1. The role humans play in models of communication

"Culture communicates", says Edmund Leach (1976:2). To understand culture,' therefore, one seems to need models of communication. Let us examine such models with respect to the role they attribute to humans. Shannon and Weaver (1949) and Meyer-Eppler (1959) specify the factors which must be involved in a process so that it becomes a process of communication. It is necessary to have a sign (i.e., a signal) and a channel, through which it reaches a recipient, and in certain cases there is also a sender, from which the sign originates, as well as a code, which provides the signifiers and signifieds, according to which the sign must be interpreted if a message is to be drawn from it.

Various types of interaction are assumed to occur between these factors, yet the question, which of these factors can be embodied by humans, is answered in the same way by all communication models. There is a general tendency to define the communication process without recourse to humans. Shannon and Weaver (1949:3 and 33ff), for example, design a chain of communication, which connects the information source with its destination.

"That wasn't Yeltzin, that was his double."
(Commentary by Jürgen Thebrath in the German TV news Tagesthemen of Feb. 16, 1995)
via a sender, a channel, and a receiver, but consists merely of a series of technical apparatuses linked with one another.\footnote{Weaver (in Shannon & Weaver 1949:3) treats, among other topics, the process "by means of which one mechanism (say automatic equipment to track an airplane and to compute its probable future positions) affects another mechanism (say a guided missile chasing this airplane)" Shannon (in Shannon & Weaver 1949:33ff) investigates as exemplary cases the telegraph, the telephone, radio, and television.}

A different picture arises when one scrutinizes the verbal descriptions formulated by the authors of these communication models; they are heavily based on anthropomorphic ideas (cf. Cherry 1957=1967:260): There is a sender, who has the intention of sending a message to a recipient. He chooses a code which he believes to be mastered by the recipient, and he selects from it the signifieds appropriate for the intended message. Since these signifieds are paired with certain signifiers through the code, the sender then produces signs which embody these signifiers. He sends them through the channel to the recipient, who goes through the same chain of factors in reversed order if he has the intention of drawing a message from the sign (cf. Posner 1989:244f). As a result, most people who apply models of communication in the human and social sciences equate man’s role with the roles of the sender or recipient in communication processes and do not consider whether humans might also be signs, channels, codes, signifiers, signifieds, or messages (cf., e.g., Jakobson 1960:357f). Saussure equips the sender and recipient with a brain, mouth, and ears, and describes the "model of a speaking-circuit" (1916:28 = 1964:11ff) as follows: "Suppose that the opening of the circuit is in A's brain [...] A given concept unlocks a corresponding sound-image in the brain; this purely psychological phenomenon is followed in turn by a physiological process: the brain transmits an impulse corresponding to the image to the organs used in producing sounds. Then the sound waves travel from the mouth of A to the ear of B: a purely physical process. Next, the circuit continues in B, but the order is reversed: from the ear to the brain, the physiological transmission of the sound image; in the brain, the psychological association of the image with the corresponding concept." In such a context, it could appear erroneous to speak of man as a sign. And it seems to fit this context well when Roland Barthes (1975:84) remarks: "I live in a society of senders: each person I meet sends me a book, a text, a result, a prospect, a petition, an invitation to an event or an exhibition, etc. The pleasure to write, to produce, presses from all sides."\footnote{The original passage by Barthes (1975:84) is as follows: ‘Je vis dans toute société d'émetteurs (en étant un moi-même): chaque personne que je rencontre ou qui m'écrir, m'adresse un livre, un texte, un bilan, un prospectus, une protestation, une invitation à un spectacle, à une exposition, etc. La jouissance d'écrire, de produire, presse d toutes parts [...]’}

2. Humans as images of god

There were times in which humans in the West did not consider themselves primarily as senders who produce signs, but at best as recipients who must interpret one another as signs. At the beginning of the 13th century the German poet Freidank wrote, "Nehein gescehpêde is só fri, sin bezeichne anders dan si si" ("No creature can avoid denoting something different from itself"; Freidank's "Bescheidenheit 12, 11-12"). The justification for this claim is to be found in the Bible (Genesis I, 26): "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' [...] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (English translation according to the Revised Standard Version).

