

THE PRONOMINALISATION OF CULTURE. DYADIC AND TRIADIC MODELS OF INTERCULTURALITY IN THE CONCEPTIONS OF THE TARTU SCHOOL, BAKHTIN, CASSIRER, AND PEIRCE

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Summary: A sense can be given, in qualitative rather than quantitative terms, to the three-part distinction, within the semiotics of culture, of Culture, Non-culture, and Extra-culture, by having recourse to the analysis of pronouns into two binary correlations, personality and subjectivity, originally proposed by Benveniste. The present communication will address two related themes: the possible relationship, which is not straight-forward, to Peirce's early presentation of his famous trichotomy in terms of personal pronouns, and its parallel, which is not a strict one, in the late work of Cassirer; and, in the second place, the curious opposition between the parts assigned to Ego and Alter, within the correlation of subjectivity, in the theories of Bakhtin and Peirce, respectively.

Key words: culture, model, ego/alter, empathy, alterity

The models of cultural semiotics which I have earlier proposed are inspired in a particular reading of the work of the Tartu school, to which inspiration from the Prague school, the Bakhtin circle, and the work of Peirce have been added. In order to expand these models, rendering them adequate for more intricate cultural interpretations, we have recently taken into account further ideas derived from the work of Peirce and Bakhtin, as well as that of Cassirer.

1. THE THREE MODELS OF CULTURAL SEMIOTICS

It will be necessary to start by recapitulating some of the *partis pris* of my own work in cultural semiotics, since the problems to be discussed emerge out of these theoretical constructs. I have retained two lessons from the Tartu school, which seems to have gained less the attention on the part of the members of that very school: that cultural semiotics is not about Culture *per se*, but about the models members of a culture make of their culture, that it, what will here be termed *auto-models*; and that these models are more involved with relationships between cultures (as well as subcultures, cultural spheres, and so on) than with a culture in its singularity. In this sense, the auto-model is first and foremost a product of a particular culture, an *effect* rather than a cause. This is not to deny that a model of culture easily becomes a factor in Culture; thus, for instance, those who insist that contemporary culture is an information society and/or a global village certainly contribute to making it into just that, as has happened in history already, in case, for instance, of the model we know as the Renaissance. As to the second limitation, relations between cultures may be seen, in structuralist fashion, as partly defining what cultures are.¹

¹ Cf. SONESSON (1987, 1992, 1993, 1994a, b; 1995; 1997c; 1998; 1999a; 2000b, c; 1002a, b; 2003; 2004)

Semiotics of Culture constructs models of models of cultures – *meta-models of auto-models* – as they are created by members of Culture (or are implied by their behaviour). Each culture (and each member of a culture) no doubt makes use of several alternative models of Culture. The most simple auto-model which we will call the *canonical model* is constructed around an opposition between the mutually defining terms of Nature and Culture. A fundamental asymmetry is built into this model, as in all others: Nature is defined from the point of view of Culture, not the opposite. Every Culture conceives of itself as the inside characterised as Order, opposed to something on the outside, which is seen as Chaos, Disorder, and Barbarism. In this sense, Nature includes other cultures, not recognized as such by the cultural model. This is not simply the model of racism and ethnocentrism. The model clearly applies to (most) traditional cultures and even is codified in their language: Huesteco, one of the Mayan languages still spoken in Mexico, has only one term (“uinic”) for saying “human being” and “speaker of the Huesteco language”. Indeed, it is well-known that Barbarians were, to the Greek, those who could not speak the Greek language: those who babble, i.e. who make sounds which not only are not meaningful but even lack organisation. The model can be manifested also in non-verbal semiosis, when, for instance, the Aztecs thought it was not worth-while to sacrifice a Spaniard to the gods. The gods would not understand.

