

Introduction to the Special Issue: Semiotic Mechanisms in Everyday life

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This introduction seeks to introduce the special issue for *Psychology & Society* on semiotic mechanisms. The goal of this issue is to propose a focus on the mechanisms that promote and control the process of meaning-making through a detailed, minute study of signs and their transformations both interindividually and intraindividually. A specific form of methodology – that of an idiographic, microgenetic approach – is used in the papers. The commentaries seek to elaborate and extend the ideas presented in the series from a global group of scholars.

Keywords: semiotic mechanisms, pre-emptive system, symmetrical sign transference, affectivating, semiotic mediation

INTRODUCTION

In this special issue, we examine the signs that are perceived, interpreted, and used for our own goals as individuals as well as researchers in everyday life. Grounding our work within a semiotic cultural psychology, we present a combination of papers that seek to unite a diverse band of theoretical contributions over a period of two years. What starts at an examination of the everyday life – how one negotiates paying for a dinner bill with friends – ends at an attempt to grasp the semiotic mechanisms working behind the scenes to maintain the world. The reflections, extensions, and commentaries by three researchers helps fuel the discussion and brings the thoughts of how best we can grow the ideas of semiotic mechanisms beyond this special issue.

A semiotic cultural psychology takes on the idea of a gardener cultivating their garden. The individual chooses the seeds to plant, the flowers to maintain, and the extra care to some. While external forces may influence the garden, such as bugs or weeds, the individual is constantly cultivating the garden to best showcase their own work for a certain reason. They use various tools – rakes, shovels, or water. And while to an onlooker, a flower garden may just look ascetically pleasing – to the individual, it may carry hundreds of meanings – ‘hard work’, ‘past experiences’, ‘relatives’, and of ‘perseverance’. As such, a semiotic cultural psychology examines how one *cultivates* the environment around them through various tools and signs to both express outwards towards others and inwards to themselves. The cultivation of the environment recognizes the influences and different perspectives of the collective, but maintains that the individual is first and foremost within these actions. Examinations within semiotic cultural psychology are based around understand each individual’s own meaning making process and finding overarching processes that generalize outwards beyond a group-based definition.

To find these general processes, one must examine the mechanisms that fuel and manipulate the process that brings us from one choice to another. What brings an individual to decide the phrase “Let’s eat Grandma” means that the food is ready instead of a cannibalistic interpretation of who is being eaten that night? “The crucial issue for cultural psychology is how to understand the mechanisms operating in that bifurcation point” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 39). Mechanisms function behind the scenes – helping to make sense of the ambiguity of human interactions and language. The context of the scene allows some semblance of understanding between people, arising “out of the worldview of the cultural collective in which they are socialized” (Moghaddam, 2010, p.466). If “the form of signs is conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction” (Volosinov, 1973, p. 21), then the sign (e.g., personality) is not the case of study – but the conditions and processes behind that promote or restrict the various signs from reemergence. By studying the mechanisms that are part of the temporary hierarchies of signs being created, one can examine how the building of signs emerges and deconstructs as we attempt to build the world around us.

Our special issue is an attempt at defining and pinpointing the actions of semiotic mechanisms in the everyday life. All contributors have been challenged with the issue of studying mechanisms. Whether that is through experimental procedures, analyzing data, or extending theory, we seek to fulfill two goals: (1) We seek to expand knowledge of the power of semiotics and of semiotics mechanisms. While we can outright acknowledge the power and influence of signs, the answer of exactly how they function within the world and through the world needs further elaboration. Through expansion, a clearer understanding of semiotics can be found through the contextualization of such signs acting through the various mechanisms. (2) Using contextualized understanding, further applications and reflections are promoted as a baseline for discussion on the place of signs within the generalized world.

By using semiotics as our approach to examine the human person, we seek to explain the behavior through a precise examination of the behavior – not of the scales or correlations between them. Our work presented will challenge, substantiate, and extend current theoretical constructions in an effort to direct psychology away from the numerical values and towards a re-examination of the individual. We have invited commentators from across the world to give their own insights and thoughts on the power of semiotic mechanisms. By starting the discussion early, we hope to promote further discussion and leave this special issue as a beginning entrance into how semiotic mechanisms can be further implemented, analyzed, and applied to cultural psychology.

