



Meaning and Dancing

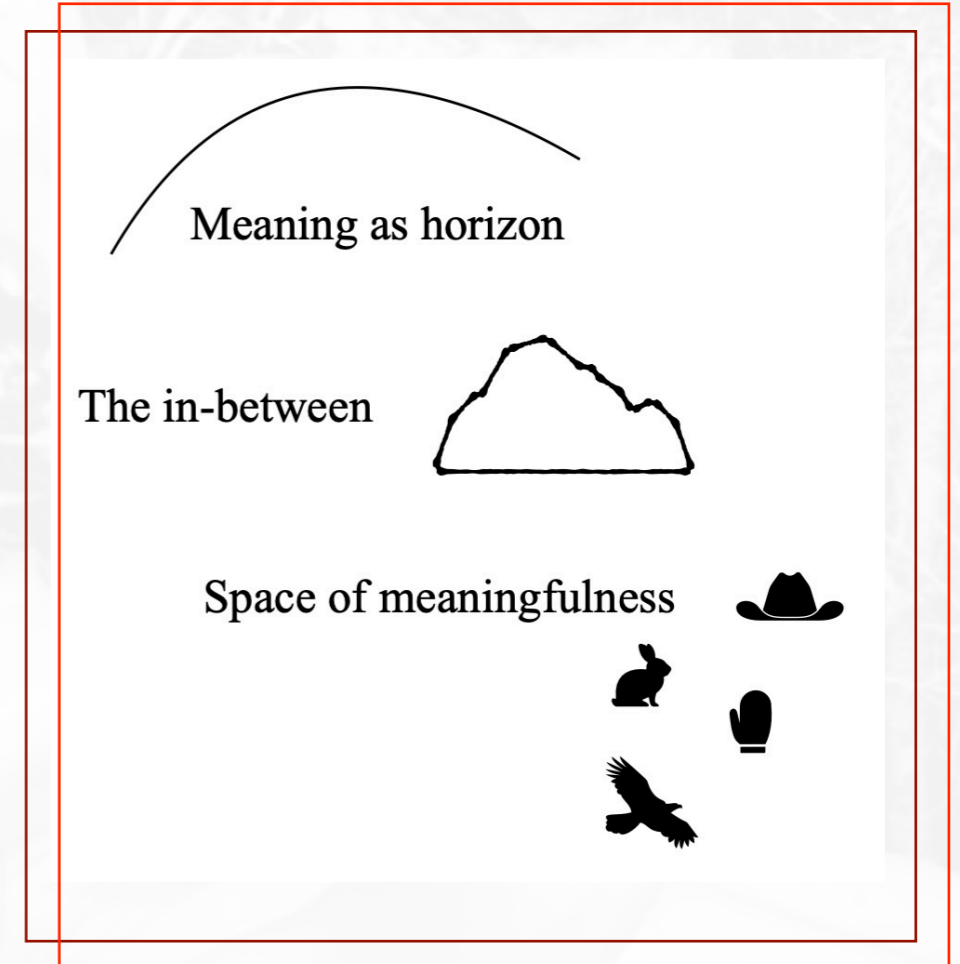
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An apartment, a door, a tree, a ball, a cup, a cat – every word has an image in my mind and can be related to thousands of other words. These words are meaningful to me because they are imbedded in a structured space of meaningfulness: I know where to search for an apartment (e.g., in a city), I know how it should look like and what I can find there, and so on. Ultimately, the word “apartment” is an intelligible image because it is not isolated. Besides, the more I know about apartments (if, for example, I get to study architecture), the more I relate my idea of an “apartment” with other words and webs of knowledge, the more meaningful the word “apartment” becomes to me. In short, the meaningfulness of things comes from their more or less stable relations. Thus, what I call the *space of meaningfulness* is an organized space where everything has its known, determined place – a space of convention.

But all of a sudden I come across an apartment that is nothing like I thought an apartment should be; or I pass by Joan Brossa’s neo-Dada works in an exhibition and find that a “no entry” traffic sign can also be an arrowed target. My *space of meaningfulness* is suddenly undermined. Art, as well as humor and logical paradoxes, play with sense-making by piercing what makes sense and allowing us to see, as a result, what lurks behind it: meaning as a *horizon* where virtually everything is possible. Existential anxiety, too, throws us out of our space of meaningfulness and into Meaning as such or, into that which yet lacks any particular object to make sense of, for Meaning is an open space which holds the possibility for any specific meaning to emerge. Meaning (capitalized) is the initial scenario, the game that is always-already played and that has to be made evident by recourse to a perspective taken both “across” and “beyond” (μετά) what is ordinarily seen.