The canonical model is an indispensable point of departure of all thinking, to the child no doubt, to the novice traveller, perhaps to everybody. But it is clearly not the only extant model: we can – and do – employ more complex models, involving more differentiations. Another auto-model is what I have elsewhere called the *inverted model* which involves the projection of Culture into Non-culture, and vice-versa.² This model may be more easily explained if we imagine Culture centred on the Ego, and Non-culture assimilated to the other (Alter, or, as we say below, Alius). Such a parallel between societies and cultures, on one hand, and individuals, on the other, is commonplace in sociology. More in particular, we may take our cue from Peirce, who talks about cultures as “compact persons”, as well as from Bakhtin, who, in his late work, applies the conception of empathy he developed for individuals to relations between cultures.

The *inverted model* may be illustrated by an example often discussed by the Tartu school but not given any specific status in their theory: Peter the Great, who considers Russia to be Non-culture for which the Culture of the West is to be substituted. It is a general problem in the conception of the Tartu school that the criteria for separating Culture from Non-culture are unclear and/or ambiguous. Looking at their different analyses, one is under the impression that exclusion from Culture is sometimes defined by relative value, sometimes by relative knowledge, and at other times by other factors still.³ In this instance, the problem is exacerbated by different criteria leading to different segmentations. From the point of view of value, Peter places himself in the West, which becomes *his* Culture; from the point of view of knowledge, he clearly remains in Russia, whose cultural system is much more familiar to him. The peculiarity of the inverted model, then, is that, what from one point of view is Culture, becomes Non-culture from another viewpoint, and vice-versa.

A third variety of the auto-model – hinted at by the Tartu school and implemented by Posner – separates Culture, Non-culture and Extra-culture.⁴ Again, the criteria for

² SONESSON (1998; 1999a; 2000b, c; 2002a, b; 2003; 2004)

³ SONESSON (1998)

⁴ POSNER (1989)

segmentation in what we will here call the *extended model* remain unclear or unsatisfactory in both the work of the Tartu school and that of Posner. In the extended model, Extra-culture does not make sense as being something “in the contiguity of” Culture, as the Tartu school would have it, or as being somewhere on the continuous “scale of semiotisation”, in Posner’s terms, between Culture and Non-culture. Clearly, the distinction, if defined as qualitative, must reside in absolute, rather than gradual, differences. We need to find a qualitative difference which permits us to extend the opposition between Ego and his other. It can be found in the personal pronouns.⁵

In an early discussion of what was later to be called Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, Peirce conceives his ontological categories in terms of the personal pronouns. In his *Nachlass*, Cassirer proposes a triad of *Basisphenomäne* expressed in the same terms.⁶ The analysis of Benveniste is more directly useful for our purpose: it involves the mechanism by means of which, in Benveniste’s terms, the subject “takes possession of language” – which means this is a socio-psychological structure *within* language, not some linguistic form generalised beyond language. Benveniste suggests that what is ordinarily considered the pronouns of the first, second, and third persons, should really be conceived as the result of combining two different dimensions, the *correlation of personality*, which opposes the person to the non-person, and, within the former pole, the *correlation of subjectivity*, which opposes the subject to the non-subject. Tesnière later proposed to use the somewhat more enlightening, but more cumbersome, terms autoontive, antiontive, and anontive, respectively: i.e. the one who exists in itself, the one who exists against (the first one), and the one who, properly speaking, does not exist at all.⁷

Conceived in these terms, then, Culture is the domain of the subject, or autoontive, while Extra-culture is the domain of the non-subject, or antiontive; Non-culture, finally, is the residence of the Non-person, or anontive. In relation to the Tartu school criteria, it seems particularly accurate to describe Non-culture as that which does not properly exist. The traditional third person, in this sense, is no person at all, and it is opposed to two kinds of persons, the one identified with the speaker, and the one identified with the listener. In our terms, *Ego* and *Alter*, while opposed as such, together stand opposed to *Alius* as in the personal pronouns the first and the second person (subject/autoontive vs. non-subject/antiontive) – which themselves are opposed on the dimension of subjectivity – are together opposed (as persons) to the third person (non-person/anontive) on the dimension of personality. Extra-culture is the one with whom Culture is “on speaking terms”; Non-culture is the one Culture may at the most be speaking about (Fig. 1.). In this sense, cultural semiotics becomes, in Milton Singer’s apt phrase, a real “conversation of cultures”; but, at the same time, it is a conversation conducted out of reach of other cultures. It therefore seems more correct to talk about the axis of *conversation* or *dialogue*, joining Ego and Alter, as opposed to the axis of *reference* or *nomination*, which connects the former to the thing meant, or Alius.⁸

