

Semiospace, A spaced out artistic experiment

Sylvain Menétray et Raphaële Bidault-Waddington



attribution - pas d'utilisation commerciale - partage dans les mêmes conditions

Ici, il conviendra de rappeler aux sceptiques et aux petits penseurs que le libre partage de contenu va au-delà du téléchargement illégal de films hollywoodiens. Une idée que les presses de Gutenberg n'ont pas su satisfaire et qui ne se veut pas croisade de missionnaires mais qui, par des conditions nouvelles, devient possible. Bien que dans notre cas il ne s'agisse que de simples « petits projets d'art », si l'information était libre, les vaccins contre le sida ne seraient pas réservés à une élite blanche et les voitures qui emmènent vos enfants à l'école auraient depuis longtemps cessé d'être une catastrophe pour leur avenir. Des parasols à l'envers permettent à tout le monde de profiter du soleil et pas à une minorité privilégiée d'être à l'ombre et, de toute manière, les parasols n'ont jamais protégé qui que ce soit d'un astéroïde.

Semiospace Odyssey

Sylvain Menétray, 2015

Launchpad

Our correspondence began in the summer of 2014. Raphaële Bidault-Waddington (RBW) came to me with a joking proposal imagining a fake group exhibition bringing together the work of her three artistic laboratories: LIID (*Laboratoire d'Ingénierie d'Idées* - idea engineering lab), PIIMS (*Petite Industrie de l'Imagerie Sensorielle* - little industry of the sensory image), *Raffinerie Poétique* (poetic refinery). I played along, and quickly suggested the portmanteau « semiospace ». An expression that would click, maybe because of its mix of mystery and familiarity. It seemed to me that it swept across a vast field of knowledge, from linguistics to astrophysics or geography; like the many domains that nourish Raphaële's art. Part poetic neologism, part scientific concept, the semiospace, as a linguistic creation, seemed to me to be a mirror of Raphaële's practice, creating hybrid objects that are at once cognitive models borrowed from science, and exuberant fictions.

The LIID Vehicle

A few months later, there arose an opportunity to carry out a preliminary experience around this notion of semiospace. Raphaële had met Stefan Wagner, co-director of Corner College in Zurich, an art space open to experimental formats such as non-academic conferences, debates and performances. What

could be more appropriate than this corner college to present research and discussions born out of Raphaële's LIID, a lab in which I suddenly had become a contracted researcher? The context of Corner College influenced the project, which transformed into a conference-performance with multiple voices, a game of question-response that was half written, half improvised, between the curator and the artist. During the presentation, the discussion followed phases that were laid out by Raphaële's artworks, which we had hung in a landscape around the Corner College's space; it was as much a giant, ephemeral mood board as it was an exhibition. The hanging of the artworks functioned as a large installation spatializing the conference, and more generally the different artistic laboratories of the artist, according to a system of work stations or workshops between which we meandered with the public during the event.

Condition of the Experiment

More than addressing Raphaële's work from the angle of this theoretical and eccentric notion of the semiospace, the objective was to establish the conditions needed for the conference itself to become a semiospace in action. With our staging and interpretation, the semiospace gradually revealed itself as we performed it according to the principal of learning by doing. Members of the public were invited to participate in this revelation by intervening and asking questions; they were then largely implicated in the last phase of the experiment, which was to fill out a diagram that Raphaële had developed, mapping out the different ideas that the semiospace evoked.

A few months later, this text does not claim to give a full summary of the conference, but instead hopes to propose a new interpretation of it. Writing allows for the prolongation of certain outlined ideas, for the imagination of a new configuration of the information and a different mode of dialogue with the artist.

Collage Palimpsest

The conference only superficially alluded to the origins of this underground word semiospace. It belongs to a gray zone: ignored by dictionaries, it is nevertheless used by some researchers. Anthropologist Lee Drummond dedicated a long chapter to it in his book *American Dreamtime* (1996),¹ an ana-

1 Lee Drummond, *American Dreamtime. A Cultural Analysis of Popular Movies and Their Implications for a*

lysis of commercially successful American film phenomena such as *Jaws*, *James Bond* and *Jurassic Park*. The author approaches these films from the point of view of the myth, which he identifies as an extraordinary narrative that responds to essential questions. Contrary to the Marxist approach of an author such as Roland Barthes, who reveals the conservative nature of myths spread by the ruling class in order to assert its domination over the masses, Drummond considers the myth to be knowledge in and of itself, a framework for reference inside which human beings have the space to develop relationships with the like-minded. This assessment allows Drummond to formulate a theory of culture founded on myths that takes the form of a “dynamic and complex vectorial system.”² He calls this the semiospace. To explain this notion, he takes a detour through Creole linguistic creations, quantum physics, fractal mathematics and chaos theory, which calls in the idea of an auto-generative culture in constant transformation, founded upon an *n* series of semiotic dimensions.

