
Qualia, semiotic categories, and sensuous truth: rhematics, pragmatics, symbolics*

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Abstract: It is a social-scientific truism, and also a problem, that the “immediate” sensuous truth for individuals is part of, and therefore must be investigated through, the “dynamic” semiosis of social groups. Qualia, carefully formulated as *facts of firstness*, disaggregate and clarify some aspects of the problem. Facts of firstness become methodologically viable as a semiotic category by weighting Peirce’s 1903 Triangle of ten sign types toward the interpretant and thereby rearranging the diagram. This diagrammatic rearrangement discloses the domain of *rhematics*, extending continuously from the familiar rhematic symbolic legisigns of language to qualia as limit cases where semiotic mediation itself seems to be suspended in (and by) aesthetic immediacy. The diagrammatic rearrangement also highlights qualia as cultural emergents: precipitates of vast scales and operations of semiosis that bear deceptively little resemblance to the processes of their production. A multimodal example of sonic, kinaesthetic, and visual calibration grounds the discussion.

Keywords: qualia; facts of firstness; rhematics; sensuous semiotics; Peirce’s classes of signs.

* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1980-4016.esse.2022.194325>. Acknowledgements: The author thanks Francisco Sedda and Paolo Demuru for the invitation to submit this article for this special issue. This article has benefited from helpful comments and questions from Yuichi Asai, Alessandro Duranti, Susan Gal, Constantine Nakassis, Richard Parmentier, Wee Yang Soh, Chen Xue, and Xingzhi Zhao, as well as from focused discussion in the Qualia and Voice seminar at Harvard University (Spring 2022) and the Semiotics Workshop at the University of Chicago (May 12, 2022).

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Introduction

Grinding. Hissing. Scraping. Silence.

On 28 November 2006, in an installment of National Public Radio's *SoundClips* series broadcast in the United States, Felicia Reynolds explained how she and other figure skaters listen to the sound of their metal blades on ice for information about how they are skating.¹ From the Burbank Ice Arena in Burbank, Massachusetts (USA), Reynolds explained that *grinding* is "the bite of your blades in the ice." Ideally, it is all that one should hear. *Hissing*, however, is "bad" because it "means that I'm not properly aligned, and my blade is skidding slightly." A "high-pitched" *scraping* from a "blade on a hard curve...tells you that your body is not aligned properly and you've gone too far forward and you're scraping your toe pick." And a "clean run of edge... should be almost completely *silent*." A better skater is "quieter," because quieter is "faster." With an apparently unintentional pun, Reynolds concluded: "Sounds easy, looks easy and really isn't easy."

Grinding. Hissing. Scraping. Silence.

As a reader, your experience of reading this list of four English words for the second time is probably different from the first time. I can speculate on your first encounter, but it is a wild speculation. In speculating, I am working with, at best, the semantic presuppositions of this English-speaking discursive community, my own personal experience of some possible referents, and the poetic effects of the list on me (in my case, they evoke a horror film involving metallic objects). But I have a much better guess about your second reading. Simply following the freshly established indexical links that connect sounds to movements, I suspect your second encounter with the words *grinding*, *hissing*, *scraping*, and *silence*, might have been "colored" by the multimodal impression of a weighted blade moving on ice. Perhaps they evoked an image of a skater moving on the ice, the coldness of that ice, foggy puffs of breath, the shape of a rink, the proprioceptive feeling of balance on a blade underfoot, or the sound of speech echoing from a flat gelid surface.

The point is that the character of your encounter with the sequence of words upon second reading is probably closer to mine, closer to that of other readers, closer to that of other ice skaters, all of which are anchored to and emerge from the narrated experience of Felicia Reynolds. In this little example,

¹ <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6550604>, accessed January 1, 2021.

the “way things seem” for one person have made their way, if only momentarily, unevenly, ineffably into the “way things are” for more than one person (hence the metaphor of “closeness” deployed above). Emanating from a multisensorial encounter with ice skating, via the registers and genres of different techno-semiotic media operating in different sensory modalities (e.g., audible radio and visible scholarly inscription), an individuated sensuous experience has been socially generalized. From the first encounter with *grinding, hissing, scraping, silence* to the second, we depart from an introspective, methodologically individual philosophical phenomenology of personal experience to the semiotic anthropology of qualia.²

The contemporary semiotic anthropology of qualia can be put in both positive and negative terms. In positive terms, it is an attempt to study the diffuse, ambiguous, slippery domain of “feeling” via a now-robust ethnographic semiotics of language and communicative interaction. In this sense, it is a systematic continuation of the decades-long de-centering of denotation within sophisticated anthropological treatments of language and a metapragmatic theorization of language’s place in sociocultural life.³ This continuation has pursued the concept of indexicality into the dubiously linguistic, as well as expressly non-linguistic, realms of social life, while at the same time remaining anchored conceptually and methodologically to the problem of language and its unique semiotic properties (HARKNESS, 2015; NAKASSIS, 2016).

In negative terms, the contemporary semiotic anthropology of qualia operates at the current limits of our semiotic paradigm. That is, it pushes beyond the limits of the linguistic sign – as above – to the limits of the sign itself.⁴ It is an attempt to analyze the diffuse, ambiguous, slippery domain of “feeling” by dealing with semiotic elements that are not reflexively experienced as signs at all, but rather as natural or given properties of things “as they are”.⁵ The project in this negative sense intersects with the evolving, often roving, cluster of thematic pursuits that aim to account for elements of sociocultural experience that are often said to resist analysis by semiotic concepts. These pursuits are generally styled as anthropologies of materiality, the senses, body and embodiment, affect, media, and the like.⁶ Within these models, the salient “thing” that is posited to

² The present article includes a major expansion and further explanation of terms laid out in condensed form in Harkness (2020).

³ See especially Silverstein (1976, 1993, 2014).

⁴ A further, if unoriginal, argument suggested by this paper is that any ideological limits to what counts as a sign, e.g., as elaborated by Webb Keane (2003, 2018), would seem to depend fundamentally and unavoidably on the ideological limits to what counts as a *linguistic sign* (GAL; IRVINE, 2019; SILVERSTEIN, 1979; SCHIEFFELIN; WOOLARD; KROSKRITY, 1998; KROSKRITY, 2000). These boundaries (sign/non-sign; linguistic sign/non-linguistic sign) are layered and co-constitutive and therefore must be investigated in combination, ideally with a technically robust analytical apparatus for dealing with both domains.

⁵ i.e., as attributed and naturalized; see Gal (2017).

⁶ For programmatic statements linking qualia to these topics, see Chumley and Harkness (2013) and Chumley (2017).

stand sui generis beyond semiotic grasp tends to shift peripatetically. The semiotics of qualia posed in these negative terms can be made even more dramatic: the project aims to understand and theorize a sensuous semiotics of de-signification. The project framed as a contradiction – the semiotic production of the experience of non-signs – can be reformulated methodologically to propose that qualia are limit cases of semiosis where semioticity itself seems to be suspended.

Combining these positive and negative terms, we can say that qualia are some of the semiotic effects that feel the least semiotic, because they are reflexively apperceived as raw or unmediated feelings of encounter with the natural or given properties (i.e., “qualities”) of what there is to experience. In this sense, qualia are cultural emergents – to use a chemical metaphor – the precipitates of vast scales and operations of semiosis that deceptively bear little resemblance to the processes of their production. In the ethnographic analysis of qualia, much of the problem revolves not merely around asking how culture shapes experience, nor even asking how culture makes experience possible, but, even more radically, how culture shapes experience in such a way that it doesn’t seem cultural. This apperception of suspended semiosis is precisely what makes qualia the sensuous semiotic substance of certitude: qualia are experienced as radically, experientially “true” without asserting or representing a truth. I will return to this problem below.