Dialogue should here not be understood in Bakhtin’s and Volochinov’s rather truncated sense. As we shall see later, the other in the conception of the Bakhtin circle is rather the one we speak *about* (the hero) or even only look at (as when we see the other’s

⁵ SONESSON (2000b; 2003; 2004)

⁶ Peirce, as quoted in SINGER (1984); CASSIRER (1995)

⁷ BENVENISTE (1966); TESNIÈRE (1969)

⁸ SINGER (1984)

body but not our own in its entirety). The other is here really Non-culture, the object of reference or nomination. This is even true about dialogicity as it is understood in the later books, familiarised as “intertextuality” by Kristeva: the author relates to the speech of the other, but the other has no way of talking back. In the Rabelais book and the late version of the Dostoevsky book the other being quoted is curiously supposed to be able to answer back; but then the asymmetry between Ego and Alter is also given up.⁹ Curiously, the concept of dialogicity, for which Bakhtin and the other members of his circle are famous, is thus very rarely applied to the other as listener, and thus potential speaker; it is rather concerned with the other as seen from the outside, the one about whom we are talking.¹⁰

In this sense, then, we are “on speaking terms” with Alter (Extra-culture), but Alius (Non-culture) is ideally only something we speak about. This can be illustrated from the different attitudes of Colombo and Cortez during the conquest of America. To Colombo what he encounters is mostly Non-culture: He puts the Indian tribes into the same lists as animals, plants, gold, spices, etc. – that is, they are “resources”. He believes them to have no culture of their own and no religion, and they speak no language (or a generic “other” language, such as Hebrew, Arabic, etc.). Cortez’ model mainly involves Extra-culture. He immediately sets out to find interpreters, inquires into the customs of the Indians, etc. He makes use of the things he learns about the other Culture: presenting himself as Quetzalcoatl, he lets himself be translated into an Aztec “text”.¹¹ Like in the case of the other auto-models, however, we must distinguish different criteria of segmentation: At the level of knowledge, the difference is straightforward. At the level of value, however, Cortez’ attitude may not be very different in the last analysis. The extended model is here, literally, only a “working model”. The goal model remains more or less the same.

2. WAYS OF ACCESS TO THE OTHER

The question of how, starting out from one culture, one may have access to another, has been asked before, but usually in terms of the relations between individuals, rather than cultures. Indeed, it normally involves the relation of Ego to Alter. In the classical conception, there are two main alternatives: either both Ego and Alter are immediately known, because of the relation of empathy existing between them (Classical empathy theory); or only Ego is known immediately, and knowledge of the inner workings of the Ego, together with observations of the other’s body, are used to create an idea of Alter by inference (Classical inference theory). Both these alternatives has long since been shown to be problematic, as least as theories of the relations between individuals. As against the theory of empathy, it can be argued that the other cannot be known immediately, or nobody would be able to tell himself and his feelings and other states of mind apart from those of other people. In the case of the inference theory, it has been observed that our understanding of the other often does not seem to work in a way which is laborious, time-consuming and conscious to the point of being adequately termed an inference; and it is not clear what would permit us to discover the analogy between Ego and Alter in the first place, if we only know the outside of the latter and the inside of the former.¹²

Logically, there are of course two other alternatives: only Alter is immediately

⁹ SONESSON (2000b); MORSON & EMERSON (1990: 172ff).

¹⁰ Cf. in particular VOLOCHINOV 1973 and the contributions by the same author in SHUKMAN, ed., 1983, as well as BAKHTIN 1981 (an exception is the notion of “super-addressee”).

¹¹ Exemples from TODOROV (1982), as analysed in SONESSON (2000b)

¹² GURWITSCH (1979)

known, and Ego has to be constructed from it. Or both Ego and Alter are really constructions made up from indirect evidence. No discussion of the knowledge of others which I know of recognizes the reality of these conceptions, the first proposed, at least in some parts of his work, by Bakhtin, and the latter, on at least one interpretation, by Peirce. To Bakhtin, in fact, only Alter is directly known, since only he can be seen as a complete, finished whole. According to Peirce, on the other hand, Ego and Alter are constructions to exactly the same degree.

