

## Semiosis and Relative Being

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Abstract: Anticipation is a semiotic activity in which a sign is interpreted as a relation between something occurring now and something expected to occur later, like the dark cloud alarming us to an upcoming thunderstorm. From its very first beginnings in Augustine's writings in the fourth century the sign has been conceived as something awakening us to infer something else: In Augustine a *signum* or "a sign is anything perceived which makes something besides itself come into awareness" (quoted from (Deely 2001)). This definition is of course too narrow in its focus on perception since elements of awareness may well be signs also without being perceived. Augustine nevertheless pointed to the core of the matter when he defined a thing as "what has so far not been made use of to signify something" (*ibid*) implying that things may well be signs but they need not be so, and also implying that the essence of the sign is its formal relational character of evoking an awareness of something which it is not itself, thereby implying the full triad of sign, object and interpretant (here the altered awareness). The evoking of such a triad is of course by no means exclusive for the workings of human awareness but is rather, as was later realized, a purely logical relation to be established in any system capable of autonomous anticipatory activity, i.e. by all living systems.

Just as predictability must precede prediction, a system of useful dyadic relations must first have been realized on planet Earth while it cooled down. Only then more sophisticated systems could survive based on a complicated capacity for anticipation, that is for bringing themselves in relation to the pre-established set of relations under the formation of true triadic or semiotic relations. And while the underlying system of dyadic relations may well be understood in terms of the things related, the emergence of true triadic semiosis in the shape of living beings and their activities established kinds of causality peculiar to this new form of *relative being*, causalities which are way too sophisticated to be decently grasped through the simple dynamics of dyadic relations between things.

Deely, J. *Four Ages of Understanding. The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*; Toronto University Press: Toronto, 2001; p. 221.

