Biosemiotics as a bridge between biology and Geisteswissenschaft

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possibly common between disciplines

- metaphors
- (math) models
- objects
XX century

• Biology and humanities were detached

Indeed,

• biology $\rightarrow$ humanities = biologization

• humanities $\rightarrow$ biology = anthropomorphization
Could it be otherwise?

Yes, if

• biology would include
  learning and communication
  (as attributes of life)

• humanities would include
  prelinguistic meaning-making
  (as a general feature of human behavior and communication)

common object?
Has it been understood?

Yes,

in 1896, a psychologist James Mark Baldwin (& Conway Lloyd Morgan & Henry Fairfield Osborn) stated, while modelling evolution, that

- not only “environment selects” = natural selection
- but also “organisms search and choose” = organic selection

Evidence: learning enhances evolution ("Baldwin effect" – the taxa with organisms that learn better show quicker evolution)
However, the XX century

Biology
• Could not find the mechanism of inheritance of the products of learning
• Since 1930s – Modern Synthesis, neodarvinism
  • All adaptations from natural selection, everything in genes
• Since 1970s – Hardening of synthesis
  • Sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, egoistic gene

Humanities
• Could not find the primary source of meaning, the locus of meaning-maker
  • Meaning is based on syntax
XXI century

Epigenetic turn
- Non-genetic inheritance
- Power of natural selection is low in testing the possible combinations of DNA
- Baldwin is back

Biosemiotics
- Mechanisms of prelinguistic meaning-making
- Organisms’ learning and communication as permanent organisers
Thus, now we understand again that

- **language assumes the preexistence of meaning**, being an advanced form of meaning-making (meaning may not require syntax, meaning is based on choice = interpretation)

- **organisms are habits and artefacts**, formed by interpretation, decision-making and learning (organism is not a metabolic machine, organism is a multi-agent with ability to search and interpret)
So, biosemiotics is

- a biology that asks **what do organisms know**
- the humanities that take into account the **life of our intentional bodies**

while using the model:

Life = meaning-making = knowing = semiosis
Bridge between disciplines (is made of) a model that covers a common object

- a biosemiotic model
  - which includes:
    - learning and communication
    - prelinguistic meaning-making
    - common object

(as attributes of life)

&

(as a general feature of human behavior and communication)
Many thanks for your interest!

Reference

Favareau, Donald; Kull, Kalevi; Ostdiek, Gerald; Maran, Timo; Westling, Louise; Copley, Paul; Stjernfelt, Frederik; Anderson, Myrdene; Tønnessen, Morten; Wheeler, Wendy 2017.

“How can the study of the humanities inform the study of biosemiotics?”