1. The qualia problem

The philosophical history of the qualia problem has often been inspired by an intractable epistemological rupture: how can we know what it feels like to be another person? Radical experiential difference forms the basis of the problem. Sociocultural anthropology has also operated through an analogous epistemological problematic, but at the level of the social group rather than the individual. When anthropologists encounter the problem of radical epistemological rupture between individuals, they look to the social context first for clues to how such ruptures are organized, experienced, reproduced, and even overcome.⁷ The word “culture” has often been used to describe this basic plane of generalized experiential differentiation, where human social groups form and transform through different histories and systems of meaningfulness.⁸ A central difference between philosophies of qualia and anthropologies of culture, apart from the obvious ones of scale and sociology, is the methodological place through which such difference has been investigated. As much as sociocultural anthropology has relied upon the individual person as a privileged site of data

⁷ See, e.g., Robbins and Rumsey (2008).

⁸ See, however, Brightman (1995); Trouillot (2003).

generation, the discipline has come to pursue the properly social by investigating what takes place *between* people, i.e., in interaction, communication, and social mediation more broadly. Intersubjectivity, rather than subjectivity, and sociocultural exteriority, rather than psychological interiority, are the methodological starting points for a truly *sociocultural* anthropology.

To force another metaphor, let us say that social scientists want to know what kinds of “matter” form the social universe. For different social theorists, various, relatively systematic constructs – power, capital, institutions, media, affect, ideas, and materiality itself – all vie for primacy as comprehending the salient facts of theory. Social matter, however, is notoriously slippery stuff, made no simpler by the problem that speech is a ubiquitous and unavoidable kind of social matter that must also be isolated and manipulated in order to understand the other kinds. That is, markedly linguistic matter, as both semiotic element and instrument, is the unavoidable, powerful, value-laden, institutional, mediating, affective, ideational, materializing medium through which to posit and conceptualize social matter more generally.

As semiotic effects felt to stand outside of semiosis, qualia are among the most evasive forms of social matter. What, then, is the socioculturally oriented analyst to do with qualia, when their character would seem to make them a kind of *anti*-social matter? In the philosophical literature, qualia have been viewed in three dominant, often overlapping ways. Firstly, in some translations of Aristotle’s *Categories*, on the topic of “qualities,” the word “qualia” has referred to variations, degrees, intensifications, and “paronymous” manifestations of some metaphysical qualities (ARISTOTLE, 1853).⁹ Later translations, however, helpfully refer to the same phenomenon as “qualifications,” which is preferred (e.g., Aristotle (1992)). A second approach has been to treat qualia as a problem of the psychology of “sense data” or “sensory experience” within a more bluntly materialist paradigm of the manifestation in consciousness of the activation of sensory channels.¹⁰ Finally, following from this, qualia have also tended to be viewed solipsistically as the atomic subjective properties of individual consciousness – ineffable, intrinsic, private, and directly or immediately apprehensible experiences of “the way things seem.” This position, while influential, has been severely critiqued as an overly-complicated way of saying something simple: namely, that qualia are the idiosyncratic effects of “public,” “relational” qualities, i.e., those that are socioculturally and specifically linguistically mediated (DENNETT, 1988).¹¹

The contemporary qualia project deals in various ways with each perspective but views the problem in different terms. It does not posit a

⁹ See also Solere (2001, p. 583).

¹⁰ See Keeley’s discussion (2009) of Lewis (1929) and Goodman (1966).

¹¹ Cf. Eco (1999, p. 99-106).

philosophical or materialist ontology of qualia – limited to variations on metaphysical qualities (see below), a psychology sense data, or as properties of individual consciousnesses – but rather posits qualia in dynamic social-semiotic terms. Qualia are semiotically constituted, related to other signs and sign processes, and are thus continuous with and investigable through other forms of sociocultural semiosis. And yet, their sensuous constitution leads them to seem somehow to stand outside of semiosis.

To explore this problem further, let us return to Felicia Reynolds’s ice skating. Crucially, the contact between ice and Reynolds’s moving blade links two structured systems. One is a proprioceptive or, more narrowly, kinaesthetic system of felt movement. Semiotically, it is largely *closed-circuit*, in which access to the salient semiotic material is restricted; only the skater has direct access to the feeling of skating, even if others might empathetically feel something as they observe it. The other is an exteroceptive system of audible sound. Semiotically, it is largely *open-circuit*, in which the salient semiotic material is accessible to anyone within earshot, even if certain sonic features are proprioceptively available only as vibrations in the medium of the body. According to Reynolds, the open-circuit system of sound is exploited for the corrective information it can provide about the closed-circuit system of felt movement. Among expert ice skaters, this linkage between kinaesthetic and sonic awareness is calibrated to produce aesthetically pleasing effects in yet a third system: a visual field of observation that mediates both an audience’s interactional engagement with the skater (even if distantly so), as well as, presumably, the projective imagination of the skater herself.¹²

In order to shift attention from the visual field – which is most accessible to the widest range of participants in this context – to the calibrated linkage between the sonic and the kinaesthetic, Felicia Reynolds guided the interviewer, the radio listener, and, ultimately, us (the readers) by working ostensibly to help explain the role of sound in skating. “*That grinding sound.*” “*The hissing sound that you heard.*” “*That was a rip, and that is the sound of a blade on a hard curve.*” “*That high-pitched scrape.*” “*That is the sound of what’s called a clean run of edge, and it should be almost completely silent.*” Combining ostension (the sounds), demonstrative determiners (“that”), and lexicalization (words like “grinding”), Reynolds charted a structured space of experience that exploits sound as a navigational guide to bodily movement.

¹² For comparable cases of interactionally grounded, closed-/open-circuit semiosis, see Harkness (2017); Hoffmann-Dilloway (2018). The visual mode of judgment of ice-skating exemplifies, in Lily Hope Chumley’s (2013) terminology, two evaluation regimes that link qualia to qualities through authorized acts of discernment: (1) a rhematizing regime of lexicalizations qua rhetic symbolic legisigns and morphologically derived hypostatic abstractions that dwell upon qualisigns related to execution, style, and personality; and (2) a quantifying regime of the scoring system of points.

In addition to this epistemological division *across* two systems, there is also a calibrated hierarchy of apperception *within* them. As we learn from the Soviet physiologist of movement, Nikolai Bernstein, systems of bodily movement are organized from a gross-to-fine hierarchy of relatively independent orders of coordination (BERNSTEIN, 1967, 1996 [1945-46]). When Reynolds said, “you should hear that [grinding] sound, because if you don't then you're not even trying,” she was referring to the first level: *tonus*, or a fine-grained condition of “readiness” or “ongoing physiological adaptation and organization of the periphery.” When Reynolds described hissing as “bad” because it indicates misalignment and skidding, she was referring to the second level: *cross-functional synergies*, or coarse-grained coordination patterns (these are generally developed in conjunction with proprioceptive systems). When she drew attention to the high-pitched scrape, which indicated “you've gone too far forward, and you're scraping your toe pick,” she was pointing to the third level: *topology*, or congruent projections of external space into the motor field (these are more often developed in conjunction with exteroceptive perceptual systems, like vision). And when she described “the sound of a blade on a hard curve” as a “rip,” she was speaking about the fourth level: *actions* themselves (here, skating along a curve), or topological combinatorics that involve the planning, sequencing, and steering of goal-directed activity. At each level, corporeal dispositions become projective “models of the future,” directed from “what is” to “what must be done” (BERNSTEIN, 1967, p. 147- 148).