DEFINING SEMIOTIC MECHANISMS

If we consider that semiotic mechanisms are an integral part to semiotic mediation, we must be able to justify both *how* they are integral as well as *why* they are needed.

To attempt to define the idea of semiotic mechanisms, we can begin by reflecting on the colloquial definition of a mechanism, which states, “the agency or *means by which* an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished” (Mechanism, 2013, definition 2, *emphasis added*). Human beings have the agency to do with what they please, so agency may not be the best term, but the means by which outcomes occur gives a starting place to work with. This can point both towards the causality of an effect (X->Y or X given circumstance Z -> Y) as well as what exactly that *means* is and how it can be examined. But what effects can be produced by individuals? If we are attempting to study human action through semiotic mediation, then the effect in constant production is signs – the world around us. So, attempting to unpack the definition further, one might say that a mechanism stands as “the means by which a sign is produced or a decision is made.” In this sense, a mechanism seems to stand as the derivative of mediation – it is the process that fuels the change from experience to sign across time. But to understand what a mechanism may be defined as is not simply enough, but instead we must look to exactly what is being produced to attempt to see *how* it is being produced.

If a mechanism promotes the meaning making process, then mechanisms are what help guide our creation of signs. However, signs are not static - signs operate both conditionally (in certain situations) as well as hierarchically (if prompted to do so by the other signs operating within the semiotic system (Valsiner, 1999). Fire in one state is a sign of warmth, while in another, a sign of danger. The same sign may follow the train of a hierarchical system, seen below:

I want to start a fire

- BUT it would be against social norms to start it in the middle of this room
- SO I will put on a jacket instead.

Or:

I want to eat a burger

- BUT I am trying to lose weight
- BUT today is my birthday and surely I deserve to break my diet.
- BUT I will feel guilty if I break my diet.
- BUT I feel guilty for many things and nothing bad comes.
- SO I will eat my burger any way.

Certain signs, like norms, are created through the collective but still understood through the person. These personally created norms eventually become ingrained into our everyday life and we allow them to control our decisions (Valsiner, 1999). But – is the sign created to solve the problem at hand, or is it created with the intention to last over time at the beginning? In short, are signs placed temporarily, but their continual temporary use causes a slow, general infusion, or are signs placed at the start knowing they will be imbedded within us? In general terms, we must allow ourselves to align with the idea that it is both – that the problem is solved within the moment, but allows for recognition of that

problem for future use. Of course, with our ability to ignore certain norms if they do not serve our needs, placing a sign does not guarantee its future use – but instead just allows it to maintain itself as a hibernated state until needed again (Prokopiou et al., 2012). In his final point of this system of control, Valsiner notes that: “the semiotic regulatory system includes control mechanisms that would limit its own excessive growth” (Valsiner, 1999, p. 29). But, this limitation also necessarily brings guidance into what *can* be promoted to grow within the regulatory system. Beyond that, the mechanisms that controlling growth exist because of the existence of the system. A mechanism cannot function if there is nothing to maintain or destroy or create. Mechanisms need signs to function, but yet signs need mechanisms to create higher ordered meanings. Mechanisms, then, must be both atemporal and temporal, and be controlling while still being controlled.

There is a problem within these paradoxical ideas, and that is that mechanisms seem to be “proposal[s] of covering laws for complex structures and processes” (Tilly, 2004, p.216). But are not all psychological processes worth studying necessarily complex? “From *the outside*, it looks like a concept (i.e. seems organized by an abstract, unitary relation between objects), but in its actual organization remains a complex [phenomenon]” (Valsiner, 2001, p. 37, *context given*). The issue is the difficulty in which it takes to create a law that can span over infinite cases. Yet, if we approach knowledge and theory through an abductive lens, whereby “in order to abductively understand the evidence, the researcher has to elaborate the theory, making it more abstract and general” (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010, p. 828), then the ability to create general laws are possible in so far as we allow them to be dynamic and recognize the limitations and malleability of the theory if a new case would present itself that did not fit in line with the current thought. The challenge presented to mechanism-based theories is the balance between being simple while not being simplistic. Mechanisms are necessary to the study of semiotics and sign-building because they allow a strong, flexible framework from which to theorize from.