As image of God every person is a sign, and the Creator must be conceived as a sender according to the communication models. The God of the Jews and the Christians created Adam from earth and Eve from one of Adam's ribs so that they might refer to Hirn as their Creator. Thus, every human can be understood as God's means of addressing the other humans. Those who regard a person as a sign of God in this way may find it difficult to accept that the very person might simultaneously be a sender in the sense of the communication models: Whenever a person speaks, they will assume that someone else is speaking through him – either God or the evil spirits who instrumentalize him. In the Western tradition, God's medium of addressing people through the body of a given person is that person's soul or heart.
He interprets the Bible in a new way by maintaining that it was not people through the body of a given person is that person's soul or heart. God who created man in His image but rather that it was man who imagined God to be of his own kind and who invented the myth of the Creation solely as legitimization of this theological idea. Formulations which point to such an interpretation can be found even in Luther; in his commentary on the first Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me", in /he Great Catechism of 1529 one can read: " [...] trust and faith alone maketh both God and idols" (Werke 30, 1:132,32-133,8). Later commentators (e.g., Ebeling 1964:42) are certainly correct in emphasizing: "It would be foolishness to interpret [Luther's] [...] phrase to mean that man is a creator and God a mere creation." Yet exactly this interpretation was put forth explicitly by Ludwig Feuerbach (1841), who viewed God as a product and projection of mankind. This thought persists in modern theological considerations (cf., e.g., Karl Barth 1928).

The inversion of the idea of the creation posits man as a sender, and this sender not only creates signs existing independently of him, such as images or texts (Aleida Assmann 1996: § 1, calls these "excarnated signs"), but he also can posit himself as a sign when necessary (i.e., he can appear as an "incarnated sign"). Roland Barthes, who will serve us as a source for contemporary views in the following, pronounces the latter intention in this way (1975:145): "I had only one solution: to write myself anew -- to add another kind of statement to the books, topics, memories, and texts." This "other kind of statement" does not consist in adding to the already published works further sign-vehicles, which then have an existence external to the sender, it rather consists in using one's own body as a sign-vehicle, as animals do. "Hardly touching it, I cover the written work, the bygone body and corpus with a kind of patch-work, a rhapsodic quilt composed of squares sewn together." In order to discover which message man as a sign can convey after the exclusion of God from the semiotic discourse, one need no longer drive to the core of man's being and involve his soul or heart:

"Far from immersing in myself I remain on the surface, because thus time it's about 'me (about my ego) and because the depths belong to the others" (Barthes 1975 145).

He who presents himself as a means of communication in Barthesian fashion will seldom be satisfied with his surface as it is. Taking over God's work, everyone creates oneself anew "as a man" or "as a woman". As early as the Stone Age, tattooing was supposed to support this semitization of the body. The man who froze to death on a Tyrolean glacier 4600 years ago had a tattoo on his body, which stands open to interpretation once more today. In the Palau Islands, as late as the 19th century, "the more tattoos a woman had on her pubic region, the more desired she was" (Probst 1992:22).

No wonder that God the Creator, in the Jewish or Christian sense, sought to prevent such interference with his creation: "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh [...] or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD" (Leviticus XIX, 28, Revised Standard Version). He who changes a sign conceived to be an image produces misunderstandings about its referent.

European women and men use much less incisive means of self presentation today: she applies make-up, mascara and lipstick, decorates herself with earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, or wears blouses, bodystockings, and stiletto-heeled shoes. He applies a razor and beard-trimmer, puts on hornrimmed glasses, and wears a shirt and tie. Both put on trousers and blazer, cap and scarf, if they don't leave it at sweaters and jeans.

3. Humans as utterances

Both the anthropomorphic communication models and the secularized idea of creation impose limitations upon the roles man may play in the sign process. They insinuate that a person is either only a sender or only a sign. If man is a sender, it seems impossible for him simultaneously to be a sign, because he would then not exist until he had been produced as a sign. If he is

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3 Deschner (1974) finds a comparable reversal of the actual relationships in the myth that the woman (Eve) was created from the body of the man (from Adam's rib), whereas, biologically seen, the opposite holds, that is, all humans tue bom from a woman's body.

4 Even in baroque mysticism God is occasionally portrayed as a creature and man as a creator, for example when Angelus Silesius (Johann Scheffler) writes in his Cherubinischer Wanderersmann (1674): "I know that God cannot live a moment without me; if I disappear he must necessarily surrender the Spirit."
a sign then it seems impossible for him to function as a sender, because as a sign he must have been produced by another sender and intended for (yet another) recipient.