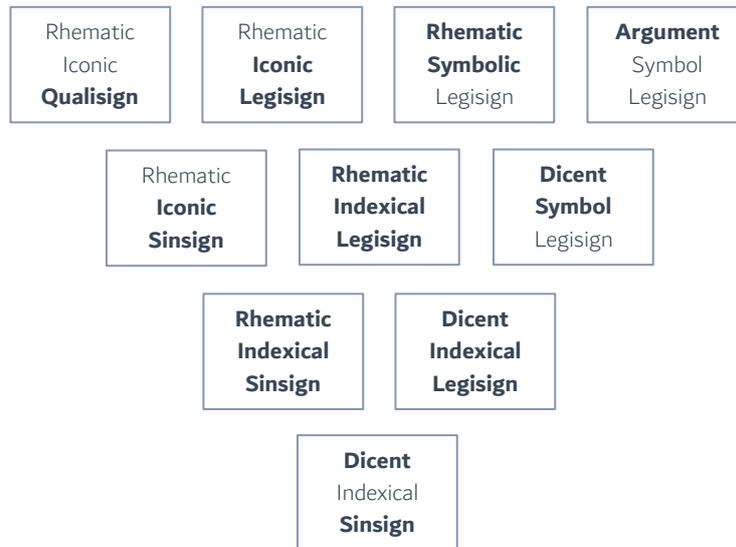
To help her audience access this highly structured, if dynamic, complex of awareness and control, Reynolds drew upon a wide range of semiotic resources – from the markedly linguistic to the overtly non-denotational. In her example, both sound and movement are organized by a differentiated organization and hierarchy of qualities. These qualities become values within a complex conceptual system linking two epistemological channels: the aural and the kinaesthetic. In their role as experiential categories with focal points of orientation, these qualities operate as signs, i.e., *qualisigns* in the Peircean idiom, or “feelings of” qualitative possibility within a dynamic indexical field. Reynolds relies on English grammar to refer to these qualisigns. A verb root and a formative indicating the continuous aspect – *grinding*, *hissing*, *scraping* – direct our attention to the sonic effects of different kinds of friction produced by skates as they move on ice. These effects can be abstracted “hypostatically” (transformation of a predicate into a subject) as generalized qualities – “grindiness,” “hissiness,” “scrapiness” – the presence, absence, or relative degree of which is an indication of a skater's relative control over their body in motion. It is important to stress that these abstracted qualities are, themselves, not qualia; they are conceptual abstractions seemingly derived as properties from the sounds. And they are also markedly morphological achievements (here, the English formative is *-iness* rather than -

ing) that help to bring a structured experiential quality space into a denotational medium of communication. The qualia problem emerges when this extraordinary semiotic complexity that produces and frames sensuous experience descends upon, condenses in, emerges as the given character, the synthesized features, the momentarily unified totality of the experiential loading of the encounter with sound as the pragmatic “feeling of doing.”

2. Rhematics, pragmatics, symbolics

How do we access – methodologically speaking – the suspended semiosis of qualia? Let us consider more carefully how qualia relate to, and can be defined in terms of, a broader array of sign types. Readers will be familiar with Peirce’s famous triangle consisting of 10 classes of signs, which is composed from the logical possibilities of the sign as constituted by a triad of representamen, object, and interpretant. Following Parmentier (1994), we view the sign’s triadic composition of parts as coming into dynamic relation by dialectical vectors of determination (object-representamen-interpretant) and representation (interpretant-representamen-object). We can think of this triad animated by a dialectic as a kind of semiotic hemiola: the musical concept for the ratio of 3:2, i.e., rhythmically as three beats against two. Each point of the larger triangle of 10 particular sign types represents an extreme manifestation of a general sign-type corresponding to Peirce’s ontological categories of firstness (quality, possibility, *tone*), secondness (reaction, resistance, *token*), and thirdness (habit, law, *type*). This triangle is helpful for visualizing the relations among the 10 posited sign types, because the triangle highlights semiotic redundancies within the sign classes and features shared across them (bolded terms within the signs represent non-redundant features).

Figure 1: Peirce's self-enclosed triangle of ten classes of signs.



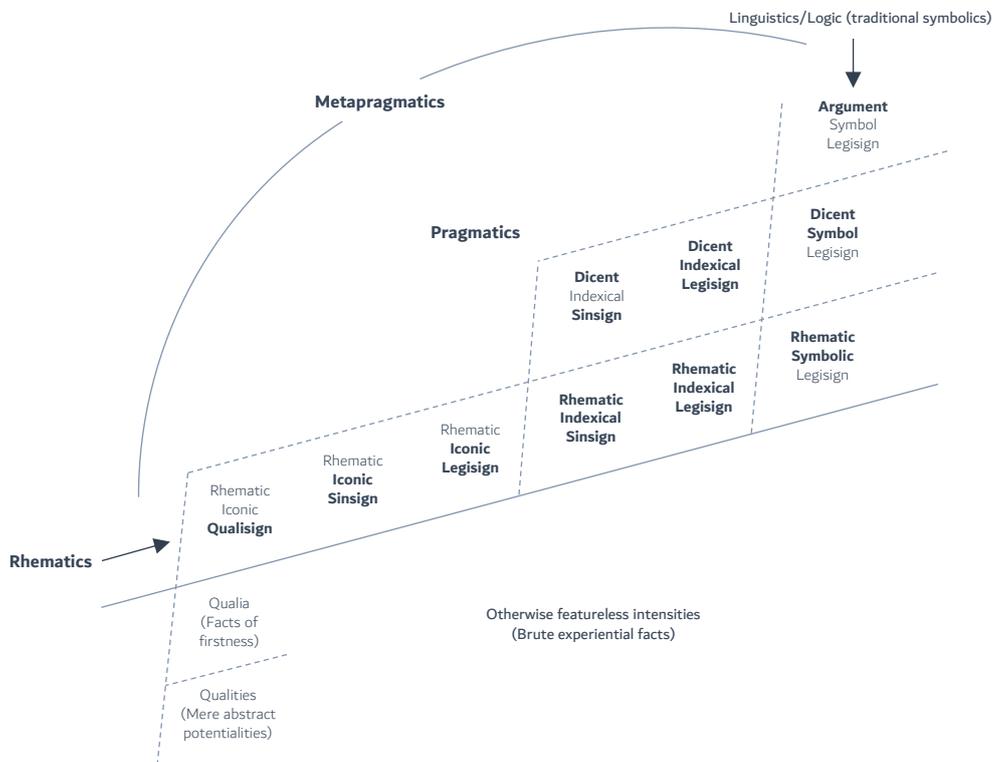
Source: The author (after CP 2.264).