A semiotic mechanism is one or more functions that operate by allowing the transformation of the meaning of a particular situation or sign. By operating (while at the same time being operated on) various signs, semiotic mechanisms are the foundations of mediation. Not simply is it “This is a father,” but *father* can be transformed through interactions with other signs, past history, and more. To further elaborate mechanisms, I want to look into how to study them as a way to understand the meaning making process given their temporal, personal, and contextual differences and introduce the manuscripts through these topics.

Subjectivity of Mechanisms

Semiotic mechanisms – as we examine them – should be approached in a dual-subjective manner – the frame of the researcher attempting to examine it, and the frame of the individual, who uses them to experience the world (c.f. methodology cycle, Valsiner 2000; Valsiner, 2006). Mechanisms operate within the ambiguity of the world, so their function must at one side be subjective enough to operate on a personal level, but clear enough

where we can see it occurring through a microgenetic scope.

As we can never fully know exactly what another is thinking, we only attend to what they attend to, trying to understand exactly what they think (Rommetveit, 1992). To manage and recognize this hurdle, one must recognize the interobjectivity of the situation – “the understandings that are shared within and between cultures about social reality (Moghaddam, 2010, p.466) that “adopt[s] a ‘cultural’ perspective that gives highest priority to collective constructions of reality that exist prior to the arrival of the individual” (Moghaddam, 2010, p.467). Within this special issue, the individual process is explored in various ways – but each attempts to bring about a further expansion of interobjectivity while respecting the intersubjectivity of participant and researcher. While mechanisms are operating within an ambiguous, intersubjective space, we can talk about them through the lens of an interobjective world where commonalities are held between all peoples.

Kevin Carriere (2013a) attempts to explain how we interpret these signs from very small microgenetic bursts. Limiting participants of external information, a mechanism of semiotic processing was created where these external signs are perceived, internalized, and then externalized back towards the Other. Through these small bursts of information, extensions are made towards the creation and maintenance of rumors and stereotypes. The function of the semiotic processing mechanism bring into greater focus the need to recognize the subjectivity and moment to moment creation of these signs. As Wall (2013) discusses signs in an extended, macrogenetic time frame, Carriere brings it to a microgenetic frame of reference.

Carriere’s work shows the problem of intersubjectivity – that we truly cannot understand the mind of the Other. The study displays the fuzziness of shared reality – that common understandings of a like/dislike dichotomy (Pinel et al., 2004) fails to grasp the humanness of the participants. The borders are blended between shared<>not shared and too similar<>too disparate. The importance of one answer over another across participants reaffirms the subjective power of signs. Each attempt at sharing cannot be quantified as the same because each is interpreted and understood in varying degrees based on the previous answers. His qualification of a quantitative study shows a unique way to allow the individual to take back control over numbers and show the detail lost within them (Rosenbaum & Valsiner, 2011). The semiotic processing mechanism can help consider mechanisms in two ways: (1) the allowance of each part to work both separately and together and (2) the division between affective reflections and behavioral reflections. Mechanisms are not stage or step processes – they are fluid, dynamic processes that adapt to the ever-changing fleeting present to work for an uncertain future. The acknowledgement of various feelings can show how mechanisms produce varying outcomes even in the end, because “semiotic mechanisms...constitute the processes that bring individuals’ subjectivity to emerge” (Bento, 2013, p. 105).

Minikes attempts to bridge this potential gap by reflecting heavily throughout both his

writing and his analysis of the study of his own actions within the research experimental design (Minkes, 2013). By creating a fluid, participant based research design; he both acts the part of the researcher as well as the one receiving the heat of the action. Participant observational-designed studies allow for a further reflection of one of the most key components of any interview or experimental design – the researcher who constructed it.