Such paradoxes become especially noticeable if the sign is conceptualized as an utterance: as speech directed at another person in a process of communication. Roland Barthes loves places in which the roles of a sender, sign, and recipient, imposed upon the human body in the framework of communication theory, become indistinguishable, for example, a "Bar in Tangiers" (Barthes 1975:144=1978:153): In contrast to normal establishments of this type where "there is speaking, communicating, meeting", this bar is "a place of semiabsence. The room is not without bodies; they are even quite close, and that is the important thing" – yet they remain anonymous.

Nevertheless it is interesting to see what happens when people get involved with this division of roles and try to embody several roles simultaneously (Barthes 1875:144):

"[...] speaking while kissing, kissing while speaking. One should suppose that there is this desire since lovers constantly 'drink words from lovers' lips'. What they are enjoying there is [...] the stammered body."

With these formulations, Barthes makes clear in succinct brevity what is characteristic for loving. Lovers are bodies which enjoy (thus recipients) as well as bodies which are enjoyed (thus signs) as well as bodies which control the enjoyment of others by their behavior (thus senders). They present themselves as utterances directed at one another.

Other kinds of people's behavior can be understood as utterances as well. As an example, consider that which we all do every morning. Washing oneself, drying, putting on make-up, clothes, and jewelry: isn't it like a process of self-formulation in slow-motion? That which strides through the partment door, goes to the newsstand, enters the subway, rides the elevator and sits down in the office is no longer a 'stammered body' in Barthes' sense but a well-articulated sign: the preened image of a business manager, the carefully made-up face of the secretary, the consciously presented body of the model, the sloppily formulated audacity of the T-Shirt-wearer with blue-jeans and sandals, the hastily prepared appearance of the schoolgirl. All these are signs facing our neighbors, who are signs themselves, but feel addressed as recipients and inclined to respond as senders.

Fig. 2: “Toilette”, Japan, around 1870; 26,1cm x 19,8 cm (Album Rolf Mayer, Stuttgart; cf. Pollig et al. 1987: 206)

"In this bar an other's body never becomes a 'person' (with its personal data [...] etc.): I am invited for a walk, but there is no address directed at me. [...] The bar is [...] a neutral place: the utopia of the third concept, a drifting far away from the too-pure pair speech /silence."

The original is as follows (1975: 144): "Un soir, à moitié endormi sur une banquette de bar..., (PIT, 79). Voilà donc ce que je faisais dans cette 'bolte' de Tanger: j'y dormais un peu. Or la bolte, dans la petite sociologie des villes, est réputée lieu d'éveil et d'action (il

s'agit de parier, de communiquer, de rencontrer, etc); au contraire la bolte est ici un lieu de semi-absence. Cet espace n'est ce qui est important, mais ces corps, anonymes, animés de faibles mouvements, me laissent dans un tat d'oisiveté, d'irresponsabilité et de flottement: tout le monde est là, personne ne me demande rien, je gagne sur les deux tableaux: dans la bolte, le corps de lautre ne se transforme jamais en 'personne' (civile, psychologique, sociale, etc.): il me propose sa promenade, non son interlocution (Comme une drogue spécialement adaptée à mon organisation, la bolte peut alors devenir le lieu de travail de mes phrases: je ne le veux pas, je phrase: c'est le corps regardé, et non plus le corps &out& qui prend une fonction phatique (de contact), maintenant, entre la production de mon langage et le désir flottant dont cette production se nourrit, un rapport d'éveil, non de message. La bolte est en somme un lieu neutre: c'est l'utopie du troisième terme, la dérive loin du couple trop par: parler/se taire."

The original is as follows (1975: 144) "(...) parler en embrassant, embrasser en parlant. Il faut croire que cette volupté existe, puisque les amants ne cessent de 'boire la parole sur les lèvres aimées' Ce qu'ils goûtent alors, c'est, dans la lutte amoureuse, le jeu du sens qui éclos et s'interrompt: la fonction qui se trouble: en un mot: le corps bredouillé."
The analogy between verbal utterances and bodily demeanor can be pursued further into the modalities of communication. As in verbal utterances, one can distinguish between situations of production and reception of signs in daily interaction. Clothing, make-up, and jewelry cannot be adorned and set aside as quickly as one can articulate and correct oral utterances. Grooming as a situation of sign-production corresponds rather to sitting down at a desk and formulating a written manuscript for a speech which is to be read at a later date, when it will be correctable only with difficulty. The paperboy, the crowd in the subway, persons in the elevator, the colleagues at work react to an image that was created hours before not to mention the fact that the clothes can become disheveled, the jewelry lost, and the make-up smeared in the rain.