While Peirce's triangle gives a sense of the elegant opposition, balance, and equilaterality of his doctrine as it was presented in 1903, it does not resemble the contorted empirical problems or the rough methodologies of ethnographic research. A methodological pathway opens if we rearrange this famous triangle according to his third trichotomy, the sign as it is "for" its interpretant.¹³ We can conceptualize the interpretant as that component of a triad which embodies the sign's triadic nature and its dialectical vectors (i.e., the semiotic hemiola) most fully: it is the component which (1) is determined by (i.e., is effectuated and characterized by) an object-representamen relation, (2) represents or construes that relation (as the necessary internally reflexive element of the Peircean sign), and (3) determines new sign triads by participating as a component within them (as an object or a representamen). This formulation of the interpretant shows how the interpretant embodies the semiotic hemiola in inverted form. The internally triadic sign, framed by a dialectic, becomes an externally triadic interpretant (i.e., a mediating triad of directed line segments: determination¹, representation¹, determination²) linking signs. According to the third trichotomy,

¹³ For some illuminating conceptual possibilities yielded by alternate visualizations of Peircean categories, see Borges (2010); Farias and Queiroz (2017). See also Gal and Irvine (2019, p. 87-111) on the methodological generativity of "conjecture" as a bridge concept linking the operations of the interpretant to abductive inference. The present article intentionally does not take up any further trichotomizing of interpretants as such. Despite its somewhat rudimentary character when compared with the later and more internally differentiated sign typologies (consisting of 28 or 66 sign classes), the 1903 typology has benefits for a semiotic framework that includes linguistics. First, the 1903 typology contains the concept of the rhematic symbolic legisign, which provides the Peircean concept most compatible with the Saussurean discoveries of *langue* as a virtual system (see below). Second, the later Peircean typologies, while compelling from a purely semiotic point of view and clearly committed to a profoundly pragmatist philosophy, run the risk for sociocultural anthropology of suggesting a billiard-ball phenomenology of semiosis (on the model of "billiard ball sociology") or a neo-behaviorist social cybernetics when applied directly to social life.

signs may be classified as rheme, dicent, argument (discussed below). When we reorganize Peirce’s triangle into a diagram weighted to the interpretant, we now see, rather than a perfect enclosure, an open, bumpy, uneven array.

Figure 2: Peirce’s triangle rearranged, with added semiotic categories.



Source: The author.

Note in Figure 2 that the sign types remain continuous, but the figure is no longer closed and evenly balanced. From left to right and from bottom to top there is still a sense of Peirce’s ascending sign hierarchy, but now rhematic signs, dicent signs, and argument signs are situated on their own independent, gradually ascending rows. These rows expose a stark imbalance among the sign categories according to the interpretant: six rhematic signs, three dicent signs, and one argument sign. As I will explain below, these rows intersect with the other ways of organizing sign typologies, charting out three domains of analysis, each with a different compositional and functional character: the *symbolics* of traditional linguistics and logic; a broad, diffuse *pragmatics* characterized by indexical signs that fill out, connect, and surround all phenomenally experienceable signs; and a cline of rhematic signs that I will call *rhematics*. All three domains are framed by metapragmatics. And in the reorganized diagram, the three extreme points of Peirce’s triangle become three descending “peaks” (for want of a better metaphor), which can serve as navigational points for the problematics of each of the three domains as they blend and overlap below.

Additionally, I have placed a solid line beneath the cline of rhematic signs, indicating a threshold between the minimally “genuine” signs of Peirce’s triangle and some newly visualizable semiotic elements (including, crucially, qualia) that fall outside of the triangle. This distinction and their placement will become important as we proceed.

First, let us begin with the familiar symbolic domain of traditional linguistics and logic. The series of three sign types vertically aligned to the steep slope on the far right are most closely associated with this domain. This series of ascending symbolic legisigns (type-level conventional signs) are the bread and butter of traditional linguistic analysis. The first two (rhematic and dicent) – exemplified according to Peirce by terms and propositions, respectively – correspond to ideological presuppositions in linguistics about the nature of language.

In Peirce’s sense of the term, the “Rhema is a simple representation without such separate parts” (CP 5.139); “a sign which is represented in its signified interpretant as if it were a character or mark (or as being so)” (CP 8.337). An example he gives is that which remains of a predicate when a subject has been removed (or has not yet been supplied), as in “___ is red.” Rhematic signs are signs which, for an interpretant, are signs of qualitative possibility, “representing such and such a kind of possible object.” Moreover, they are simplified, self-contained, and direct attention to the synthesis of the representamena. All representamena are compositions of some sort (however minute their parts); however, for the interpretant of a rhematic sign, that sense of particulate combination becomes an experience of synthesis. For example, a concrete noun is encountered as a unitary “word,” rather than as a phonological series (e.g., the word *ball*); the phoneme is encountered as a unitary “sound” (e.g., /b/) rather than as a bundle of distinctive features (e.g., voiced bilabial plosive); a good, self-evident diagram (e.g., Peirce’s triangle in Figure 1) holds together as a unitary form, rather than a cluster of disparate parts (e.g., my reorganization of Peirce’s triangle in Figure 2 upon first glance). In this way, the rheme is apperceived as a self-standing (“intensional”) whole, which produces for the interpretant the suggestion of qualitative possibility (i.e., possible but as yet undetermined “extensions”). Of course, rhemes are combined with other signs and can themselves be decomposed, but the point is that they operate as rhemes by seeming to stand as self-contained unitary signs, the formal character of which (i.e., attributed features or qualities) *seems* to contain information about a potentiality of possible objects.

For Peirce, the common noun is the most obvious, prototypical sort of rhematic symbolic legisign. However, rhematic symbolic legisigns actually can be said to correspond to all of the elements within a grammar in the Saussurean tradition (SILVERSTEIN, 1985, p. 218). From lexemes, to morphemes, and even

to phonemes, these type-level conventional (linguistic) categories are typified signs of possibility, participating in functionally different ways within the linguistic system. Their “possibility” is shaped by their potential combination with, and avoidance of, other signs within the linguistic code, i.e., their Saussurean value (*valeur*, valence). To be sure, from lexemes to morphemes, there is a generally decreasing “concreteness” of ideas or concepts associated with them (i.e., Saussurean “sense”; on the “sliding scale” of concrete-to-relational concepts in grammar see Sapir (2014 [1921], p. 82-119)). Framed this way, we may also think of the phoneme itself is a very special kind of rhematic symbolic legisign; it is a sign of possibility that directs attention to its representamen with little by the way of an associated idea apart from its role as an oppositive, negative, correlative value within a system of differential elements. That is, its extensions are “unconsciously felt as ‘placed’” like steps in dance (SAPIR, 1925, p. 39-40). But this role as a functional, type-level, conventionalized value and synthesis of distinct qualitative attributes within a system of possible combinations gives it a rhematic character. Saussure’s concept of value as combinatoric potential more generally corresponds to the principle of “qualitative possibility” constitutive of rhematic symbolic legisigns differentially arranged, dimensionalized, and motivated by linguistic systems qua structured codes.

Moving up a level, dicent symbolic legisigns, or propositions, are, within our inherited European linguistic ideology, an ideal typical category corresponding to the fully formed utterance, the plane from which to derive Saussurean *langue* as a virtual system. A dicent sign is a sign which, for its interpretant, is “a sign of actual existence”.¹⁴ The proposition, qua dicent symbolic legisign, is the realization of combinatoric potential of Saussurean value in linguistic composition – the idealized form for asserting “what there (indexically) is.” To do so, it relies on speaker expectations about the how rhematic symbolic legisigns (terms within a paradigmatic axis of selection) are relatively attracted to or repelled by others in combination (i.e., in ideologically well-formed propositions).¹⁵

¹⁴ On processes of “dicentization,” see Ball (2014).