Temporally Dependent

Signs are not simply created by individuals out of the blue. Every sign has a meaning – be it temporary or extended – to achieve a goal. And while some signs are placed and then lost over time, others are continually reified to create lasting impressions on both themselves and others. The same can be said for mechanisms, which operate when needed as needed to maintain the signs over time.

By imagining a persona, children are placing a symbol on themselves (I am a firefighter) and at the same time creating a certain set of rules in which their imaginative persona is able to act within. Of course, what we frequently see in children is their ability to break those exact rules and challenge the situation they are faced with (that they themselves created). In observing children, Oliveira and Valsiner state:

“that imitation in play did not bind them to already experienced situations, but liberated them from the past, as they controlled it by volitional repetition and images. In this way, they went beyond historical boundaries.” (1997, p. 130)

The historical boundaries are both what the individual has experienced but also the sign’s own power, brought by the individual. The individual has created a sign within their imagination – but by creating it has granted it power to control the individual.

This idea of sign’s power is shown in the immediate display of the child’s imagination – yet the child also shows the power to govern the sign to their own will. But yet, what of honor? Morals? There are signs we have created that govern individual action – and while they can still be challenged at any given moment, they extend beyond the current here-and-now timeframe and reach the distant past. These signs have survived through generations to govern individual psychological action while having been created by the same individuals who it seeks to govern.

In line with governance of signs, Wall examines sign commemoration, where a sign is promoted in place of another that has been removed, such as a flower representing a lost family member. Here, the sign is not being created to act *on* an individual, but instead act *for* an individual that was once present. The sign does not govern their actions – but instead serves as a psychological mediator to help them cope with loss. Yet, this individual-focused approach to sign commemoration does allow the thought of commemorated signs that act *on* the society at large – with reflections of war memorial commemorations

(Beckstead, Twose, Levesque-Gottlieb, & Rizzo, 2011) or museum works. Beckstead enables us to focus on the space and enabling the study of the constant re-internalization of sign creation based on how it is placed and where it appears. "The war memorial is, in large part, a symbolic object, and becomes a 'site of memory'" (Beckstead et. al, 2011, p.196).

This idea of a site of memory allows for further reflection on the governance of signs and the importance of memory. How does memory (and the loss of memory) affect the placement of signs – those that govern us, or even the simple ones that unite us? How do individuals with Alzheimer's disease, and those interacting with ones struggling with it, handle the loss of certain signs? Wall discusses the power of placing a new sign to replace the one lost, but it seems this reflection leads to another type of sign-distinction.

In her commentary, Lordelo argues against Wall – saying that signs are inherently linked to the objects, actions, or feelings to which they have been ascribed (Lordelo, 2013). Wall states that something such as a grave will remind us of the loved one, but because the loved one is gone, they cannot promote the memory of a grave. Lordelo argues that "if we can think of that person, then we can trigger the meaning transfer process" (Lordelo, 2013, p.125). In this distinction, Lordelo discusses the issue that mechanisms are *not* asymmetrical, and that given the opportunity, signs can be promoted and demoted through various conditions.

To his side of the case, Wall is dealing with moments of rupture – unlike Lordelo's work with children. Both sign transference mechanisms are operating, but at seemingly different levels – while Wall sees ruptured sign-moments as blocking the transfer, Lordelo is able to see "not exactly a symmetrical operation, but neither an asymmetrical" (Lordelo, 2013, p. 126) operation either. In both cases, time is the marker. Lordelo's work studies the individual over time – and Wall studies a retrospective individual over time. But yet – both are able to see the individual operating within the cases, using transference. And the ambiguity of operation – not symmetrical but not asymmetrical – links the subjectivity of how the individual interprets the situation and their power within it.

Contextually Dependent

The individual, while the actor of intention, is not free to operate in any way he or she can imagine. They are limited by the context and surroundings in which they find themselves, and in which they must act upon. The mechanisms that help mediate the situation are likewise constricted on their causal outcomes due to the context at play.