As in verbal utterances, the interpreter of bodily demeanor can never be certain that he draws the line between information conveyed intentionally and unintended conclusions properly. An important criterion for differentiation is the changeability of the bodily and behavioral features in question. Signs that are easily changed are more often suspected to be manipulated than others: “She proclaimed her innocence, but did you notice the way she was sitting there?” “He presented a perfect Show as a mayor with the chain of office around his neck and the signet ring on his finger, but his hands moved like those of a peasant.” As remarks of that kind demonstrate, we examine the gestures and posture in order to ascertain that we may trust the oral and facial expressions of a person.

To be certain that we can trust the bodily movements and clothes we test the more permanent characteristics of the body. This creates a hierarchy of credibility which relates life-long characteristics (fingerprints, voice patterns, eye color, primary sex characteristics, facial structure, skin color, birthmarks) to those lasting many years (body size, scars, mutilations, prothetic devices), those lasting several days (hairstyles, type of beard, length of nails), those remaining the same for several hours (clothes, jewelry, make-up), and those lasting only minutes (bodily position and posture) or changing by the second (facial expressions and gestures), or fractions of a second (speaking, laughing, sighing). This hierarchy is only interrupted by bodily reflexes (blinking at light disturbances, hiccupping, sneezing), which last only seconds and nevertheless count as behavior that is not manipulated.

Every human utterance is subject to this hierarchy of credibility and is almost automatically submitted to a contextual comparison. Therefore, persons who question the validity of their permanent characteristics (facial structure, primary sex characteristics, hairline, etc.) through surgical alterations (see Moser 1988) put themselves in a difficult situation. If one's long-term image appears to be manipulated, the credibility of one's shorter utterances is also weakened.8

Fig. 3: Francis Bacon “He’s My Main Man” (tattoo, 1991; cf. Hardy 1992:80).

4. Humans as signifiers

The hierarchy of credibility demonstrates that not all of a person's characteristics can be classified in the same way as utterances. Personal utterances are generally considered as intended, even if some of their aspects are not under full control, and they are typically short-lasting phenomena, even if they can achieve permanence through recording procedures. This justifies regarding not only linguistic formulations but also facial expression, gesture and posture, clothing, jewelry and make-up, length of fingernails, and hair- and beard styles as utterances produced by a person for the purpose of self-presentation.

8 Tattooed people must wrangle with this experience, at least in the western cultural world. He who is tattooed not only forces himself to say “forever yes” to an utterance that remains perceptible his whole life long, but he also irritates his companions, who might ask themselves which of his other permanent characteristics he had manipulate (cf Hardy 1992:5-15: "Forever Yes").
Yet the utterance analogy fails when it comes to body size and pupil dilation, skin color and fingerprints. These signs are either very difficult to control intentionally (body growth and pupil dilation) or hardly modifiable (pigmentation distribution in the skin and the pattern of ridges in the fingertips). Therefore they cannot be produced as signs even if they are received as such. They are interpretable only because they belong to a field of signifiers (Prieto 1966:37 = 1972:39f: "semantic field") which is structured in correspondence to a field of signifieds (Prieto 1966:35 = 1972:39: "noetic field").

Thus, before colonialization, people's skin color was seen as strongly correlating with their geographical place of origin. Even today, Africans from further south than the Sahara are referred to as "black", Asians as "yellow", Indians as "red", and Europeans as "white", and the consequences, attempts at mutual spatial exclusion and dominance, are well-known.

**Fig. 4:** Skin color and haircut serving as a basis for judgments about the local origin of people during colonialist times: Painting by William Blake titled “Africa and Asia support Europe” (illustration in Stedman 1796; cf. Pollig et al. 1987:30).

An African who paints himself white does not thereby become a European, and a European who paints himself black is still a European. They are just as incapable of changing their skin color as their roots, and for this reason the skin color can signify the origin of a person even though that person cannot use his skin color to communicate anything. However, an African who puts a white make-up an his face and a European who colors his skin black can communicate through this make-up. If the context is appropriate, they will tell their companions: "Imagine I were white and came from Europe!" or "Imagine I were black and came from Africa!" These are utterances in the sense discussed above.