Heuristic Tool

More recently, Kimitaka Matsuzato also seized upon the term semiospace to describe the political situation in the Caucasus the day after the five-day conflict between Georgia and Russia in 2008 over the secessionist republic of South Ossetia in his article *The Five-Day War and Transnational Politics* (2009).³ This specialist in Eastern European geopolitics compared stories from different protagonists, which led him to reconsider the widespread idea of an irreparable distancing between Georgia on one side, and South Ossetia, North Ossetia and Russia on the other. In fact, he discovered a large number of parallels in the evaluation of the problems, but also in the mutual comprehension of them, whether linguistically or ideologically, between the different regions of this transnational territory. The semiospace functioned as a heuristic tool that allowed him to make visible and map out the different semiotic

Science of Humanity, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996.

2 Raphaëlle Moine, “Compte rendu : Lee Drummond, American Dreamtime”, in *L’Homme*, vol.37, n°144, Oct-Dec 1997, pp.165-166.

3 Kimitaka Matsuzato, “The Five-Day War and Transnational Politics”, in *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 17, été 2009, pp.228-250.

axes crisscrossing his object of study. In this sense, it could be seen as a more complex version of Greimas's semiotic square, with the space indicating a third dimension.

The definition of semiospace differs little between Matsuzato and Drummond, who integrate it into a force field in which different axes cross and generate hybrid and complex cultures in constant reconstruction. They looked to make visible the dynamic semiotic system that underlies the kaleidoscopes of our cultures, territories and identities. This conceptual scheme seems to shed light on RBW's multifaceted ecosystem of creation as well as on her methods of addressing territories and organization as we see them.

Artist-Explorer

Nicolas Bourriaud attributed to artists the role of guide, when he compared them at the beginning of the 2000s to semionauts. According to him, the artist should function as a guide who facilitates the navigation of a fragmented, disconnected and excessive world that no longer has a stable hierarchy. The artist's mission was to collect a series of incongruous materials and to trace itineraries into the heart of this jungle of countless signs.

With the veritable mind of a researcher operating in a globalized network, RBW has initiated or collaborated on projects from Uruguay to Iran, from Palo Alto to Helsinki. An important part of her work consists in creating cognitive models that poetically shine light onto our present as well as prophesy our future. More than anyone, she incarnates this figure of the artist-semionaut. Yet her work exceeds the frame of this definition with the fiction that she introduces into it. Under the seeming rigidity of the scientific aesthetic of her productions, there often lies hidden a sort of wandering – or derivation, to use the words of the Situationists – that challenges the illusion of rationality. She toys with utopias and derails the diagrams. The imaginary's subversion or sublimation of formats characterized by their troubling normative neutrality. An example, incidentally, takes us back to the Caucasian semiospace identified by Matsuzato. A voyage undertaken on behalf of *Dorade* magazine led us to this region in 2012. I was the Editor in Chief and Raphaële the guest artist for an issue dedicated to the Black Sea. One of her contributions was a prospective fiction on the future of Villa Garikula, an artist residency in the Georgian countryside where we had stayed. In this text, she imagined a glorious success story for the Villa, mixing the artistic, economic, ecological and democratic development of the region in which it lies. Transforming into a mode of territorial development strategy, the artist struc-

tured a system of virtuous impact (a semiospace) around a demanding cultural programming, notably in linking Garikula to the young, promising Contemporary Art Triennial of Tbilissi. Her text was close to the models of future visions produced by think tanks specialized in the revitalization of abandoned lots and sites supposedly in decline, but with an artistic and political ambition that went back and forth between utopia and delirium. Paradoxically, the scenario was just one of the plausible solutions, and all the characters in the story were real, as though it were only a matter of contacting them...

One could hardly be surprised, then, when Raphaële was invited to conferences, research groups and into other scientific and economic circles to give her opinion, report on the findings of her research and enrich other disciplines with what she calls “aesthetic intelligence.” Her economic model functions according to the argument that imagination is knowledge and understanding is a market.