In his early work, Bakhtin is very much preoccupied by the differences between the self and the other, often masquerading under the terms Author and Hero.¹³ He is undoubtedly arguing for a parallel between the two couples, but it seems to me that he often forgets one of the pairs when suggesting properties that are plausible in one case but not the other. This is true, for instance, of the other as a partner in a dialogue, which, as was observed above, hardly pertains to the Hero. Moreover, it is a fundamental fact of semiotic ecology that “precisely that which only I see in the other is seen in myself, likewise, only by the other”¹⁴, but this cannot apply to the relationships between Author and Hero. In fact, as a figment of the author’s imagination, the hero cannot see anything at all in the author. Even if we take the hero to be the transposition into the text of a real-world person, this person becomes a non-person, to the extent that he is entangled into the text. Indeed, contrary to those that Colombo treated as non-persons in the real world, the hero has no possibility (however remote) of protesting his description by the author.

Bakhtin points out that it is only the other which may be (and must be) seen from the outside, and thus is perceived as a complete and finished whole; the self, on the other hand, is an unlimited process which can never be grasped in its entirety, indeed it is some kind of stream of consciousness, which only comes to a stand-still at death. This is so because “my emotional and volitional reactions attach to objects and do not contract into an outwardly finished image of myself”.¹⁵ This sounds very much like Husserl’s notion of “intentions”, which are directed to objects, which they characterise, and which may be used to define the subject intending the objects only in the phenomenological attitude. Indeed, an orthodox follower of Husserl such as Gurwitsch, similarly denies the existence of the self as an entity given to consciousness (except under special circumstances).¹⁶ Only the other’s body can be seen completely: there is an “excess of seeing”. In the case of ourselves, some part of the body is always lacking, even as reflected in a mirror. This difference translates to the mind. In this sense, the other, contrary to the self, has the property of outsideness, or *transgression*.¹⁷

It is not surprising, then, that Bakhtin uses these observations to criticise the theory of empathy popular at the time: understanding cannot be an identification with the other, for, to begin with, this would be pointless, since it would only give us the same thing over again, and in the second place, it is impossible, because the other, by definition, can only be seen from the outside.¹⁸ Bakhtin admits that we may imaginatively take the position of the other on ourselves, though what is gained from this outside position can only be

¹³ BAKHTIN (1990; 1993)

¹⁴ BAKHTIN (1990: 23),

¹⁵ BAKHTIN (1990 :35) cf. BAKHTIN (1993)

¹⁶ GURWITSCH (1985)

¹⁷ BAKHTIN (1990: 22ff, 27ff).

¹⁸ BAKHTIN (1990: 25ff, 61ff)

appreciated once it is reintegrated into the stream of consciousness, as a phase of the ongoing process that is the self.¹⁹ In a very late text, however, Bakhtin suggests a parallel can be made between the meeting of self and other and the interpretation of other cultures: in both cases, understanding is not possible by means of a total identification with the other culture, but only by entering the other culture and then returning to a position external to it.²⁰ In our terms, Non-culture can only be transformed into Extra-culture by taking once own ultimate stand in Culture.

There is thus a transgression of the other culture. To illustrate this point, we would have to invert our models of culture: it is the other/Non-culture, which is an open space with definite limits, while the self/Culture is a square limited on all sides. The graphic would have to show a box floating on a stream.²¹ I don't think there is any real contradiction here, however, for the "insiderness" and "outsiderness" involved are of different kinds: in the canonical model, they concern the position of the Ego, of that which is known, etc; in Bakhtin's version, they concern limits in space and time.