If one regards humans as signs, one must therefore differentiate between communicative signs produced by a sender with a particular communicative intention, and significative signs. The latter embody particular signifiers which refer the recipients to corresponding signifieds if they are familiar with the appropriate code, even if they were not produced for this purpose. Signification is a sign process which can take place without anyone intending to send a message to someone. Through signification, a knowledgeable interpreter can be informed about a person without that person desiring so or ever having thought about it. The codes that underly such signification processes have been investigated since ancient times by medical semiotics (cf. Huckenbroich 1996: § 2.3). The resulting knowledge can engender great advantages for the sign recipients indeed, often at the expense of the unwitting sign vehicle. If an innkeeper recognizes the worn wrinkles around the mouth of his guest as a sign of stomach troubles, he will serve him differently than a gourmand. If a saleslady notices the dilation of her customer's pupils occurring when he looks at a particular item, she will not comply even with the most stubborn haggling, because she knows that he will purchase the item anyway. A person who raises his or her eyebrows can communicate interest; a person whose pupils dilate, however, does not communicate anything, since he cannot prevent his body from signifying his interest.

Signification is possible without senders, but it can also be utilized by persons who make themselves into signs. Elaborate systems of signification (i.e., codes) have been developed for this purpose in all societies. Clothing is a central example. Monks consider themselves as living symbols of God (Li 1996: § 9.3), but they can only be recognized as such by their robes. Police officers are regarded as walking signs of state authority, but without their uniforms they are hardly identifiable. The clothing someone wears often serves as a sign of his profession. And this is put to use by larger organizations who design their own clothes and differentiate them according to the various fields of activity of their members. In the armed forces of most countries, the marines have a uniform different from that of the army and the air force. And each unit uses epaulettes as signifiers of rank. (Civil armies like those of the French or Chinese revolutions show little
differentiation, while professional armies carry the differentiation to extremes.

The codes in use also make it possible for people to utilize other people as communicative signs. Many an industrialist who marries an actress does so to present her as a signifier for his appreciation of art. Some European families who adopt an orphan from the Third World do so to create a signifier for their sense of responsibility. He who surrounds himself with many servants often uses these as signifiers for his wealth. All status symbols are communicative signs based on signification, and, for this reason, no one is safe from being misused as a status symbol.

Charles S. Peirce also analyzed man as a signifier. He does not seek man's sign properties on the surface, as does Barthes, but within. In the style of the closing 19th century, he takes thinking to be the basic semiotic activity man, not communicating (cf. Posner 1995).

According to Peirce, every thought we have is a sign of its context, and by every state of thought we refer to the object thought of. Since a living person is unable to avoid thinking, one's life can be seen as a chain of thought-states continuously replacing one another. And if every state of thought is a sign, then the complete chain of thought-states is a complex sign: "[...] the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign" (Peirce 1931-58: § 5.313).

It is interesting that Peirce takes into consideration the development of each person which leads to progress in his thought. In doing this, however, he reformulates the question slightly. Regarding the linguistic expression as prototypical sign in his essay "Some consequences of four incapacities", he asks: "What distinguishes a man from a word?" (Peirce 1931-58: § 5.313). According to Peirce, there is a whole range of differences:

- The signifying characteristics and the forces in man which determine what he means and to what he refers are all exceedingly complicated compared to those of the word. Yet Peirce takes this only as a relative, not an essential difference.

- Man as a sign is able to take in information; his meaning becomes enriched; he can mean more and more. But this is also true of words, says Peirce: "Does not electricity mean more now than it did in the days of Franklin?"

Having rejected these attempts at differentiation, Peirce emphasizes: "Man makes the word, and the word means nothing which the man has not made it mean." This amounts to assuming a two-level structure for the human sign: Man is himself a sign, and he creates signs; he is a sign-creating sign. Yet Peirce makes it very clear in this context that a gain in information would be impossible for man if he could not use words to carry this information as their meaning. Man can only be a sign by creating signs. It is remarkable how Peirce takes it for granted that man has a status comparable to that of a word. The biblical conception is still at work here: Christ as incarnation of God's word and humans as creatures who strive to attain this status in the imitation of Christ.