A Choice of Stop

For the conference at Corner College, I wanted to propose three axes, three dimensions that would form the semiospace of RBW’s artistic constellation, where a fictive and imaginary space, a territorial approach and an immaterial and speculative economy cross paths.

We explored each of these axes from the starting point of the artworks exhibited in the space or with reproductions shown on a projector. Like the leaves of a fern, one level of complexity hid another: along each axis, other semiospaces unraveled along a fascinating and dizzying fractal structure.

I. Imaginary Space

The Universe of Word

The artist defines her text *Les Mots du Ciel* (Words of the Sky), published in the literature review *Espace* in 2013, as a “semantic tale.” She imagines the extra-human and alien pseudo-life of words, lost in space once they come out of our mouths, but full of feelings and sensations. In their perpetual state of weightlessness, their isolation seems to reduce them to powerlessness, like the characters in the space opera *Gravity*. They suffer this absence of grammar and syntax, of the rules that would permit them to assemble themselves, to make language and thus make society. Close to the nonsense of Lewis Carroll, the nonsense of this spatial environment devoid of meaning contaminates the artist’s text, which from time to time becomes a parade of random letters, a bug in the keyboard, a cosmic onomatopoeia. Typographic space crosses through the same turbulence as the words of the sky, as though the story were being performed before the eyes of the reader. This lamentation of an order, this despair of solitary words and syllables in search of their complement, like the androgynous beings in Plato’s myth who sought to find their other half, also unite in Raphaële’s text to form a sort of euphoria. Flying, floating weightlessly, leaping into thin air, what exhilaration! This ether in which we navigate between torment and ecstasy metaphorically expresses the functioning of our spirit, which produces unities of non-structured thought that drift and dance gaily before forming semantic and syntactic chains when we speak. We think of these hazy coastlines between sleeping and waking, these scraps of thought and these images that the cortex cannot yet master and analyze, as described by Proust. Seen by Raphaële, space is a figuration of our brain where elementary particles wait to be put into contact by our rationality. Poetry, and in particular automatic writing, is a means to capture this raw mental space, devoid of linguistic operations. In its methods of organizing mental material⁴, the spirit functions

as a semiospace in perpetual evolution, founded upon multiple axes such as memory, experience, emotions, knowledge. It filters, links, opposes and compares a series of information in order to produce thoughts and speech with the aid of these floating and indecisive cognitive particles: a forest of signs in which we move like in that French Touch music video that shows a universe imagined entirely in typography.

The World of Images

If words can sometimes seem to have lives of their own, like slips of the tongue, the notion of living images immerses us once more in a long tradition, evoking forms of animism that attribute an energy and will to things. In their resemblance to living organisms, certain striking images acquire a power that could make them quasi-subjects. Images clearly have a capacity to provoke action and transformation within the people who see them. If jolting, uni-dimensional advertising images are meant to fool and to increase fetishism, other more ambiguous or subtle images create the possibility of an intelligent and live discussion. The text *La République des Images*⁵ (the republic of images) by RBW is certainly anchored in this discourse on living images, imagining a politics of images acknowledging or even “reenacting” the problematics linked to our era. We have entered into a period of an overabundance of images, a veritable chaos, a flood of visual information, which digital tools have clearly accelerated. Some go as far as thinking that reality now consists in what we once called images, and that reality and the digital universe are now just two versions of the same reality in constant post-production.⁶ Added to this are reformatting, copying, retouching and reframing, operations that are in the hands of anyone who possesses a computer. Once recognized as proof of the existence of what they represented, photographic images today can no longer take on this role. RBW’s text imagines images imbued with a sense of responsibilities, that seek to organize themselves in order to stop this chaos and put an end to this era of suspicion in which we are immersed, as the European nations did in the post-war era.

4 *Matière mentale* was the title of a solo show by RBW at the Espace d’En Bas, Paris, in 2011.