¹⁵ In this way, the proposition itself eventually came to serve as the baseline unit for the linguistics of syntactic structures that would emerge in the mid-Twentieth Century when the paradigmatic possibilities of a Saussurean grammar could not adequately predict the organization of elements along the syntagmatic plane (see Silverstein (2012)). The syntactic structural type itself was formulated as a new, if still ambiguous, kind of rhematic legisign. In an interesting etymological twist from early Nineteenth Century England, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1990) proposed the name *rhematic* for a science of idealized functional syntax – from the ancient Greek *rhema*, “thing said” or “utterance,” to be contrasted with *onoma* and *logos*. For Coleridge, *rhematic* would be a “meta-grammatic... doctrine of arranging words and sentences perspicuously” subsuming within it the mere “grammatical scheme & instrument of connecting words significantly” (1820-1, §4771); “the Science not yet named, lying between Grammar & Rhetoric” (1824, §5133), i.e., the arrangement of utterances or the “logic of sentences,” whereas “the object of rhetoric is persuasion, – of logic, conviction, – of grammar, significancy” (COLERIDGE, 1835, p. 137). In postwar Prague school linguistics, *theme* is contrasted with *rheme* as presupposed or continuous contextual information is contrasted with new and thus more functionally dynamic information. My use of the terms

Finally, the argument symbol legisign. An argument sign is a sign that, for its interpretant, is “a sign of law” and which represents an object by fully expressing its triadic character as a sign. Crucially, this sign type is the only *argument* sign allowable in Peirce’s doctrine (there is, obviously, a further well-known trichotomy of arguments into deduction, induction, and abduction). This sign type is much beloved by philosophers, for it consolidates the assumptions of a grammar of linguistic units, and of a syntax of propositional forms, and projects it onto the idealized plane of logic as a specialized metalinguistic ideology mobilized as an instrument for the investigation of denotationally projective truth. Peirce offers the example of the syllogism, in which three propositions point to, and rely on, and mutually reinforce one another. Note that the argument symbol legisign is, within my re-arranged Peircean triangle (Figure 2), seemingly diametrically opposed to qualisigns; indeed, this re-arrangement visualizes the extreme degree to which the philosophical assertion tends to be treated ideologically (i.e., “felt”) as somehow standing apart from, and therefore able to comment distantly on, the extreme range of other sign types corresponding to the varieties of human experience. The re-arranged diagram, however, returns indexicality to the center as both the “presenting fact of language” (SILVERSTEIN, 2012, p. 15) and the first principle of a thoroughly sociocultural semiotics.

Now, moving leftward from traditional linguistics, we immerse ourselves in the domain of indexicality: indexical legisigns and sinsigns. Pragmatics, as mobilized in our contemporary semiotic paradigm, pertains generally to the problem of indexicality and meta-indexicality. A robust concept of indexicality has made it possible to move methodologically from the structural enclosure of symbolic legisigns (traditional linguistics, which, following Saussure, has largely erased secondness from its methodology even as it continues to depend upon it) outward to view their replicas and variations in combination and context, under different semiotico-structural conditions not conforming to or resembling a linguistic code. The move indexically outward puts linguistic analysis in continuous relation with other, non-linguistic pragmatic processes. These pragmatic processes – whether explicitly discursive or not – have been explained through a specifically semiotic theory of interaction and its metapragmatic framing and regimentation, incorporating both the classic metasemantic equivalences that established (and continue to constitute) the primary methodology of traditional linguistics, as well as the introduction of the concept of linguistic ideology to account for such biases and their political uses (SILVERSTEIN, 1976, 1979). In subsequent decades, careful attention to the reflexive and discursive metapragmatic framing of the pragmatics of social life

rheme, *rhematic*, and *rhematics* in the present article clearly exceeds the strictures of the language-focused formulations as well as of the Greek etymology more generally.

has made it possible to expand early insights on the unavoidably indexical nature of “shifters” and the “message” (JAKOBSON, 1984 [1957], 1960) into the ethnographic analysis of the poetic-pragmatic structuring of complex semiotic compositions in context, interaction, and interdiscursive circulation (SILVERSTEIN, 2014).

Now let us proceed directly leftward from the locus classicus of linguistics – the rhematic symbolic legisign. The six sign types horizontally aligned to the gentle slope are all rhematic signs. Recall that the rhematic sign is, for its interpretant, a sign of possibility and is “understood to represent its object in its characters merely.” This basic rhematic aspect is exhibited in the signs from the right hand of the gentle horizontal slope to the left, beginning with “terms” such as common nouns (or, as noted above, any analytical element within the traditional planes of linguistic analysis) and ending with qualisigns or “feelings (of)” to the lower left. The apperceived self-contained unitary simplicity of the representamen, combined with the qualitative potential of its possible objects, links signs along the rhematic cline.

This “qualitative” relationship between the rhematic sign’s formal character or features and the array of its possible objects finds its most explicit expression in iconicity. Because of the interpretant’s emphasis on the form, character, or features of the representamen, iconicity (i.e., a ground which links a representamen and object by likeness or some shared quality) is a residual effect of rhematic signs, which is sometimes latent and sometimes foregrounded explicitly among them. This effect has been crucial for recent linguistic anthropological accounts of processes of “iconization” as a regular and pronounced effect of rhematization more generally (CHUMLEY, 2013; IRVINE; GAL, 2000; GAL; IRVINE, 2019). This apperceived iconicity is a residual effect of a more general process which focuses the representamen and its unitary character as supplying some information about its (potential) object through its own features – i.e., an object-space of qualitative possibility drawn from the attributed qualities felt to be most salient to the signal-form (GAL, 2017). I refer, then, to this horizontally aligned slope, and the problematics foregrounded by the sign categories there, following the continuity of rhematic signs from symbolic legisigns to iconic qualisigns, as the domain of *rhematics*.

There is insufficient space to fully explore all of rhematic signs in the rearranged diagram. However, I must note the functionally significant placement of two sign types that have long been crucial for sociocultural analysis. Just left of the domain of traditional linguistics are rhematic indexical legisigns. These signs carry over problems from linguistics proper, such as “shifters,” which I mentioned above. They also establish more general issues of communicative underdeterminacy in interaction – the typical examples usually given are types of shouts and telephone rings and knocks at the door. And, even more

expansively, they direct us to a core problematic regarding cultural typologies of various non-denotational gestures. A now-classic discussion of this problem can be found in Clifford Geertz's famous reflections on eyelid movements: twitches, blinks, winks, parodies of all three, and so on, in the metapragmatic problem of "thick description" toward a "scientific phenomenology of culture."

Moving leftward still, the rhematic iconic legisign puts in semiotic terms the typification of social form itself, i.e., figurative structures that are generalizable from, exert formal typifying pressure on, and even can seem to stand apart from the specific arrangements of social action. The example given by Parmentier for this kind of sign is architectural order, which is a type-level generalization from, and exerts formal pressure on, token-level specific instances of buildings or blueprints or virtual renderings. Cultural cosmologies also exhibit this kind of type-level ordering of "what there is," as do rituals that bring pieces of that big ontic picture into the here-and-now of social action. As we now observe, indexical iconicity is the concept necessary for explaining the efficacious, dense, poetically organized ritual processes of dynamic figuration that link micro-cosmic and macro-cosmic planes through social form (TAMBLIAH, 1985; STASCH, 2011). In fact, when we speak of any structured reflexive model or pragmatic paradigm of social life, any register or genre, conceptual structures from kinship to grammar, we are speaking in part about rhematic iconic legisigns (the other major part being dicent indexical legisigns). The rhematic element in these typified sign configurations combines their integrity as seemingly internally unified forms with the qualitative possibilities of their effects; their iconic function provides a structured mapping or depiction of their possible effects qua indexical extensions.