Peirce goes so far as to say: "[...] the word or sign which man uses is man himself" (1931-58: § 5.314). For him, the consequence is then: "My language is the sum total of myself" (1931-58: § 5.314). These conclusions reached by Peirce in the year 1868 are reminiscent of Wittgenstein's claim of 1921: "The boundaries of my language are the boundaries of my world" (Wittgenstein 1922: § 5.6). Both philosophers consider language to be a system of verbal signs, but Wittgenstein refers to their signifieds and Peirce to their signifiers. Neither of them is concerned with the individual linguistic utterances made by humans, but with utterance types, that is, words and sentences as elements of a language system.

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9 The complete passage by Peirce (1931-58: 5.313) is as follows: "What distinguishes a man from a word? There is a distinction doubtless. The material qualities, the forces which constitute the pure denotative application, and the meaning of the human sign, are all exceedingly complicated in comparison with those of the word. But these differences are only relative. What other is there? It may be said that man is conscious, while a word is not [...] But this consciousness, being a mere sensation, is only part of the material quality of the man-sign [...] The man-sign acquires information and comes to mean more than he did, before. But so do words. Does not electricity mean more now than it did in the days of Franklin? Man makes the word, and the word means nothing which the man has not made it mean, and that only to some man. But since man can think only by means of words or other external symbols, these might turn round and say: 'You mean nothing which we have not taught you, and then only so far as you address some word as the interpretant of your thought.' In fact, therefore, men and words reciprocally educate each other, each increase of a man's information involves and is involved by, a corresponding increase of a word's information.
5. Humans as actors

From the means of writing oneself let us now revert to the proper acts of writing, to the uttering processes. If a person were nothing but a system of signs, as Peirce and the early Wittgenstein assumed, then his utterances would merely be components of this system, realizations of ready-made signifiers. But is this always the case? A glance at the theater teaches us otherwise.

Every actor utters words and sentences in order to be taken not as himself but as another person. Is he not expressing himself in these utterances? Does he not act as their sender?

In answering these questions we might find it instructive to consider how we are used to speaking about expression. We say, "Someone expresses an opinion" and "He expresses himself", "He expresses himself about something else" and even "He expresses himself about himself. But not everyone who expresses an opinion about something expresses himself with regard to it; he can speak as another person's mouthpiece. Persons who express opinions about something without expressing themselves with regard to it are said to play roles.

In everyday life, a person's behavior on the different levels of the hierarchy of credibility serves the others to identify that person. Each person has a set of personal characteristics on every level of the hierarchy; they constitute the specific personal code. But in most situations only a small selection of the personal code is utilized in identifying a person. A fleeting glance at the wellknown sweater or half an ear's listening to the person's voice is usually sufficient. One looks or listens twice only when discrepancies appear (unusual clothing, a sniffly voice, an unfamiliar way of walking). These are the cases when longer-lasting characteristics such as facial structure or physique are taken into account.

In the theater, this selective method of perception is systematically exploited. It is only by partial identity that an object on stage refers to the object presented. A piece of furniture on stage stands for a piece of furniture of the same size and form (but possibly of a completely different material); the light on stage stands for light of the same brightness and color (but possibly from a completely different source); the person on stage stands for a person with the same clothing and hair-style (but possibly someone with a completely different language and knowledge, feelings and attitudes). A comparatively small complex of prominent characteristics shared by another person is used to refer to that person and to call to mind all the rest of his permanent characteristics.

Thus for the audience the actor is on the one hand an iconic sign with behavioral characteristics shared by another person, and on the other hand an indexical sign referring to that person's other characteristics which he does not share (cf. Rozik 1995). This is also valid in film. And if the person presented has only a fictional existence, then his characteristics not shown by the actor can remain indeterminate (cf. Ingarden 1931:261ff=1973:335ff).

These structures also allow for the presentation of emotions on stage (cf. Ekman & Friesen 1975). Any actor who wants to display surprise must be able to produce some of the facial traits (or gestures) which the person presented would have in a moment where he would experience surprise. The presentation of emotions is thus achieved through imitation of prominent parts of actual affective behavior. The display of such facial traits (or gestures) by the actor creates a reference to the corresponding emotions, and the prominence of such facial traits (or gestures) in the corresponding emotional behavior makes the audience supplement the other characteristics of the face (or gestures) which belong to that emotion.