5 Published in 2010 in *tales-magazine.fr* http://www.tales-magazine.fr/style-harmony-life-vision/republic_of_images

6 Hito Steyerl, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/#_ftn14

The Sphere of Information

The proliferation of signs was also at the heart of the installation *Bulle Poético-Spéculative*⁷ (poetic-speculative bubble), which spread out like a galaxy of anonymous images. Hung according to families in the exhibition space, these urban cross-sections taken from the four corners of the world were lit up by the psychedelic rays of a disco ball and black lights. A rhythmic soundtrack as variable as the business climate gave ambiance to the images, inciting the spectator to formulate new, random combinations and associations of urban motifs, a beginning of a narration, an enigma, a charade. The artist cited the model of the datascape, the cartographic data tool imagined by the Dutch architects MVRDV in 1999, as being among her inspirations. To this she added movement and representations in three dimensions. Realized in 2001 at the time of the digital stock market's first crash, this poetic-speculative bubble evokes the first internet boom, the demultiplication of information and the circulation of shares on the stock market, a field in which the artist had worked in a previous life. This artistic vision of the expansion of the data domain is even more pertinent fifteen years later, when the process seems more uncontrollable and notions such as data flooding have come into being.

Much more than a simple imaginary space, this semiospatial installation allowed, through an architecture of images, for the sensitive experience of an extremely large-scale phenomenon.

II. The Level of Territory

An Urban Constellation

Implicitly pronouncing a metaphorical vision of the city as a landscape of information, as a constellation, the *Poetic-Speculative Bubble* has become a clear source of inspiration for *Paris Galaxies*, a vision for the City of Paris, an experimental⁸ project that RBW undertook in 2008.

Outside the architecture and urbanism firms invited by Nicolas Sarkozy's government to meet in Paris and its suburbs, RBW developed her own vision of stretched capital. Her proposition is centered around four axes: tangible urbanism/environment, institutional governance/architecture, creative program and immaterial/virtual. In order to show their interrelations, she reproduced these in a methodological diagram inspired by representations of the cosmos in astrophysics. Laureate of the grant Paris 2030 (2013-14, renewed for 2015-16), this project of the LIID is being carried out in the ACTE Institute (Art, Creation, Theory, Aesthetic) of the University of Paris 1, Pantheon Sorbonne, along with other partnerships. A series of workshops with students at the Paris College of Art (formerly Parsons Paris) nourished a vast "aesthetic audit," which allowed for the identification of vectors of urban transformation coming from the artistic constellation of the metropolis. In addition to this, there have also been research projects-exhibitions, publications, conferences, round tables, etc., all opportunities for experimentation. Since 2008, *Paris Galaxies* has grown all over the place, in a way that is at once concerted and organic, according to a principle that is perhaps similar to Schwitters's *Merzbau*, at the mercy of grants, encounters and collaborations, under the spotlights or in the shadows of the workshop, in artistic contexts but also in academic, ecological, urban and political ones.

This multi-dimensional and composite scaffolding clearly echoes the intended patchwork content of the project, and testifies to the spirit of the laboratory that

is part of RBW's work. Thinking of the city as a galaxy can also lead one to the work of geographer Edward Soja. This analyst of the sprawling urbanism of Los Angeles, which he considers to be both an exception and a prefiguration of the mega-cities of the world, describes these as "spatio-social structures that are fragmented, polycentric, nearly kaleidoscopic," thus calling to mind the image of galaxies.

Immaterial Layer

At first glance, Paris presents itself as the antithesis of the Californian model, as much for its density, its human scale, its usages and its administrative divisions that form a nautilus of districts circling around from the center outwards, as for its history. The city functions like a single, dazzling star, a legacy of the Old Regime, of the Sun King (Louis XIV), whose last candles still light up the French institutional system, marked by the prince's act and by centralism. It's nice to live in this shimmering place, but beyond it there are no alternatives.

The model of the cosmos cleverly breaks with these absolutist French ways, all while exploiting the imaginary associated with the capital, nicknamed the City of Lights for its countless lampposts and reflective surfaces. In the place of a single, blazing beacon are myriad glows and subsystems that crisscross and form a complex living network. In this figure, we find the idea of multiple identity of Édouard Glissant, who contrasts the "lone root" that "kills all around it" with the rhizome, "which spreads out to meet other roots." The city is divided into small, independent units capable of entanglement, of fertilizing and reproducing themselves. *Mental Geographies*, another work by RBW consisting of 23 drawings realized with colored pencils on colored paper, which were presented at Corner College, seem to resonate with this patchwork vision of *Paris Galaxies*. They appear in the form of drawings of thin curves, bringing to mind meteorological models or contour lines on topographical maps. They evoke a state of mind, a humor, a form of asceticism of the artist seated at her drawing table, but also representations of space, force fields, of the births of galaxies. With Raphaële, mental space has a tendency that is both all-encompassing and uncontrollable, without edges and in non-stop movement. Hung on the wall, they seem like a series of nutrient broth that twist and turn, multiply and get ready to propagate. A form of energy and life pulses within these drawings, like in the neighborhoods of Paris.