Indeed, while Bakhtin's conception presents itself as an outright inversion of the inference theory, Peirce would seem to extend the latter to both Ego and Alter. Peirce thus proposes a *symmetrical* inference theory. It is the idea of the other that is different. Both Bakhtin and Peirce see the self as something which is not and cannot be concluded, something that exists only as developing in time. But while to Bakhtin the other is something static, essentially closed off, he is for Peirce of the same kind as the self, that is a stream of consciousness, which cannot be halted — before the moment of death. So from this point of view, the other is just another self to Peirce. On the other hand, Peirce claims there is no direct access to knowledge about the self, just as there is none about the other: both are only indirectly known through signs. The access to Ego is thus as indirect as that to Alter.²² As far as access to knowledge is concerned, then, the self is merely another other to Peirce. The outsiderness, or transgression, which Bakhtin attributes to the other is also a property of the Peircean self. In a graphic, Ego and Alter would appear as two parallel (or perhaps imbricated) streams of consciousness.

3. ACCESSING CULTURAL OTHERNESS

As applied to culture, the empathy theory is clearly irrelevant: there can be no direct access to the other culture. It could nevertheless be true in a general sense: Extra-culture is accessible to us, because, like Culture, it is cultural. Unlike Non-culture, it is part of the human world. This is just another way of stating the general claim which could be called *Vico's principle* (anticipated by Terentius and paraphrased by Jakobson), according to which we can know that (and only that) which we have ourselves produced — that is, that which has been produced by other human beings, which, as, humans, are also producers of culture. The inversion of Vico's principle consists in treating other cultures as nature, thus transforming the human world into *Alius*. This is what we have observed Colombo doing.

No matter what it is worth in the explanation of interpersonal relations, the inference theory *does* seem, in important respects, to describe the relation of Culture to Extra-culture. The inference does not simply yield a similarity Ego/Alter, but also a difference — the very definition of Alter as opposed to Ego. This is indeed a process which is often

¹⁹ BAKHTIN (1990: 15ff, 17, 25f)

²⁰ BAKHTIN (1986)

²¹ BAKHTIN (1990: 12) explicitly claims the Hero is included in the Author.

²² Peirce, as quoted in COLAPRIETO (1989) and SINGER (1984);

laborious, indirect, and time-consuming.

Bakhtin's conception at first seems entirely unfeasible when applied to the interrelations between cultures. It will be remembered that it is a generalisation from the perception of the body: you can see the whole of the other's body, but not your own. Such a conception becomes absurd when applied to the mind as well as culture: no matter how little you know about yourself or your own culture, you certainly know more than about alien minds and cultures. However, Bakhtin may well be right from the point of view of the Ego. If we put the emphasis on the point of view of the Ego, otherness *is* closed off, finished, complete, but there is no final description (before death) of the Ego. Alter is the black box floating in the stream of consciousness. From the point of view of the Ego, Alter is complete: Ego already knows all he wants to know – or can know – about Alter.

We have seen that Peirce proposes a symmetrical inference theory: We must infer the Ego, as well as the Alter, from the different states ("signs") within the "stream of consciousness". At the level of cultures, at least, this makes sense: Culture is constructed in opposition to Non-culture and Extra-culture. But if Ego and Alter are both constructs, our access to the "signs" for constructing them may still be different

Also having recourse to the metaphor of the three common types of personal pronouns to describe analogies between persons and cultures, Peirce puts them in place of what was later to become the three fundamental categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. But Peirce did not identify the second person, as one may at first naively expect, with Secondness, but with Thirdness. In his view, the second person was the most important, not the first: "all thought is addressed to a second person, or to one's future self as a second person" (quoted from Singer, 1984: 83f). In terms that Peirce took over from Schiller, the first person stood for the infinite impulse (Firstness), the third person for sensuousness (Secondness), and the second person for the harmonising principle (Thirdness). Peirce called his own doctrine "Tuism" (from "Tu", as opposed to "Ego" and "It"), and he prophesied about a "tuistic age", in which peace and harmony would prevail. So the Peircean other is a friend and collaborator; he is not the spirit that always says no, the devil in a Biblical sense.

I would not presume to decide who is right, of Peirce and Bakhtin, about the self and the other; perhaps we should consider their descriptions to be alternate, but equally possible, models. In any case, it seems clear that, given its egocentric point of departure, cultural semiotics must side with Bakhtin. Ego and Alter are two of a kind to Peirce, but in the model of cultural semiotics that we have presented Ego and Alter are essentially opposed as to their nature, as in Bakhtin's work.