This is, again, a two-phase sign process based on iconic reference and its indexical supplementation.

Fig. 5: Iconic signs for the persons represented are combined with indexical signs for the person acting: Rudolph Valentino and Diana Mayo in the film “The Sheik” (USA 1921, film director: George Melford; foto: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin)
With the proper choice of iconic and indexical reference, acting can itself be portrayed. This requires, on the one hand, the production of prominent characteristics of the person that is presented by the actor to be portrayed, and, on the other hand, the production of prominent characteristics of the actor to be portrayed which are missing in the person presented. Combinations of contradictory characteristics are particularly effective, such as the linking of flexible singing with stiff bodily motion in the portrayal of an opera singer who is to play a seducer, or the linking of foreign names with English pronunciation in the presentation of a foreign play on an English stage.

As this example demonstrates, the audience in a theater not only realizes iconic references to prominent characteristics of the person presented and their indexical supplementation, but also pays attention to prominent characteristics of the actor's behavior which constitutes the core of his own personality. In this way, actors become two-level signs: By expressing something on behalf of another person, they are able to express themselves. This raises the question of how the actor's behavior differs from the role playing of people outside the realm of the performing arts, e.g., politicians. The answer is simple: An actor must noticeably distance himself from his role, while a politician must not do so. He who desires to be successful in politics must inseparably connect succinct personal characteristics, which guarantee a high degree of recognition, with the image of positive deeds (e.g., those of a „committed social activist“). In the public's eyes he then "stands for" those deeds and can utilize this image as a shield in other areas. But what happens when a politician engages an actor to do his job? This question is not at all far-fetched, as a number of stories about doubles show.10

Recall the dentist Peter Shapallo, who had the bad luck to be born in the same month as the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha. As his biographer Lloyd Jones (1993:1ff) tells us, he was "]... over six feet tall, and broad across the shoulder. The dentist and the dictator had perfect matching shadows. And twin smiles designed to reassure." Height, shoulder width, and smiling lines were the prominent characteristics required for the dentist to be able to play the Great Leader. The rest was taken care of by the plastic surgeon, hairdressers, and tailor employed by the dictator in the 1960's. They modeled the dentist so that the iconic references to the dictator increased, and tried to reduce to zero the number of characteristics having to be indexically inferred. The dictator came into the operation room from time to time and followed the progress of the sign production:

"His glance moved between Shapallo and his own reflection in a handheld mirror. Once satisfied that the reflection could not be improved, he had Shapallo's family killed – his wife and two daughters, aged eight and ten. Next to go were the surgeon, hairdressers and tailor. They were in the bus that toppled over the cliffs which spill down to Dhenii on the Adriatic Coast" (Jones 1993:2).

The dictator stuck his double in a cage-like building and let him be taken care of by an attendant who dealt with all of his needs. He was forced to travel behind black-tinted windows and present himself on balconies to the cheering masses at May Day Celebrations; "and once when the leader dreamt of an airplane crash, it fell to the dentist to take the leader's place on a helicopter flight from Vlore to the then Russian naval base nearby" (Jones 1993:4).

Shapallo was the perfect icon of the dictator: "He lost weight when the Great Leader dieted; together their hairlines receded and when the Great Leader sprained an ankle Shapallo limped" Jones 1993:4). And yet instrumentalizing the double also changed the behavior of the original. To avoid letting any false conclusions arise, the dictator now traveled behind black-tinted windows as well, and his behavior with regard to the population became like that of his double.

"On film, Shapallo is the slow-moving shadow turning to wave to the crowd; there, he pauses from his stride to take a bouquet of flowers from the small girl. Here, he strikes a serious pose. He tilts back his chin and clasps his hands behind his back" (Jones 1993:4-5).

But did the Shapallo in the film think the thoughts of a ruler or those of a dentist? And how often did the dictator regard reality with a dentist's eyes? It was on the occasion of Shapallo's first public appearance as the Emperor's understudy;

"[...] as his motorcade entered the Tirana Football Stadium, the crowd rose to its feet with a deafening cheer. He was introduced to the players of both teams, and as he moved along the line the players bowed, or smiled so easily or willingly that Shapallo, out of gratitude for their easy acceptance of him in the Emperor's clothes, smiled handsomely back" (Jones 1993:119).
The ruler's sign produced signs to thank the addressees for mistaking it for the original. The addressees took his thaas for a proof of grace of the original.

