



Fig. 1—Nicolas Antoine Vittori (MA candidate at the Design dpt. KHIO) during a performance in the learning theatre (Dec. 14th 2023, 12:45-13:25). To crowdsource the artistic contents of a project constituted from different drawing experiments, involving improvisation based on a variety of restrictions/constraints, he had set up the chairs of the audience and pedestals in a seating pattern and arrangement similar to a jazz club. His performance-lecture thereby was situated within the crosspressure between two scenographies. One for the floor/audience and another one for the stage/performer (in this case was a distributed exhibition space). His specialised topic was the use of constraints in improvisation to explore the affordances of drawing as mark-making. His theoretical point was to explore the possibilities and impact of ekphrastic description to explore drawing as markmaking.

As the learning theatre has come to be defined as semiotic contraption—a mousetrap for non-dramatic purposes—we have also arrived at a point where we move from two-tiered model inspired by *dramatic* theatre, to turn to the anatomic theatre: i.e., how the semiotic theatre departs from it. As the anatomic theatre is devoted to experimental *analysis*, the learning theatre aims at articulating the relationship between *two* analytical levels, or tiers. The project has grown from query into a specific semiotic problem I identified during an Italian state fellowship in Bologna.

Which means that it is a problem that I have been working on since 1989. It is not small problem. It comes from the efforts of Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev who in 1943 published a volume aiming to establish his *Prolegomena to a theory of language*. His aim was to delimit linguistics—or, glossematics—as a science. In this effort, he came to task areas *falling out* of the scope of his inquiry, to the care of physicists and (social) anthropologists. This point was clearly articulated in the Italian of *Trattato di semiotica generale* (1975) was redacted in *A theory of semiotics* (1976).

Though I was given a status as a visiting scholar at Istituto della comunicazione (Università degli studi di Bologna)—and also met with Prof. Umberto Eco—I never managed to find out why the passages that was devoted to the topic that caught my keen interest in the Bompiani edition (1975), had been removed in the English translation (1976) at the Indiana university press. The interest derived from what had brought me to Bologna in the first place: which was how certain *events* that trigger *contents* of a clearly semiotic but non-linguistic nature, can be *expressed*.

That is, the crowdsourcing of historical, popular and local *contents* in real time (social anthropology); and how these summon the *expression* of the arrangements that made this confluence possible (physics). A third level adds to these when the *content* and *expression* are combined: the compound work of *pathfinding* (material contents) and *goalseeking* (material expression) that we can call *design*. Based on the Italian etymology of ‘design’ (i.e. *disegno*) which determines drawing and purpose *in one*: a point made already by Giorgio Vasari (renaissance 1511-74).

The interest I took in the problem—prompted by life-experiences resonating with André Breton and Paul Éluard’s concern with *coincidence*—soon revealed that signification *beyond* verbal language (and Hjelmslev’s glossematics) also brought up *signification* and *readability* from the same place. The difficulties of account for the non-linguistic layer of sign, I perceived, would

impact linguistic as a whiplash. Since this non-linguistic layer is *always* there: that is, somehow operating from within language from a place beyond language. It could be a reason why these passages had been redacted in the English version: as semiotics comes from linguistics. A typical hen-egg paradox. Scouting beyond the hen-egg.

If such, we are confronted with problem of *mutual dependency* on logically discrepant terms, which summon an experimental and comparative approach: *experimental* as in physics, and *comparative* as in anthropology. Or, to be more succinct, to combine the work of isolating analytical

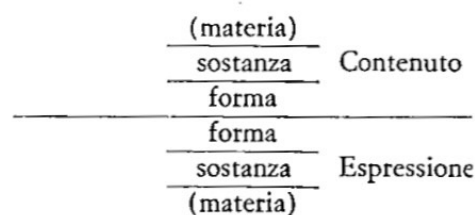


Fig. 2—In this chart in the Italian original version of *A theory of semiotics* (*Trattato di semiotica generale*) Umberto Eco proposes a diagram challenging whether/not materiality is part of semiotics.

traits with the *analysis* of a field of comparable instances, which Nicolas A. Vittori (2023 [Fig. 1]) proposed in what we coined ‘an ecology of phenomena’. In his experimental material, **a)** the isolation of distinguishing traits of discrete experiments with drawing, conjoint with **b)** the understanding of the experimental *corpus* as a field with comparable drawing-experiments.