Greg Minikes develops our search for sign mechanisms further by examining how signs are interpreted to best suit the needs of the current situation (Minikes, 2013). When the simplest option seems blocked, the switch from one desired meaning to the utilized meaning brings in the idea of a semiotic switch mechanism. His experimental condition of placing his participants in such a situation in which they must avoid blaming the researcher

points towards a strong expansion of Moscovici's (1976) theory of social change, discussed by Ivana Markova when she states: "it is, primarily, about tension and conflict resulting from difference which are judgmental, where consensus is not possible... intensified by the judgment of one party by the other" (Markova, 2000, p.437). He places two levels of contention – of the researcher<>authority as well as recognizing the participant's social role of not wanting to insult (judge) the researcher.

Minikes's experimental block of 'trapping' the participant between two very unwelcoming choices shows what could be considered stage one of a semiotic trap (Cabell, 2011). "Cases of circumvention around the trap is also possible. One can feel bad and say "but I don't care" in which case the trap no longer has its affective hold" (Cabell, 2011, p.8). Minikes's experimental trap, especially within the second case, brings some interesting points of consideration. Where else can traps be created? There has been work done within false confessions within the police force which comment on the situation feeling 'inescapable' and their confession – for some reason, seems to be the only thing that sets them free (when it is the only thing that locks them up) (Kassin, 2008; 2012).

Finally, the semiotic switch mechanism allows for much further elaboration. Narrowing in on circumvention strategies, the semiotic switch can exemplify how situational relatedness – how the given situation – can drastically effect the same start. A does not always lead to B, but can under certain circumstances. The switch's acknowledgement of the power of the situation plays in across the other mechanisms. It is another example of the dynamic, systemic model of human behavior that a semiotic cultural psychology looks to develop. How does the switch operate outside of a circumvention? How can we change sign A to sign B? Situational relatedness points to the multivocality of signs – their ability to be a dog, a best friend, a pet, and a piece of meat all at the same time. Perhaps the switch is the defining change from one self to another within the dialogues of the dialogical self (Hermans, 2001).

In continuing with the theme of situational relatedness, Carriere adds to it through the examination of *Umwelten* and their relation to the concept of 'home'. Through the process of affectivating (Carriere, 2013b), an environmental focus of the signs involved within the environment to create a future environment is examined. The individual's power differential within the environment allows oneself to place the signs that eventually become engrained within the environment to bring various future affects. This affectivating focuses exactly on the situational relatedness of the semiotic switch with a focus of how the individual relates towards the given situation, and extends it by allowing the individual to act on changing the relation for future switches.

Affectivating gives a foundation for placing the focus back on the situation – and how the situation can bring about various other results. While Minikes attempted to show how various situations could lead to different blocks as well as circumventions, he was able to tie them together with the idea of the semiotic switch. Likewise, Carriere's link towards the

importance of understanding the affective power of environments can help further explain other external devices – monuments, war memorials, and graveyards – as expanded through the semiotic commemoration of Wall’s work. Wall exhibits the power of sign affectivation – and how a butterfly can bring similar affects that were once far away from the individual due to the death of a loved one.

Bento’s discussion of self-referential, hetero-referential, and co-referential processes of the dialogical self highlight the power of the situational processes that change from person to person. He notes that each paper “exemplif[ies] how each communicational act simultaneously carries a statement about the Self (self-reference), about the Other (hetero-reference), and about the communicational object” (Bento, 2013, p. 106). But who is deciding which I is emerging? Bento discusses the abilities of ‘pre-adaptive systems’ – in which the system is already meaningfully created to work towards the future and adjust on the fly. Yet, this system is inherently being challenged by the other forces outside of it (Beckstead, Cabell, & Valsiner, 2009) and so situational factors need to be recognized as well as the external forces – beyond the negotiation but towards where, when, and how the individual is negotiating. His concluding points on the higher and lower levels of sign-systems, taking over (in light of blocks) or receding (in light of little information) point to further elaboration on both vertical and horizontal constraining of semiotic processes.