In certain phases of this drama, the governmental protocol tended to prefer Shapallo's appearances to those of the dictator because Shapallo corresponded better to the original's ideal than the original himself. As the ruler lay dying, a sort of cheerful exhaustion was expected of Shapallo. At the insistence of his attendant, Shapallo used a walking stick to support himself.

"On the same advice, these days he allowed himself to be bodily assisted to the rostrum, to take in a parade. He was to smile at the silliness of all the fuss and give every indication that recovery lay just around the corner" (Jones 1993:127).

Both Enver Hoxha and Shapallo were spared the bullet of the assassin. Yet what consequences could such an assassination have had? If the bullet had hit the dictator, then the government might have been tempted to let the dentist simulate convalescence so as to make him take over the full role of the Great Leader. If the bullet had hit Shapallo, then the dictator would have been forced to simulate a wound on his person and a subsequent convalescence. The game would have been risky in either case, because the double was only successful in his work as long as the public knew nothing about him.

It has been established by historians that Enver Hoxha died in the middle of the 80's of Parkinson's disease. The door to Shapallo's cage was deliberately left open on this night so that he could flee. But now the actor was to recognize with a shock that he couldn't convince anyone that he was different from his original. The surgeon, hairdressers, and tailor had done their job too well, and the original himself had taken the last bit of individuality from the image by copying his behavior.

As the burial day dawned, a rumor was going around it was said that the Great Leader had been seen:

"[...] like the 'Christ figure' Enver had eisen from the dead. The sightings spread out from Tirana to the countryside Eyewitness reports spoke of a man with 'film star looks'" (Jones 1993:2ff).

How does an iconic sign rid itself of its sign-function when its referent no longer exists? Shapallo tried to reach the German embassy's grounds in Tirana:

"Word passed among the crowds camped along Embassy Row that the ghost of the late dictator had come back to haunt those seeking to leave. There was a terrible commotion. Shapallo was pinned to the fence inside and those on the outside waiting to get into the embassy reached through the fence to rip his clothing. It was left to the Embassy officials to haul the concussed dentist to safety inside the building. A doctor was sent for - and an ear lobe was sewn back on and several cuts stitched above Shapallo's right eye. [...] A staff member found him the next day, draped over the bathtub, the mirror and bathroom walls splattered with blood and, in the handbasin, the knife which Shapallo had taken to the Emperor's face. Shapallo has lost the tip of his nose. Down the centre of his forehead he's made a deep cut. It was [the German official's] UI impression that the dentist had tried to peel back the skin" (Jones 1993: 3f).

The story could only have this shocking conclusion

- because the distinction between the actor and the person presented, which is always possible in a theater, failed due to a lack of indexical signs;
- because the audience refused to acknowledge the mistake it had made in confusing the imitator with the person imitated for years on end;
- because everyone took the permanent characteristics of a person more seriously than his shorter utterances.

Due to the predominance of one-sided communication models, the circumstances of humans behaving as signs have not yet been studied sufficiently. Many general problems must be clarified:

- If people are signs, who can be their sender and who their addressee?
- If people embody signifiers, who encoded them and who decided about their proper decoding?
- What difference does it make whether it is a single person, a type of person, or a group of persons that becomes a sign for someone?
- What types of message can be communicated by people who are signs?
What makes people capable of having meaning? Is this only achieved in a society structured into groups of people according to criteria such as sex, age, way of life, occupation, income, background, religion, and race (cf. Posner 1991)?

Can the signifieds a person may stand for be explained simply as projections of that person's behavior onto his appearance? Which is more fundamental: the differences in appearance between people or the tendency to semanticize them on the basis of their differences in behavior?

Portrayals of people in pictures, tone, and language tend to turn types of people into signs and to suggest to us their meanings. Painting, music, literature, and theater are full of examples. But to which degree do we activate such meaning assignments when we interpret our neighbors in everyday life?

Finally, if humans are able to take part in communication not only as senders and recipients but also as signs and signifiers, what is to stop us from analyzing them as channels, codes, or media of communication?

For millennia, man has been known as "homo significans". The time is past in which this was taken to mean only "homo signa faciens" -- sign-making man. In die future, we will again have to take man seriously as "significans" in die narrower sense: as a coded sign -- a sign, certainly, which creates other signs as well.

References