Take, for instance, Bach’s violin partitas or any other music for that matter (whether as mathematical as Bach’s or not): they are not mere noise to our ears because they relate to us by “*making sense*” and so we do *feel* something (emotionally, when we listen to them) because they do. However, before making sense of any sound we must first belong to that which makes sense possible at all. For the same reason, Bach’s violin partitas are imperceptible for a tick, as the tick (whose ability to thermo-sense we lack in turn) lacks a horizon which is the precondition for the structuring of certain sounds that we call musical sounds, thus permitting their meaningful and emotional reception. And wouldn’t this also apply to a cat, which relates to the sounds from within what we call in our [book](#) its embodied “existential perspective,” and which might deem the singing of a bird worthy of reaction but Bach’s partitas uninteresting noise worth, at most, of the slight movement of an ear if the pitch of a note proves too high?

In short, we perceive through Meaning like we do through space and time – only that, unlike space and time, Meaning tends to erase its own evidence. Similarly, Roy Wagner compares thinking with seeing and remarks that “the eye is never included in its own field of vision.” Trying to see my own eyes without the aid of a mirror will result in perceiving silence or simply nothingness *full of presence*. In like manner, Meaning is noticeable the second before one exclaims “θεός!” after discovering the idea of a circle or anything new for that matter. Its presence is perceptible when one understands a joke or a logical paradox or looks at a mountain as if for the first time. Because, before being this mountain, before being an image in my brain related to other images, the mountain is *an emergent silence* that does not yet make total sense: I can see it in a way a cat would not be able to but I cannot utter a word neither in my mind nor out loud. At this brief moment the mountain is not present as a being among beings but it is a presencing of *something* that manifests itself.



Furthermore, on account of being a mere frame, no-thing happens *within* Meaning unless some relation is established between meaning-makers (us) and other things. It is in an *in-between* space that the mountain shines forth and we feel awe witnessing it. Being conscious of that space is not only to gain an awareness of that which has emerged and is thus visible (as something, i.e., as an identifiable φαινόμενον) but to gain sensibility towards that space of *nascent* meaning. In such a space, listening to and thinking on what emerges as meaningful, without yet drawing any conclusion, are the rules. Besides, that *in-between* space serves as a reminder that meaning is *born* and not given and that the relations between humans and things are not established from without but formed from within.

There is a remaining question worth considering, though: what does come *first*, the meaning of things or the relations we establish with them? Probably, they are inseparable from one another, as Bateson suggests, and one should keep this in mind instead of assuming that the word “elephant” is the original problem (as one might infer from Mannoni and Lacan’s exchange) rather than the relation one establishes with what we name thus (an “elephant”).

Moreover, to think that we are radically split from the earth (or the “Real”) because we semiotize it, is to forget that the earth is always-already semiotic and that we are naturally (how else?) the earth’s continuation. And yet, while the earth is not *split* from us, it is not transparent to us either, since Meaning somehow *separates* us from it (to go back to Frédéric Neyrat’s distinction). Hence, since our belonging to Meaning is our οὐσία in the sense of our “being” and “richness,” the anti-correlationist dismissal of human meaningfulness on account of the separation produced by it and its often dangerous consequences, amounts to despise human living altogether. Rather than being, as Deleuze has it, ashamed of being human (although it is sometimes necessary, of course, to feel that shame), I prefer to think on what is fascinating about it.

And yet, we can, to a certain extent, step back *into* that from which Meaning somehow separates us. True dancing, which has nothing to do with training or choreography, is an *earthly act* because it listens to the body that emerges like a flower every second of its life – a body which is not exactly ours, but broader and older than us. Nevertheless, paradoxically, it is *words* that help us become other-than-human because one may say “a duck” and then become one, or say “my ancestors live in my bones” and dance them by listening to them. This kind of dance happens in what I like to call the *in-between*, when one sees and feels things but has *no* words for them. Such dance is an existential dance, a dance of life and death, which consists in becoming only to return to oneself enriched and more sensible to the permanent emergence of the earth. It is also a dance of beauty. Hence, I wonder, if the re-union occurred after the separation from a primordial oneness (which echoes Hölderlin’s distinction between two different types of “intimacy” [*Innigkeit*]) may be worth thinking and experiencing as something truly healing and unique.

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