III. Economy of the Immaterial

Post-conceptual Art

A unique artist, seldom seen in the art world and non-existent in the market, but known and respected for the strength of her conceptual research, RBW might be seen as an immaterial artist. She plays with this dark, masked image by presenting her artistic identity and her work according to an aesthetic that borrows from organizations, hiding behind the different names of her laboratories. The insistence on notions such as aesthetic intelligence, on the production of diagrams, texts, voluntarily ordinary photographs, and on quasi-academic research clearly place RBW in a tradition of conceptual art.

The years between 1960 and 1970 saw the dawn of the minimalist and conceptual art movements, as well as processual and performative art, which saw themselves as resisting institutions and the art market. And still, the market wound up recuperating these forms, and legal minds revealed themselves to be particularly innovative in formalizing sales and production contracts. A *jeu d'esprit*, conceptual art was already pleasing to certain well-informed managers in the 1960s. At the 1969 opening of *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Bern Kunsthalle, which was the first exhibition benefiting from private funding from Philip Morris Europe, it was precisely the “innovative” character of the exhibited art that the group’s president, John A. Murphy, placed at the foreground. It was a quality that “new art” shared with “the business world,”⁹ he affirmed during his speech.

Statement

Starting at the end of the 1990s, RBW has discerned elements of comprehension in this history of conceptual art, and even a sort of laboratory that is a precur-

9 John A. Murphy, “Patron’s statement for *When Attitudes Become Form*”, in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2000.

sor to the theoretical paradigm of the “immaterial economy,” which emerged 25 years later.

The title of her website *goodwill.is.not.free*, which archives all her laboratory experiments since 2000, insists on this intangibility and the manifest worth of her artistic engagement.

Beyond the play on words that she appropriates to eliminate the commercial extension of her internet host, the phrase borrows the financial term “goodwill”, the immaterial appreciation between the amount that a buyer is willing to spend to acquire a business and the sales figures of that business. In other words, goodwill brings together all the elements of intangible capitalism: prestige of the brand, copyrights, the intelligence of the organization and hypothetical prospects of future profits, without any real correlation.

A fictional sum that is calculated from a part-rational, part-fantastic basis, which implies speculation, a process at the heart of the artist’s practices. Through her architectures of images, engineering of ideas, aesthetic audits and future projections, RBW proposes an experimental and artistic mode of comprehending this immaterial value of organizations. Her concept of “aesthetic intelligence” pairing up with content and form gives her a means to access the immaterial value of social practices.

If the immaterial academic economy was founded in the 1990s, and not without conflict, on a privatization of knowledge, on authorship, patents and licenses, it has remained at a theoretical dead-end, inadequate for understanding the contemporary economy. Rationalization and conventions have been unable to grasp this immateriality.

Testifying to a fairly radical autonomy of thought, RBW is invited today to share her artistic experiments, as much creative as critical, on the immaterial value of organizations (businesses, cities, research centers, etc.) in numerous theoretical contexts. It is this approach that is at work in the aforementioned project *Paris Galaxies*.

Aesthetic Intelligence

Rather than faking a resistance to the market as the conceptual artists did, RBW chose to actually create economic value around her laboratories, notably with the valorization of their immaterial capital and not simply their exhibited productions.

Her reasoning comes from a recognition that is both simple and subversive: if aesthetic intelligence serves the immaterial economy, why not bargain with it?

With a view toward this, she created the LIID, which allows her to take distance from any and all forms of recuperation or art marketing activities based on the image, all while doing business with companies. While some artists give the impression of playing shop by reproducing (ironically or not) certain cogs of the capitalist system, RBW is playing a much more dangerous game, as she is participating directly in the economy. That's her artistic vision, her critical analytical ability, her imagination, her diverse knowledge and her sense of experimentation, which she puts into play all at once. There is thus no separation between this way of acting in the economic sphere, and her activities in the art world. She takes from this the privilege of considerable independence vis-à-vis the market and art institutions.