In Figure 2, I have placed a parallel, gently sloping solid horizontal line just under the continuum of rhematic signs. This line indicates the boundary between what, in Peircean terms, are minimally "genuine" signs and those which are not. This boundary in no way is intended to communicate that what falls below the line is not semiotic. By minimally genuine, I mean those signs which, for the interpretant, are minimally triadic. Borrowing concepts from mathematics, Peirce used the terms "genuine" and "degenerate" to account for the 10-sign arrangement overall, as well as for the way the interpretant can construe the constitution of a sign differently from its determination, i.e., to account for differences between the vectors of determination and representation as they are expressed within the triadic sign (PARMENTIER, 2016, p. 63-79). For Peirce, the argument symbol legisign is truly "genuine" because it is most self-reflexively triadic. There is, however, a terminological irony: what is most "genuine" in Peircean terms exhibits the greatest and most obvious degree of conventionalization, and the least "genuine" exhibits the greatest experience of immediacy ("feelings").

Qualia lie just beyond the threshold of minimally genuine signs; indeed, they may be conceptualized as the semiotic effect of sociocultural pressure penetrating the minimal threshold of genuine signs. Just above qualia (and just above the line) are rhematic iconic qualisigns: qualities serving as a sign, “feelings of,” “signs of firstness,” or “firstness under its form of thirdness.” The phrase “form of thirdness” indicates a minimally genuine (although degenerate) triadic sign, with “qualitative possibility” as the indeterminate (immediate) object. Qualia, by contrast, are “facts of firstness.” “Facts,” in Peirce’s terms, are a kind of secondness; qualia can also be described as “firstness under its form of secondness”.¹⁶ Another way to put it, which emphasizes a syntactic inversion, is this: whereas qualisigns are “feelings of,” qualia are elements “of feeling.” As facts of firstness, qualia are posited as the unitary, raw features of sensuous experience; they are semiotically generated, but they seem to resist being apperceived as signs with “standing for” relations. Their semioticity is reinstated as they become objects of reflection and manipulation via rhematics, pragmatics, and symbolics.

In Figure 2, I have placed an additional semiotic category below qualia: “qualities,” or “mere abstract potentialities.” The vertical line descending from qualisigns, past the threshold of minimally genuine signs, to qualia and qualities parallels and inverts the vertical line ascending from rhematic symbolic legisigns to argument symbol legisigns as the Peircean consummation of semiotic genuineness. Qualities, in this formulation, are entirely hypothetical – they are just kinds of “firstness” ... “not referring to anything nor lying behind anything,” i.e., monadic state, a ground (CP 1.356-7). Such “abstract qualities” are interesting to think about but basically constitute a Peircean approach to metaphysics. For an empirically oriented social semiotics of culture, the central interest is not in metaphysics, but rather in how social groups pragmatically form and transform in relation to the conceptualization of such qualities, especially as they are conventionalized and felt through qualisigns and made explicit through lexicalization (see “hypostatic abstraction” above).¹⁷

Dwelling below the line, we may consider an additional semiotic category. The derived category of “brute experiential facts” corresponds to the otherwise featureless “intensities” that often go under the name “affect” in social theory.¹⁸

¹⁶ For an extensive, detailed discussion of these concepts, see Harkness (2017); Rosenthal (2001); Houser (2010).

¹⁷ An obvious but essential point here is that the qualia problem is both constrained and made accessible by the limits of metapragmatic awareness (SILVERSTEIN, 2001 [1981]). Lexicalization, morphosyntax, and conventionalized qualisigns will exert an epistemic force on what to make of, i.e., how to predicate, qualia. Therefore, we look to the far right of the rhematic cline (rhematic symbolic legisigns) and the far left of rhematic cline (rhematic iconic qualisigns) for the likely sign-types that will structure, help us navigate, and subsume access to the qualia space. The necessity of “passing through” lexicalized qualisigns on the way to qualia corresponds to the Peircean formulation of qualia as *facts of firstness*, where “of [the fact] every quality whatever is either true or false” (CP 1.436).

¹⁸ For a brief, helpful commentary, emphasizing secondness, see Manning (2018).

This category is also entirely hypothetical, posited only indirectly and, as depicted in the diagram, fills the diffuse space (as a kind of negative pragmatics) beyond the threshold of minimally genuine signs. Recall that qualia can be described as “firstness under its form of secondness” or as “facts of firstness,” where “facts” refer to the “form of secondness.” By “brute experiential facts,” I am referring to the raw experiential facticity of “pure secondness”; however, crucially, I do so through an act of “prescission” (note the spelling) which further separates parts which are empirically found together.¹⁹ Like “qualities,” these “brute experiential facts” are not accessed directly; they can only be “prescinded” from qualia. But given their implied agentive and efficacious property, rather than being anchored to the problem of abstract features or character, they are conceptualized in terms of degrees, the otherwise featureless effects of which can be felt. In empirical fact, most of what goes under the term “affect” in anthropology and social theory is actually many different sign processes; like emotion, it is “a simple predicate substituted by an operation of the mind for a highly complicated predicate” (PEIRCE, CP 5.292).²⁰ With some effort, we can conceptualize the transition across the rhematic threshold of minimally genuine signs by imagining the processes of semiotic compression in relation to the interpretant: from a minimally triadic sign of qualitative possibility (qualisign), passing “below the line” to the seemingly suspended semiosis of representamenal synthesis (quale), to two hypothetical semiotic elements: (a) the prescinded “pure secondness” as the effect of an interpretant merely being affected (an otherwise featureless intensity or brute experiential fact); and (b) a mere abstract potentiality (quality).

This entire operation presupposes a metapragmatically regimented, pragmatically generated, dynamic complex of sign phenomena above the minimally genuine sign threshold. It is in this way that we can conceptualize qualia as *cultural emergents*, i.e., precipitates of semiotic processes that do not necessarily bear resemblance to those processes. Qualia are apperceived as standing somehow outside or beyond the reach of semiosis (hence their treatment as “non-signs” or “suspended semiosis”), all the while being the products of, thoroughly inflected by, and feeding back into (and indeed sustaining) these semiotic processes.

¹⁹ I think Peirce puts this most lucidly in MS 499: “I may suppose that a star shines with an intense light without making any supposition at all in regard to the color of the light, further than that it has some color. We thus separate luminosity from hue. I called this mode of analysis prescission.”

²⁰ Note the continuity here with Barthes’s observation that “No doubt the moment we turn an art into a subject (for an article, for a conversation) there is nothing left but to give it predicates.” A central concern of Roland Barthes’ masterful essay, “The Grain of the Voice,” (BARTHES, 1977[1972]) in which this observation appears, was an attempt to point out and theorize beyond the *je ne sais quoi*-ism of the aesthetic, the “impossible account” of the thrill of artistic experience, musical ones in particular, and singing especially, by thinking of the “truth of language” in relation to the “truth of the voice” as a “grain”.

3. The sensuous semiotics of certitude

Let me summarize a few points. The qualia project I have described is a thoroughly semiotic one, aimed at the sensuous rather than the narrowly sensory, and at the sociocultural rather than the individual. The anthropological commitment in the qualia project is to develop reliable semiotic instruments for the analysis of sociocultural life. To meet this commitment, it shifts much of the methodological focus from introspection to interaction. It also treats with great caution any lexicalized cultural concepts that may elsewhere be held up as ontologically prior or given, whether they be simplex lexemes like “truth” or morphologically derived hypostatic abstractions like “materiality” (the 18th Century concept of phlogiston is a helpful, cautionary reminder in this regard).

