovorka 1992; Bernard, Pribitzer & Withalm 1989; Benrad & Withalm 1990), the already mentioned drugs project, and, almost ironically, a small study on the implementation of semiotics itself as a hitherto relatively marginal phenomenon in academia (in the *festschrift* for Wolfgang Pollak; Bernard 1985).

The subculture model was also the theoretical focus of his already mentioned research on Autonomous Culture Centers. When it comes to a *Differential Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Jeff Bernard referred to theorems of the Tartu-Moscow scholars put in a larger context, for instance by replacing “the singular hierarchy ‘sign—text—culture’ [...] by a plural one, ‘signs—texts—cultures’ (in which culture as such will function only as the intertext, or intertextual space [...]). to be moreover refined by more detailed gradations of textuality”. (Bernard 2007, par. 4)

The various fields and segments of society Jeff Bernard dealt with in his research show the general orientation of his semiotics: a strong emancipatory and enlightening quality, a view he shared with his late friend Wolfgang Pollak, the famous socio-linguist and former president of the ÖGS/AAS. As mentioned earlier, Bernard, Pollak and Erich Fries formulated a programmatic paper “Emancipatory Sign Theory” which eventually led to the research project *Sign Theory & Sign Practice* discussed above.

The question of semiotics and emancipation was a constant topic as is shown by the paper he presented at the last international conference he attended, the 10th IASS World Congress in La Coruña. In the section on “Global Semiotics” chaired by Paul Cobley, he talked about “Late Capitalism in the Mega-Crisis – A Chance for Emancipatory Semiotics?”

One of the parts of the Austrian research project just mentioned, co-authored by Jeff Bernard and myself, dealt with the socio-semiotic concepts of the author who most strongly influenced and inspired our work: the Italian semiotician and philosopher Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (who actually became also our close friend in the years before his death in 1985).

Rossi-Landi’s semiotics, which is a socio-semiotics, must not be read as consisting of isolated or separated parts. The various concepts are rather interconnected elements of one integrated theory, a complex network in which each and every idea, each and every argument has its unique and proper position. As a consequence, even a brief presentation of Rossi-Landi’s work would take too much time. Thus, I will only enumerate some of the concepts that Jeff Bernard took up and developed further.

One of the core concepts formulated by Rossi-Landi is the *homology of material and linguistic production*. Jeff Bernard adopted and expanded it, with regard both to the levels and the areas of production covered, to a general homology model of human production

including mental and ideological domains and culminating in the explication of the creation, making and components of *culture* (that is, integrating also the findings of hitherto existing approaches in the semiotics of culture).

A second central concept is Work — considered in an anthropological sense and with regard to both material and sign production. Given the homology just mentioned, the modeling of both sign production (and *re*-production/consumption) and the entire sign process has to be based on the various forms of work which can be distinguished. This is not only true for the external, visible part of semiosis, but also for the internal sign production in the mind of the sign workers, as shown in Bernard's differentiated sign model.

Finally, Rossi-Landi dealt extensively with *Social Reproduction* that can be defined on several levels starting from the most basic of production, exchange (including sign production, sign exchange and sign consumption) and consumption (cf. Rossi-Landi 1985: 38). Again, Jeff Bernard took the original model and enlarged it to cover both the internal sign production shown already in our sign model and the production of ideology as already done in the homology model. Thus not only "brain work" is based on semiotic procedures, but ideology is deeply rooted in semiotic processes.

Many of the features just outlined with regard to Jeff Bernard's semiotic and cultural studies apply likewise to his entire oeuvre, be it artistic, scientific or organizational. Most prominent among these traits is the true integration of theory and practice, departing from, as well as reaching to, both directions. Another facet is the focusing on semiotic, communicative processes which was not confined to his actual theorizing on signs and sign processes, but pervaded also his artistic and cultural work.

Maybe the most prominent aspect of Bernard's work summarized above is a strong momentum of responsibility and an emancipatory stance governed his work, his thinking and his life: Jeff Bernard never lost sight of social dimensions and societal implications, as for instance in the paper presented at the 10th IASS World Congress in La Coruña mentioned earlier ("Late Capitalism in the Mega-Crisis – A Chance for Emancipatory Semiotics?").

In addition he was invited to give a long ad-hoc presentation in another working group dealing with the "Status of Semiotic Theory" that was convened on the spot on the last morning of the Congress. And all our friends were glad to see Jeff back on track. Unfortunately, as was the case more often than not, neither of the papers exists in writing, ready for publication, as Jeff Bernard preferred to lecture and to speak to the audience rather than read from a written text.

Because of the sudden and entirely unexpected death of Jeff Bernard on February 24, 2010, the various manuscripts and notes and diagrams that he used extensively in his argumentation are yet unordered and need a good deal of editing work. Likewise, a thorough scientific presentation and evaluation of Jeff Bernard's work in semiotics and socio-cultural studies will have to wait.

Together with a possible publication of texts yet unprinted or difficult to access, it is a task for the next years that I hope to fulfill together with the many friends and collaborators from the semiotic community. And this is not only a task to honor an important figure in the recent history of semiotics in Austria but a necessary documentation of semiotic thinking in my country.

Note

- 1 All the pictures of the original presentation are available as a pdf-file on my website:
<http://www.uni-ak.ac.at/culture/withalm/wit-texts> — link: “An Overview on Semiotic Activities in Austria and Jeff Bernard’s Role in the Semiotic Community”.

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