By inventing this new artistic paradigm 15 years ago, which can be seen as prospective and a precursor to the art of a new generation, the artist seeks to go beyond the impasses of conceptual art as well as those of the immaterial economy. Artist, researcher and consultant, she offers up her services to artistic, academic, urban and economic worlds, and in particular for the development of strategic visions and futures. In this way, she is invested in different platforms, agencies, publications and future-oriented think tanks in France and beyond. Her career crosses, in a fluid way, different worlds – academic, economic and artistic – and divides itself into different laboratories that produce a continuous flow of thought. Each axis of this complex construction informs and influences the other components, creating a productive and virtuous force field. The work that comes from this is never presented as a finished product, but rather as the start of something else. Likewise, exhibitions function as steps of opportunities to share the current state of a research in progress, and not as achievements. Because it takes its place along the peripheries, between the past and future, order and chaos, the macro and the micro, a series of unstable states, nearly gaseous, RBW's work creates the image of non-stop movement.

We could therefore consider the semiospace of these practices and laboratories, where all these territories become tangled to the point of being indistinguishable, to be the location of a prefiguration of an art form, of an economy and of a post-capitalist society whose emergence news stories can only confirm.

SEMIOSCAPE

Raphaële Bidault-Waddington, 2015

Complementing the *Paris Galaxies* diagram, the drawings *Géographies mentales* (mental geographies) and the slideshow presenting the productions of PIIMS laboratory, the *Semiospace* installed and performed at Corner College included two other “stations” to be visited during the conference: one dedicated to the *Polygon* project, and the other to the interactive diagram *Semioscape* (see the post-production version inserted in this book).

Polygonal Research

The *Polygon* is a project that I had imagined for the exhibition *The Incidental Person (after John Latham)*, at Apex Art in New York in 2010, which, since then, has been slowly enriched with new experiments, as all my laboratories do. The goal of this project was to create a space for collaborative investigation within the LIID, and to explore a method of so-called polygonal research. Radically free and trans-disciplinary, this method is based on a core polygonal principle, which is then adapted to each topic addressed. The whole *Polygon* project aims at exploring its potentialities. As I generally do in all my laboratories, it is a new “format” (a conceptual form) of creation and action. The principle of the *Polygon* consists in collecting and

then mapping out or spatializing diverse points of view, without limits, like so many possible entries into the same subject. In this way, it attempts to collectively comprehend and embrace critical questions, thus forming a discursive polygonal landscape, which can become labyrinthine, but always remains open and evolving¹⁰. Without being exclusive, the first topics addressed in the Polygon are those of LIID since its creation in 2000: “aesthetic intelligence”, diagrammatic language, urban conceptual models, the aesthetics of organizations, the democratic company, and the value of images, the data-sphere and global governance (with the *Republic of Images* research).

The polygonal approach breaks out of linear or dialectic logics, introduces new oppositional or reflective geometries, even multiplies them, to imagine new logical or illogical, rational or irrational angles, in a way of thinking that is radically plastic, abstract and multidimensional. It is the point of aesthetic intelligence and idea engineering to put thought to work in a way that is both significant as well as formal or metaphorical, to become emancipated from the conventional territories of knowledge, language and Reason. This method allows for exploring and playing with other forms of abstraction that are both artistic and cognitive. By working with cartographies and “contrasted” panoramas of spatialized points of view, new folds appear without end, in which imagination, thought and action can venture out. This multifaceted, “multi-sopic” and somewhat dizzying process is at work in all my laboratories, whether through my diagrams, research projects, auditing methods, photographic compositions, drawings or even textile constructions.

Reflexive Plans

It’s in following this polygonal and semiospatial method that I imagined the *Semioscope* diagram in order to re-address and to create a *mise en abyme* of the very concept of the semiospace, in parallel to the triangular reasoning constructed by and with Sylvain for the conference. This introduced a dimension that was not only performative, but also reflexive into the investigation being carried out on itself. This incomplete diagram, in draft, opened a new discursive horizon beyond the universe of my work, which we had first focused on in the conference, and engaged in a live research session with the audience. The public made

use of Post-It notes and markers to enrich the diagram and add keywords to the semantic architecture.

If the semiospace recalls notions of space, the *Semioscape* for its part calls up notions of landscape – that is to say, a space that cannot be disassociated with he who regards it, thus including his point of view in its observation. The landscape is not a space, but rather a vision of the environment constructed by the person looking at it, a mental and interpretive (aesthetic) representation of space, like the ethnographer who, in contrast to the sociologist who stands at a distance, includes his own sensibilities in his object of study. The notion of landscape also brings to mind the notion of the mental landscape (mindscape). The *Semioscape* therefore proposes a panorama of points of view on the semiospace, subsequently giving it a second form of reflexivity.