4. THE WIDER SPHERE OF ALTERITY

Todorov, who has been our guide to such episodes in the history of otherness as the Spanish *conquista*, returns, in a later book, to the other, this time in order to criticise the Hegel/Sartre kind of dialectic between Ego and Alter as a combat where one of the participants must always lose — or, indeed, both.²³ In this reading of Hegel, Ego can only be recognised as a person by subduing the other; but once the latter has been subdued he is a Non-person, and his recognition of the other as a person has lost its value. Like Peirce, Todorov points out that we are always *with* the other. There is, so to speak, no moment in time in which the other is not already there with us. Indeed, Todorov goes on to quote evidence from developmental psychology, which shows us that the first other is not a man

²³ TODOROV (1995: 34ff, 15f, 31ff)

met in combat but the mother taking care of her child.²⁴ And there is no problem in being recognised as a person: in fact, already after a few weeks the child tries to catch its mother's gaze and is rewarded by the mother's attention. Conflicts emerge later and suppose a third party who determines who the winner is.

But this is not the same Alter as the one that emerges from the study of the Conquest, or the book on French attitudes to foreigners, although Todorov nowhere comments on the difference. In the first two books, Todorov is concerned with radical otherness, a property attributed to somebody coming from another culture.²⁵ This otherness is not only characterised by "outsideness", in Bakhtin's sense, but by some more determined kind of foreignness. It is not reversible. Or rather, it cannot be reversed without changing its meaning: the otherness of Cortez to Moctezuma is not the same otherness as that of Moctezuma to Cortez.

In contrast, the kind of otherness that Todorov now discusses is the otherness of just about everybody. In this version, as well as in the work of Peirce, Mead, Cooley, etc., everybody is the other for another, i.e., the other is the Ego viewed from another point of view; and the point of view changes as it changes with the use of the first person pronoun. This relationship is certainly constitutive of life in society (that is, life en general), but it is the other kind of relationship between self and other that is constitutive of relations between cultures.

It is striking that not only Peirce, but also the late Cassirer and Popper came up with threefold divisions of "what there is". If one of these instances can be identified by subjectivity, then all three thinkers would seem to agree that there are two kinds of alterity. Even though both Peirce and Cassirer, at times, identified the triads with the personal pronouns, it does not seem that they were thinking about exactly the same thing; nor was Popper. And perhaps none of these divisions can be identified with the triad of cultural semiotics referred to above.

The most general sense of alterity seems, at last according to some definitions, to be contained in Peirce's notion of Secondness: like Berkeley, Destutt de Tracy and Maine de Biran before him and Sartre after him, Peirce identifies our sense of reality with resistance, that is, "this sense of being acted upon, which is our sense of the reality of things".²⁶

A door is slightly ajar. You try to open it. Something prevents. You put your shoulder against it, and experiences a sense of effort and a sense of resistance. These are not two forms of consciousness; they are two aspects of one two-sided consciousness. It is inconceivable that there should be any effort without resistance, or any without a contrary effort. This double-sided consciousness is Secondness.²⁷

This explains that in Peirce's early trichotomy, using the three personal pronouns, it is the third person, and not the second person, which corresponds to the later notion of Secondness (Fig.2.). But this only becomes self-explanatory, when we remember that, to Peirce, the other is never someone who stands opposed to the Ego, certainly not as in the Hegel-Sartre tradition, but not even in the more general sense of the Bakhtinean conception. Indeed, the second person is a harmonizing influence.

The basic problem, however, is that Alter is thus given the function later assigned to Thirdness. But this means the sign as such, which later becomes the incarnation of

²⁴ TODOROV (1995: 39ff)

²⁵ TODOROV (1984; 1989)

²⁶ PEIRCE (1998:4)

²⁷ PEIRCE (1998:268)

Thirdness, has no part to play in the earlier conception. Like the pragmatic models I have criticized elsewhere, it thus presents a situation of communication in which speaker, hearer and referent encounter each other without any mediation. Indeed, like pragmatics, as well as the Bakhtin circle, this model tends to reduce the sign system to the interaction with the other.²⁸ There is thus no other alterity than the second person (which is not really an other, because he is in harmony with the Ego) – and that of the exterior world.

