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Semiotics Mesh with Respect to Conscious Systems

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Abstract: Integrated Information Theory (IIT), first proposed by Giulio Tononi in 2004 and

updated (v.3) through 2014, seeks to explain conscious experience by understanding the action of elements within an experiential system such as the brain, and setting forth principles and measurement operations that can be used to decide levels of consciousness. Some of the postulates of IIT have much in common with Peircean semiotics. Among these are the presence of recursively nested operations, the importance of relational structures in forming conscious experience, subject/object dichotomy, and an objectivist stance that requires a system be really affected in order for consciousness or semiosis to proceed. However, difficult problems confront anyone hoping to find a translation between the two programs, especially with respect to the foundational concepts of time (duration) and continuity (i.e. Peirce's synechism). I argue that it is possible to overcome the problems of time and continuity through two moves. First, I put forward the notion of dwell, a period of real, if indeterminate, duration in semiosis, during which a judgment or tentative conclusion is reached. Secondly, with respect to continuity, I argue that an analysis of an interpreting system never has the ontological purity of the system it attempts to understand. Instead, any analytical assessment of an interpreting system must be considered a synthetic and expedient cut into the continuum. Thus, the continuum of experience remains unaffected even as the (tentative) understanding of the continuum happens through such artificial analytical frames. The value of "meshing" IIT and Peircean semiotics is that the semiotics can be seen as a structural outline that maps the conceptual territory of conscious experience for which the principles and measurements of IIT, in turn, provide useful tools of empirical data collection.

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