With this in mind, let us also recall that the first step descending below the threshold of the minimally genuine sign does not, in the first instance, mean decomposition. And, moreover, the shift from upper right to lower left of Figure 2 does not mean less complexity, per se, but rather a kind of experiential condensation. Qualia represent an unstable limit to this principle, the effect of which is an encounter with the synthesized features of semiotic effects. In qualia, gradients of relative internal simplicity or complexity are suspended by this representamenal unity. However, the hypothetical semiotic elements, i.e., brute experiential facts (otherwise featureless intensities or pure secondness) and abstract qualities (pure firstness), do involve a process of decomposition, as they are derived through prescissive abstraction and hypostatic abstraction respectively. They are conceptually derived from qualia using semiotic instruments from above the minimally “genuine” threshold.

Recalling a set of terms corresponding to the Peircean categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness – namely, tone, token, and type – we can put these observations more formulaically: the contemporary semiotics of qualia is the investigation into the *typification of tone entokened*. Built on the model of the now widely used term, “entextualized”, the ugly brutalism, “entokened” is intended to capture the emergent aspect of the qualia problem from the rhematic, pragmatic, and symbolic domains. In this sense, the sensuous semiotics of certitude framed as the typification of tone entokened is a method for studying the social generalization of individually sensuous truths: the elusive domain of *tone* discoverable through *typifying* processes of *entokenment*.

The sensuous unity of the quale as a cultural emergent may be just as well applied to relatively focused sensuous experiences (e.g., corresponding to the stimuli associated with classic sensory-epistemological channels) as to more overtly complicated encounters with complex aesthetic objects qua unified, poetically self-focusing textual totalities.²¹ While the rhematic aspect is

²¹ On aesthetic textuality, see Portis-Winner (1994).

fundamental to the production of any kind of textuality, some textual formations may emphasize this aspect as primary and definitional, as seeming to unify form and feeling, for example, in the dense, intensifying poetics-cum-aesthetic truth of ritual textuality (e.g., Kaluli “lift-up-over-sounding” in Feld (1994, 1996); Sardinian dance in Sedda (2019 [2003])); Korean glossolalia and group prayer in Harkness (2021)).

An especially generative species of rhematic textuality is what Constantine Nakassis has recently called the “image-text” (NAKASSIS, 2019). Developed on the models of the pragmatic (indexical) aspect of interactional textuality and the symbolic aspect of denotational textuality, the image-text is an exemplary kind rhematic text in its general orientation to firstness and its specific manifestation of the aesthetic function.²² The terminology of *image* here launches from the typical kind of non-denotational textual object in the visual field, i.e., the pictorial “image,” to evoke two distinct functional positions along the rhematic cline: (a) the rhematic iconic aspect of the first of Peirce’s three kinds of (hypo-)icons (*image*, diagram, metaphor) and (b) the rhematic symbolic legisign corresponding to Saussure’s “acoustic *image*” as a defined space of system-level intension (cf. Locke’s “ideas” as mental images).

Rhematic texts may emerge and anchor social action through more established compositional genres (culinary, filmic, literary, musical, etc.), or they may arise from relatively informal, if stunningly complex ones, such as observing a quiet, clear, starry Idaho night sky, or standing overwhelmed at rush hour in Tokyo’s Shinjuku station. From such experiences, various abstract qualities and affective degrees may be inferred and attributed; but this is possible by working from qualia as experientially, sensuously unified. Indeed, if rhematic textuality has a telos, it is the promise of the totalizing sensuous unity of the quale that awaits consciousness as it passes the far threshold of the rhematic cline, i.e., as semiotic process submerges itself into the water of suspended semiosis, momentarily holding its indexical breath.²³ Of course, most encounters with qualia are much more banal precisely because they are felt to be so natural.

It is important to point out the problem that this formulation of qualia as facts of firstness presents for distinguishing between an “immediate” and a “dynamical” object, in Peirce’s terms. A crucial effect of the semiotic suspension of apperceived semioticity is the absence of an “immediate” object: there isn’t one. This is why qualia present as the sensuous substance of pre-semiotic authority. By contrast, the “dynamical” object is semiotically expansive: if it is

²² On denotational and interactional textuality, see Silverstein (2004).

²³ In a personal communication, Susan Gal has helpfully suggested that the term “grok,” coined by Robert Heinlein in the science fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), captures and lexicalizes the dream of intuitive immediacy, a yearning for total empathy with or feelingful understanding of another consciousness, entity, or fact – i.e., the fantasy of a non- or pre-semiotic epistemology of encounter, which qualia can motivate.

anything, it is the total semiotic history, process, function, and structure from which the quale can plausibly emerge. Consider as a singular quale the total experiential whole, the unity of feeling, the complete character tacitly attributed to standing outside of one's Boston home at mid-day in the warm Linden-scented June air and focusing the sun's rays through the convex lens of a magnifying glass onto a dry brown scrap of crunchy leaf, perched lightly on the unique grooves of a single finger of one's own hand. The combustion that results is a grand planetary phenomenon of electromagnetic radiation, biological matter, and chemical reaction, catalyzed by human attention and manipulation into a fleeting change of state that can be seen, touched, smelled, heard, and, if one desires, tasted. In its totality, it is no doubt meaningful; but it cannot (to my knowledge) be assigned, by traditional models, a "meaning." Even though we do not have a single lexemic form to correspond its character, it can be considered as having a "quale." Condensing millennia of human curiosity and invention, transmitted by communicative interaction, and preserved by the poetics of ritual, the act of igniting with sunshine that small scrap of dry leaf can be remembered and imagined, and it can be repeated. The element of feeling that comprehends, for a participant, the experiential whole is a thoroughly cultural emergent.

If we cannot step into the same quale twice, then what is the point? The point is that social groups do by and large establish degrees of sameness across various radical epistemological ruptures. From the grinding, hissing, scraping sounds of Felicia Reynolds's weighted blades on ice, to the scent of a burning leaf on the tip of one's finger, each attempt at a replication of experience exploits qualia as facts of firstness, which themselves can be generated with increasing precision (here, note the contrastive spelling) toward relatively conventionalized qualisigns, which, as they become relatively conventionalized, can be assigned lexicalizations – existing or new – and whole registers and genres of human conduct, across modalities, emerge to produce relatively stable linkages across these semiotic planes.²⁴

The act of starting a fire with a magnifying glass has a distinct textuality, insofar as it is repeatable as a structure of mutually indexical components resembling a familiar composition. A multimodal text, its typification belongs to a kind of culturally recognizable genre – what might, for example, be called "childhood science experiments." Other such experiments might involve mixing baking soda and vinegar to simulate volcanic eruption or monitoring the growth of mold on sliced bread under different conditions of humidity and temperature. Insofar as the act is composed of co-occurring signs that, together, point to predictable features of context, such as the type of person who engages in such an activity (a child or an educator) or the type of activity that might accompany it (science education), the activity is also enregistered. As these linkages stabilize,

²⁴ For two semiotically continuous ethnographic examples, see Harkness (2013) and Lee (2022).

the qualic totality might also be stabilized, from which specific qualities might be derived as culturally conventionalized, lexicalized, even institutionalized qualisigns (e.g., “the child-like feeling of curiosity and discovery”).²⁵ Such qualities may also be decomposed into more discrete qualisigns, thus narrowing corresponding qualia that are generated to explicit zones of attention and hierarchies of experience (e.g., “carefully” selecting the proper leaf; “delicately” focusing the ray of light; “subtly” blocking the breeze with one’s body, etc.). In the shift from viewing qualia as individual idiosyncrasies of personal experience to viewing them as cultural emergents, the anthropological qualia project attempts to understand the sociocultural processes that create, regiment, and transform this diffuse sensuous matter of social life.