As far as I know, Peirce never put his later trichotomy in relation to the three pronouns, but if he had done so, I think he should have arrived at a quite different conception. If Firstness remains akin to “the infinite impulse”, then both the Ego and the Alter would basically be of this kind. But *as* an Alter, as partner in a dialogue, Alter would already be a kind of Secondness, just as Ego would be to Alter. In this sense, just as the outside world, the sphere of reference, Alter is something which resists us, and which we resist. But even the sign, which is of the nature of law, and thus Thirdness, must partake of Secondness, because all semiotic structures impose constraints on our possibilities of dialogue, and, in the end, of being.

In this interpretation, the trichotomy is roughly similar to Popper’s more generally well-known conception of the “three worlds”, with a different numbering: the first world corresponds the third person, the sphere of reference, and both the first and the second person pertain to the second world. The third world, however, is of the same general kind as Peircean Thirdness: it involves the kind of generality that is the result of organism-independent representations.²⁹ In the sociology of the early 20th century, as well as in latter-day Marxist writings, this is known as objectification or reification: the transformation of relations between people into artefacts standing on their own. In a late book, Cassirer argued, against Simmel more than against the Marxists, that such processes of objectification were not only negative phenomena, not only a “tragedy of culture”: rather, they represented the origin of culture.³⁰

When later on, in his *Nachlass*, Cassirer defines the three *Basisphänomene* in terms of the three pronouns, objectification is mentioned only in passing, but it seems essential to the whole conception (Fig.3.). The first person, the “Monas”, also characterized as “Leben”, is no doubt close to the “infinite impulse” of Peirce (which is not so strange, because, while Peirce starts out from Schiller, Cassirer refers to Goethe). More explicitly than in Peirce’s discussion, the second person is not characterized in itself, but precisely as being second to a first: it involves “Wirken” and “Zusammenleben”, all of which is can only be in relation to a first person. However, it is also “Wirkung und Gegenwirkung”, just as the Peircean Secondness, which, as we have seen, does not concern the second person. The third person, finally, does not correspond to something “out there”, but to the to the world of our objectifications, epitomized by “Werke”.

The latter terms seem to be equivalent to the notion of *opus* that plays an important part in the theory of Augusto Ponzio (where it seems to derive both from Rossi-Landi and Levinas): it is a kind of exteriorisation of the self (and perhaps also its relations to the other). Indeed, Ponzio talks about the other as being only an instance of “relative alterity”. “Absolute alterity”, on the other hand, seems at times to involve the material world, at

²⁸ SONESSON (1999b)

²⁹ POPPER (1972)

³⁰ CASSIRER (1942: 113ff)

times the world of signs or *opus*.³¹ Both descriptions are, in my view, correct. Both the material world and the world of objectifications impose much more severe constraints on our personal being than the other person as such; they are, so to speak, much less negotiable in the form of dialogue.

For the purpose of cultural semiotics, this discussion offers important insights: the relations to extra-culture and non-culture are relations of “absolute alterity”. They are much more difficult to negotiate than the ordinary-life relations to persons and things. This is precisely what accounts for the culturality of culture.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The suggestions made by Peirce as well as the late Cassirer concerning the basic categories (of the situation of communication if not of being) are fragmentary and difficult to analyse. Nevertheless, even our superficial considerations may offer some insights of value to semiotics generally and cultural semiotics in particular. From the point of view of cultural semiotics, three categories of understanding seem to be insufficient. It may be necessary to distinguish the relationship between persons (Peirce’s tuism, the Bakhtinean dialogue, etc.) from the thing character of signs (“Werk”/opus/reification). And the latter must be kept separate from the resistance offered by the material world. Starting out from the egocentric definition of cultural semiotics, however, everything else turns out to involve differentiations within the sphere of alterity.