With the level of access available from this compound, Vittori approached a new level of objectivity: that of markmaking (i.e., drawing as mark-making). In the scope of the semiotic terminology of *signifier* and *signified*—from the structural tradition of linguistics after Ferdinand de Saussure—Vittori’s method was to set the signified temporarily *adrift* by accepting a variety of constraints, turned to chance-methods, thereby opening a clearing in which qualities of contents from the twists and turns of the signifier were collected: deriving material content from material expression.

That is, investigating his practice of drawing with a method bringing drawing closer to its distant cousin print (expanding the notion of markmaking). In rigging of the space, in preparation for his performance lecture, Vittori ventured to arrive experimentally at an adequate space, in a similar way as with drawing: drawing with a pattern of chairs and pedestals. In essence, he was bringing together his performance lecture in the crosspressure between two experimental bodies—one on paper, the other in a BlackBox—and then bringing the two together in his performance lecture.

Which is why and how, he managed to *crowdsource* the material contents featuring in the sample of works he had brought for the occasion, to establish the ekphrastic language articulating the *detail* of material expression (i.e., his series of experiments from his curriculum in graphic design and illustration in which he specialises and his own independent projects). From this formal vantage point, his work contributed to the larger variety of similar attempts amongst the other MA-candidates: according to the general setup of the [learning theatre](#) that invited this.

The uniqueness of his contribution, in this setting, was his reach for *analytical* precision in the scope of the ekphrastic language (which is what made his scope properly semiotic, beyond the inspired metaphor). Under the circumstances, the possibility of materialising content, through crowdsourcing, is conditioned by the inclusion of an active audience. Without such crowdsourcing the contents do *not* materialise in this way. And the ekphrastic journey through the material of expression—using jazz improvisation and clubbing as a vehicle—hatches new artistic choices.

Returning to Umberto Eco’s reading of Louis Hjelmslev’s (bracketed) level of (material) content and expression, however, it becomes clear that such crowdsourcing—following in the wake of emergent turns (whether in jazz improvisation or event-occurrences)—is not *locked* to the attendance of a human crowd (as an audience), but can also occur through other mediations: history, location and culture (in varied proportions). Which means that the substance of what has been discussed above, also applies in the larger scope of fieldwork and the field-diary.

That is, what opens up to field-research of the entire scope of natural history: ranging from astronomy, geology, botany, zoology, anthropology and archaeology. Of which archaeology has a specific relevance in the present context: in the sense that material expression and its choices, take place in hindsight of crowdsourcing (as a necessary, though not sufficient, condition). Which is why Tim Ingold’s bold initiative to compound the 4As in his book on Making—anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture—of determining importance, through it is *analytically* weak.

It features the poetic side (i.e. relating to *poiesis*) of natural history, which is relevant. But it does not bring on the analytic aspects of *execution* that come out through making (i.e., the material execution), which is relevant to design. The fact that they are brought up, conjured or evoked through the crowdsourcing of material contents, does not mean that the pathfinding and goal-seeking alternatives and choices that thereby become expressed and contained in the arrangements that in fact *preceded* it, not only makes the archaeological framework relevant, but also the *making* that opens this door (more boldly than with “fieldwork”).

Making obviously goes beyond the traditional understandings of participatory methods in anthropology. In an upcoming intervention in a [HAU](#) symposium methods and perspectives I have harvested as staff member at KHIO, will expand participation to include the use of camera note-taking as the fieldworker’s side-kick will bring this argument to the table. The table to the left brings Hjelmslev’s argument—scoped by Eco—to argue the semiotics of material contents and expression in the area of *hydroelectricity*.

continuum	Piano dell'espressione		Piano del contenuto		continuum
	unità	sistema	sistema	unità	
luce, fenomeni elettrici	AB	1100	1111	pericolo	l'insieme amorfo delle posizioni dell'acqua e tutto ciò che si può pensare in proposito
	BC	0110	1110	allarme	
	CD	0011	1100	sicurezza	
	AD	1001	1000	insuffic.	
materia non semiotica	<div style="text-align: center;"> ↑ funzioni segniche ↓ ————— occorrenze segniche </div>				materia non semiotica

Fig. 3—Umberto Eco (1975) charting materials of expression and material content. Our argument here, however, is that this material is semiotic, a point that is being covered elsewhere in studies of the theory of shifters (R. Jakobson)