Finally – and fundamentally – back to language. The domain of rhematics, as I have characterized it here, charts a pathway to bring qualia to bear on questions that motivated early modern linguists in both the Saussurean and Boasian traditions. In the first instance, this pathway builds upon the well-established concepts of genre and register as differentiated but intersecting semiotic planes involving the relative text-type-indicating (genre) or context-feature-indicating (register) poetics of stereotyped co-occurrence (qua “reflexive models” or “pragmatic paradigms”). Genre and register are the indexically saturated forms through which language is experienced, and also the semiotic pathways through which qualia become relatively stabilized in relation to lexicalized qualisigns of value.²⁶ The rhematic cline also reaches even further into the linguistic system as such. It leads to the foundational units of the code – i.e., the system of rhematic symbolic legisigns that is presupposed by speech – as well as to foundational questions about the nature of language.

The problem of linguistic “feeling” (not only linguistic representations of feeling) has been present since the founding of modern linguistics. Saussure himself stressed the significance of the typical speaker’s “feeling” of the linguistic system qua social fact (see, e.g., Saussure’s various discussions of the “feeling” for identity, segmentation, analogy, and functional roles of abstract entities in grammar). Indeed, the very concept of linguistic value was based on the typical speaker’s “feelings” for (i.e., intuitions about) the compositional possibilities and restrictions of a linguistic system. This basic problem still informs the method of much of traditional linguistics today. Linguists ask (in various ways) how speakers “feel” about specific kinds of sentences, and they place an asterisk [*] next to non-normative or undocumented usages to indicate negative feelings of impossibility to the point of total avoidance.

²⁵ Note that this phenomenon forms the basis of corporate (multimodal) “design language,” the qualisigns of “brand” (MOORE, 2003), and consumer “commodity registers” (AGHA, 2011) more generally.

²⁶ See, e.g., Gal (2013, p. 31-33).

Edward Sapir made the problem of feeling explicit in his linguistic discussions. The word “feeling” itself is repeated throughout his writings. The importance of *Sprachgefühl* is perhaps most pronounced in his discussions of the “psychological reality” of the phoneme, where he emphasized the psychological effects of linguistic categories for the apperception of speech sounds and native speaker intuitions about language: “‘ideal sounds,’ which are constructed from one’s intuitive feeling of the significant relations between the objective sounds, are more ‘real’ to a naive speaker than the objective sounds themselves” (SAPIR, 1925, p. 45). Sapir, in this very Saussurean moment, is referring to the “psychology” of combinatoric potential in the phonological composition of utterances, i.e., what “feels” right or wrong, real or impossible, as Saussurean value being realized on the syntagmatic plane. This recalls Franz Boas’s (1889) earlier observations on “alternating sounds” qua “alternating apperceptions,” when he demonstrated with searing brevity and clarity how the phonologies of indigenous languages of North America “sounded” (i.e., “felt”) primitive and disorganized to the primitivizing and misorganizing ears of bigoted linguists. The typified “listening subject”²⁷ that formed Boas’s target had (mis-)heard the unfamiliar speech sounds through the categories of his own phonological system, a conditioned feeling that was further shaped by the influential and destructive social evolutionary view of language typology.

The rhematic emphasis on the feeling of form can help us chart improved methodological pathways to understanding the problem of “feeling” at the level of the linguistic system, via the interactional, interdiscursive, and enregistered dimensions of social life that have rightfully taken center stage in the pragmatic reframing of the problem of language in anthropology. From Whorf on the “logical inevitables” of “fashions of speaking” that cryptotypically cut across multiple categories of linguistic analysis, to Jakobson on the “frustrated expectation” of an unconsummated poetics, such a commitment recalls, if not always explicitly, at least in spirit, Sapir’s call to confront, head on, the “form-feeling” (put positively) or “tyranny” (put negatively) of our own linguistic usage: “Of all students of human behavior, the linguist should by the very nature of his subject matter be the most relativist in feeling, the least taken in by the forms of his own speech” (SAPIR, 1929, p. 212). This requires, as he put it, “the destructive analysis of the familiar” (SAPIR, 2014 [1921], p. 94).

To conclude, we might again consider the contemporary qualia project in both its negative and positive senses. One future direction of research in qualia is to continue to expand into increasingly non-linguistic domains of sociocultural life, to the limits of the semiotic paradigm applied to empirical, ethnographic research. Another direction, just as vital, is to move beyond the predicate, the hypostatic abstraction, the tokens of lexicalized tone types (the focus of much

²⁷ On the concept of the “listening subject,” see Inoue (2006).

of our thinking on the qualia problem to date), and rejuvenate some foundational system-level linguistic questions. We can do so by tracing the methodological pathway opened by rhematics – from the “properly” linguistic to the sensuous featural syntheses of qualia – to better understand how naturalized elements of feeling within a plenary structure of socialized apperception permeate the organization, use, and experience of language, and, as a result, linguistic propositions and arguments about truth. ●

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Qualia, categorias semióticas, verdade sentida: remática, pragmática, simbólica

 HARKNESS, Nicholas

Resumo: É um truísmo sócio-científico, e também um problema, que as verdades sentidas “imediatas” dos indivíduos façam parte de uma semiótica “dinâmica” dos grupos sociais e, portanto, devem ser investigadas como tais. Qualia, cuidadosamente formulados como *atos de primeiridade*, desagregam e esclarecem partes desse problema. Os atos de primeiridade se tornam uma categoria semiótica metodologicamente viável a partir da reformulação, feita de acordo com o interpretante, do Triângulo de Peirce de 1903 referente aos dez tipos de signos. Este rearranjo diagramático revela o domínio da *remática*, estendendo-se continuamente dos sinais remáticos simbólicos mais familiares, que são os legissignos, aos qualia entendidos como casos limite de semiose nos quais a própria mediação semiótica parece estar suspensa no (e pelo) imediato estético. O rearranjo diagramático também acentua os qualia como culturalmente emergentes: sedimentos de vasta escala e operações de semiose que enganosamente guardam pouca semelhança com o seu processo de produção. Um exemplo de calibração sônica, cinestésica e visual dá respaldo à discussão.

Palavras-chave: qualia; atos de primeiridade; remática; semiótica sensorial; classes de signos peircianas.

Como citar este artigo

HARKNESS, Nicholas. Qualia, semiotic categories, and sensuous truth: rhematics, pragmatics, symbolics. *Estudos Semióticos* [online], vol. 18, n. 2. São Paulo, agosto de 2022. p. 56-81. Disponível em: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/esse>. Acesso em: dia/mês/ano.

How to cite this paper

HARKNESS, Nicholas. Qualia, semiotic categories, and sensuous truth: rhematics, pragmatics, symbolics. *Estudos Semióticos* [online], vol. 18.2. São Paulo, August 2022. p. 56-81. Retrieved from: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/esse>. Accessed: month/day/year.

Data de recebimento do artigo: 22/01/2022.

Data de aprovação do artigo: 26/05/2022.

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