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³¹ PONZIO (1993)

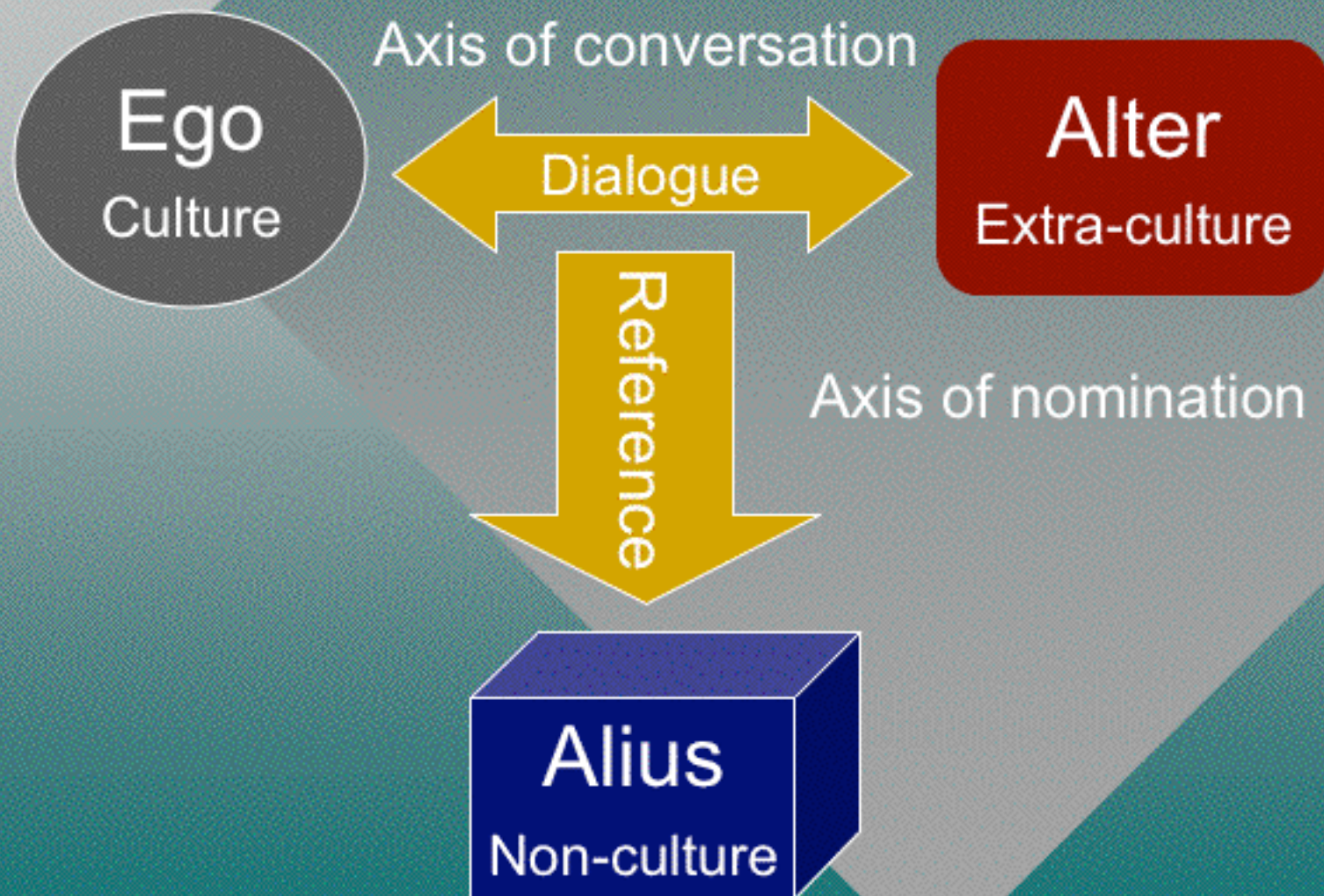
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In Cassirer's *Nachlass*: the three *Basisphänomene*



Axes of Cultural semiotics



Peirce's first trichotomy

2nd person (Thirdness): *Tuism*, i.e. harmony