Bento’s commentary provides us with a second application of the use of mechanisms operating within the three spheres – self, other, and object, and how the self mediates itself through the relations between the three. His notion of co-reference between objects and the self point towards the individual making sense of the object, which allows further self and hetero-referential actions. His final development, that of the pre-adaptive system, recognizes subjectivity, temporality, and contextuality of the given stimuli as well as a fourth condition of the influence of higher (and lower) ordered psychological processes. This fourth condition allows for the ability for mechanisms to operate on other mechanisms – something perhaps lost within the scopes of this special issue, but still an extremely important point to consider as we approach the idea of semiotic mechanisms.

Methodology to study Mechanisms

Our approach within this special issue within the experimental portions brings an approach towards abductive reasoning. In comparison to deductive or inductive reasoning, abductive “refers to the specific po [sic] under investigation, moving “backwards” from it—the unique exemplar under investigation—to the underlying possible causal system of that exemplar” (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010, p. 826-827). Charles S. Pierce writes about abductive reasoning when he states

The first, which I call *abduction* ... consists in examining a mass of facts and in allowing these facts to suggest a theory. In this way we gain new ideas; but there is no force in the reasoning. ... The second kind of reasoning is *deduction*, or necessary reasoning. It is applicable only to an ideal state of things, or to a state of things in so

far as it may conform to an ideal. It merely gives a new aspect to the premises. ... The third way of reasoning is *induction*, or experimental research. (1935, p. 209)

It must be remembered that abduction, although it is very little hampered by logical rules, nevertheless is logical inference, asserting its conclusion only problematically or conjecturally. It is true, but nevertheless having a perfect definite logical form. (1935, p. 188)

Pierce's suggestion of *allowing* and lack of *force* permits the complexity and unpredictability of the individual in an attempt to restrictedly generalize (bounded by the contextual definite form). A theory needs to be able to be flexible in order to conform out of the ideal, for the chance (and highly probable chance) that the ideal will never come to fruition "render[s] inductive (and deductive) inference strategies defective for the problem solver and turns the future-oriented abductive inference strategies into the most appropriate cognitive adaptation" (Valsiner, 1998, p.246).

Abductive reasoning is the chosen approach towards mechanism study because "causal mechanisms are posited relations or processes that the researcher imagines to exist" (Mahoney, 2001, p.581). Abductive reasoning allows for the recognition of time (Pizarroso & Valsiner, 2009) through predictions of cases based on what the given rules are and what the given results appear to be. The rules are the foundations of both theoretical work and individual experiences, and the results are the lived-in experiences to come. The case – and how that case came to appear – is the only one left we do not know. We can know the past and we can experience the experience, but to examine the process (mechanism) grants us further knowledge than we might once have had.

The approach taken to examine these mechanisms follows the idiographic methodology (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010) of going by a case-by-case basis. In this, we look directly for the "interesting" cases – (which may be the uninteresting ones!) – and attempt to place a framework that explains the case.

A general feature of all the papers in this Special Issue is their adherence to the methodological canons of idiographic ... Psychology needs to give up the use of samples (pretending to generalize to populations) in favor of creating generic models based on individual cases, and testing these models on other individual cases." (Valsiner, 2013, p. 4)

This moves our research away from that of numbers and operationalizations and towards lived-experiences. The respect given to each individual case brings a seriousness towards the research done – each case must fit or expand the model – and if not, a flaw within the mechanism is discovered and must be rectified. In some ways, it seems our best attempts at being taken seriously when 'no one will' (Valsiner, 2013) comes not from conforming to the T-Tests and quantitative methodologies – but by finding the best methodology that is the most critical of our own thoughts.

While Valsiner noted the idiographic nature to the study of mechanisms, let us also consider again the temporality of mechanisms. Mechanisms operate moment to moment – the meaning of a ring can change dramatically if one finds out their significant other has cheated on them, or even simply changes when dirty or clean. Therefore, a microgenetic, moment-to-moment study of the individual as they make meaning through time would serve best for semiotic-based studies.