More generally, we must remember that LIID and *Polygon* are spaces for artistic research, which, contrary to academic or scientific laboratories, allow for the conservation of the richness, flavor and originality of the subjective investment of each participant – my own as much as that of any other person with whom I collaborate. There can be no “normalization” of content and forms, simply an organization, a landscaping of focuses or perspectives. It includes space for the uncanny. As an example, and a friendly wink to Sylvain and his eponymous magazine, which sealed our first collaboration in the Georgian semiospace, I deliberately chose the figure of the Dorado constellation in order to structure the *Semioscape* diagram.

The diagram simultaneously gives a view of the ensemble, a cartographic zenithal view, as geographers say, on the problematic of the semiospace, and introduces two new reflexive planes inside the conceptual geometry of the polygon. One places in symmetry two other sub-axes that depart from the left and cross at one point. The second (or third) responds to these crossing perspectives with a spectral vision coming from the right.

Epistemological Topographies

The first two axes of vision that start from the left cross at a point, that of the artistic semiospace (which served as a point of departure for the conference as a whole) where sign and space, form and content become mutually entangled, before separating into two trajectories.

The first highlights the different “semio-dimensions” of the space, or in some wide sense the cognitive and significant landscapes of the real space. The second explores all sides of the spatial dimensions of signs, that which would character-

alize the “universe of signs” itself. To the left of this crossing, we are in the mental space of the person who investigates; to the right, in the landscape of typologies of semiospaces, which we could call the polygon of shared knowledge, and the place from which epistemological topographies spread out. A palette of segments and indicative landmarks was proposed along these two axes, taking up certain items and images from the conference, and was augmented with possible new facets or dimensions of semiospaces, up to a very high level, beyond the visible, where comprehension is always challenged.

Along axis 1 (Spatial Dimensions of Sign) is a series of spaces of sign perception and production (in our case, the Corner College), followed by fictive, imaginary or dreamlike spaces conveyed by signs and translating mental spaces. In this different sort of immaterial space, we then find cognitive, scientific and speculative spaces such as those designed by diagrams and semiotic architectures. On the last step of the spatial ladder comes the holistic and metaphorical vision of the sphere of the signs, the *cloud* and the *datascape* as a whole.

Setting off again from the left, along axis 2 (Semio-dimensions of Space), the artistic installation is only one example of a significant proposition in the space of perception, but reminds us that the conference takes place in an art gallery. Along the way there comes the already very well defined and robust point of view of semiology, which becomes enlarged up to the scale of urban space (Barthes). Félix Guattari’s ecosophy,¹¹ and the semiotics of the built space developed by Liam Gillick,¹² show other possible folds, other angles. These keywords serve as nodes for the reasoning and mark as many entries as possible in the polygon and the semiospace.

The next landmark invites the appropriation of new languages of the territorial imaginary: psychogeography (Debord), inherited from the Situationists at the whim of their urban derives; the geopoetic (Kenneth White), geocritical and ecocritical literary genres that focus on the subjective interpretation and narration of natural space.¹³ We think of it as well as being in the current trend of

11 Félix Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies*, ed. Galilée, Paris, 1989.

12 Liam Gillick, “The Semiotics of the Built World”, in *The Wood Way*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2002.

13 Rachel Bouvet, «Géopoétique, géocritique, écocritique : point commun et divergences», conference at the University of Angers, 2013.

geo-aesthetics,¹⁴ where art interrogates all forms of territorial borders. Beyond the imaginary, language and signs also allow for the recognition of all the invisible dimensions that demand an interpretive approach to space, as they are hard to visualize, or even imperceptible. In that regard, gigantic global cities remain an interesting scale for study (see the *Paris Galaxies* project). Finally, in symmetry with the *datascape*, it is only via signs that we are able to access certain spaces, whether at a very small or very large scale, and whether these signs take the form of a mathematical equation, a story or a 3D modeling on a computer screen.