In discussing the microgenetic methodology of Bartlett, Wagoner states:

“Thus his methodological movement to develop theory is from single case to general model, and back to single case.

In sum, only by using rich cultural material and analyzing *individual cases* and their *qualitative transformations* through time (e.g., ‘something black’ changing into ‘breath’) did Bartlett access the *constructive, imaginative* and *active* processes of remembering, as we use it in everyday life.” (Wagoner, 2009, p. 106)

Wagoner points to both the idiographic quality of Bartlett’s work – from single case to single case, but also points to the active processes he was attempting to grasp at while doing this work. Studying strictly the outcomes would not show the active process, but instead the change – the process between the first recall and the second, allows for the understanding of memory as Bartlett sees it develop across time.

The following work presented in this special issue tackles their work in this way - representing idiographic, microgenetic examinations of mechanisms built through abductive reasoning. The commentaries on the articles represent an extension of these interpretations, testing, criticizing, and conceptualizing mechanisms and their place within cultural psychology. As each person takes mechanisms in their own way, it turns to understanding the subjectivity of mechanisms and their subjective role within individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

And, with that, we find ourselves faced with the same questions at the beginning – what are semiotic mechanisms, how can we attempt to study them, and why should they matter. By this point, I hope I have introduced how the work in this special issue seeks to answer all of these questions and more.

Semiotic mechanisms are the operating controllers of semiotic mediation. They allow signs to function, adapt, and change based off of the given situation, time, and other operating mechanisms present. Semiotic mechanisms can help make meaning of identity, of activities, of opinions, of lost others and others not-yet-met. The work presented takes the complexity of human meaning-making through idiographic examination. By respecting the individual and not reducing them to simply a number on a scale, the work seeks to find a way to

approach theoretical frameworks from single cases and yet be able to apply these theoretical concepts towards a larger range of applications. The commentaries provided give a global perspective on the extensions of what a group of emerging researchers can achieve if given the right set of tools.

Valsiner, in his preface, states we carry with us a “constructive arrogance” (2013, p. 2) – challenging ‘the literature’, ‘science of psychology’, and the ‘administrative systems’. All authors in this special issue are honored to be told we carry that – but arrogance may be overstating the intention here. We are by no means trying for an overarching theory of semiotic mechanisms intentionality within the semiotic system. We are limited both by our samples and our experience. Our methodologies challenge the convention for we are not yet taught of the conventions to follow – and if we did, the mechanisms that have been instilled within our philosophical minds in the last four years challenges us to not accept the collective meaning and to create our own in any way. It is not the system that we attempt to circumvent – it is just we have found a system that operates above the ‘normal’ system. Perhaps this special issue stands as a case study – an example of a mechanism operating on another mechanism – the fourth prescription of Bento’s (2013) line of mechanisms.

What is still needed in the work of semiotic mechanisms is that of further application. Cultural psychology has been able to study semiotics and sign-systems in a very ordered, logical fashion. Yet, the studies in this series show that even the most controlled experiment, or the most controlled interview, brings disorder. Applying these concepts to both experimental work as well as real-life situations – such as memorials, apathy, or rumors – allows a deeper understanding and development to bring psychology out of this trivial research Valsiner references and into the world of application as well as theoretical development.

More work can be done in exploring other mechanisms as well. It is not that a long list of infinite mechanisms could be seen as any more theoretically relevant than the triviality of research, but mechanism-study builds on itself. Forcing ourselves to seek the mechanism that controls the process of meaning-making in that situation, we force ourselves to create a model that fits each situation, actively seeking explanations beyond “error” or “chance” in an understanding of the model’s best fit. Mechanisms, if able to operate at higher levels than others, may be able to operate on each other. Being said, a literature of mechanisms is not necessarily horizontal in nature – it builds onto itself as mechanisms build off of each other. Their developments in seeing the meaning-making process in various ways allow – through the fun of work – the production of novelty.

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