Spectral Vision

Taking a radically opposed orientation, situated at the extreme right of the diagram, the third perspective takes on a totally spectral aspect that could re-embrace and re-engage all the items on the diagram, but without closing off the polygon. Starting off with the idea that everything, even matter, air or thoughts, is composed of data, that the world is made of meaningful particles and that they gravitate around us in the cosmos or in our brains, it becomes impossible to create a separation between sign/space, reality/virtual, interior/exterior. It is now as if we were looking at the semiospace from the center of the Earth, without being able to distinguish between the sky and the ground, between empty and full, between form and content. Without ground, reason loses its footing, and the semiospace here transforms into a cloud, or an infinite galaxy of data. In fact, this way of approaching the semiospace crushes the symmetry and conceptual topography of the first two axes, and leads to the use of another form of intellectual plasticity or cognitive meteorology to find the way.

In this paradigm, all form, all space, every wave, is language, or rather code, carrying its own drama, and splits in two to become both real and metaphorical. Whether we want them to or not, particles speak. It's in this paradoxical dimension that my fictions in words and images occur, such as the *Republic of Images* or the *Words of the Sky* evoked in the conference. This troubling and quasi-dreamlike zone is one of the current frontiers of knowledge that undergoes digital tornadoes, and which art can drill into, like we do in and with the

14 Exhibition and publication *Géo-esthétique*, under the direction of Kantuta Quirós and Aliocha Imhoff, ed. B42, Paris, 2014.

Semioscape experiment. Perhaps new extra-scientific metaphysics are invented there, to use the vocabulary of the philosopher Quentin Meillassoux.¹⁵

A Maze

The collective session in the end accelerated the exhilarating and free-style character of this diagram, which seems to fantasize about the idea of kissing the world, “the whole universe,” with its mouth half open. For can we not see in the schema the profile of two mouths speaking very closely, or perhaps kissing? It seems that it’s there where tongues and languages intertwine, call, spell out, sink their shovels into the black hole of the invisible. Escaping from or settling into new semantic particles, hmm, ah, *Buzz*, *Good Fun* and the *E-motive* are indeed there, *Situated*, with the *Bedroom*, which all makes sense somehow, asking new questions in *Responsis* and adding, in *Bracket*, new segments to the reflexive and multi-faceted polygon. *One Word? Persuasion! (Or Projection?)* The shadow of doubt seems to show up.

The architecture of the semiospace, first triangular, and then polygonal, metamorphoses one more time to become a sort of nebula, always more complex and labyrinthine. New semantic constellations take shape in a *Multidimensional Hierarchy*.

The imaginary machine of the *Semioscape* changes its system, multiplies its axes, its vectors, and takes on a resolutely kaleidoscopic, even psychedelic structure, as though the thought game we are playing in the polygon had given it a blurry and moving aspect, a *Body Language*.

To the far left are the notions of *Belief* and *Attitude*, reminding us how much our regard is conditioned (which is in fact one of the issues that the *Semioscape* seeks to show). To the right, *Control* and *Original* sow the seeds of doubt a little deeper and instill an ambiance of conspiracy into the *Semioscape*. Would the *Pictorial Gang-Bang* and the *Vortex* be the best *Metaplan* for the semiospace? *Proust* is within the invisible dimensions of territories, with *Temporality* spreading out by *Desire* toward the *Future*, to better reach toward *Virtual vs Real Networks*. Along this line, a whole story comes forth, and so many other *Races of Advertisement Narration*, that one can only let loose one’s imagination, in *Dynamics*, by reading between the lines, between the keywords that never cease to create new doors, new *Fields* in the *Semioscape*. Is the *Ego State* still possible, and what about *Res-*

possibility when *Sign X2* approaches *One* and *Eye-Level*!?

Showing up and off, a *Zero* becomes the cornerstone of the datascape, while across the way the *Void* code creates a hyphen between invisible and virtual spaces. It's at the extremes of the diagram that maximal abstraction is formulated, as if beyond these landmarks, the power of the white wall, of the white cube or of the white page, full of silent and speculative potentiality, took on absolute significance.

Paradoxically, the true physical void is by nature obscure, dark like the depths of the universe. The sense, the meaning that would transform it into a semiospace, only appears by effects of radiance, reflection and reasoning, more or less readable, clear or patent. Luckily Peter Brook¹⁶ is here for us, to reassure us with a reminder that all empty space, dark as it may be, must be seen as an invitation to perform theater. Here we all are in our conference-performance, halfway between art's white cube and theater's black box, to act out the illusion or the improvisation of intelligence in the polygon of the *Semioscape*. The strange light of the Corner College is, in the end, perhaps not so insignificant; scientists sometimes say that clear knowledge arises from the twilight...