

the true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. - O. Wilde

A train of thought from diversity to the void.

on diversity.

I just looked up the term “diversity” in the oxford dictionary: *“the state of being diverse”*. After which I needed to look up “diverse”: *“showing a great deal of variety; very different”*. Neither of these definitions actually teach me which concrete content these words point to. Admittedly, I hadn’t really expected anything else. I imagine we’d all give a different definition of the term should we be asked. Personally, I don’t like the term, nor am I much inclined to use it. The reason is quite simple: I don’t believe there exists much diversity in the human context.

I believe there is much bio-diversity on our beloved planet, but between people? Not so much. We are born, live our lives and pass on. D.T. Suzuki wrote “nothing much ado” a beautiful appropriation, or perhaps better, a beautiful improvement on W. Shakespeare’s “much ado about nothing”. Suzuki wrote it to demystify “the Asian mindset” when introducing zen-buddhism in the US, using the sentence to state plainly what was commonly accepted in the East vs. what still hasn’t taken hold in the West i.e. *the unbearable lightness of being*.

note: I don’t actually believe there is much bio-diversity either but that would lead me too far here.

The main point being, for me, diversity hints at G. Bateson’s *“a difference that makes a difference”*, which really brings it within the semiotic realm again. When does something differ from anything else? Or the reverse of the medal: Is everything similar or the same? This last an old-sore critique when connecting it with iconicity or the Icon in general.

I believe all differences are phenomenological issues that need to be addressed first and foremost not on the actual existence of differences but on the surrounding context that deems certain differences to exist. The real troves are the question-words when/where/why/who. When do we speak of diversity, wherein lies this diversity*, why do we see it as “diversity” and most importantly who are we to see differences.

The cultural context seems to be the obvious suspect. Identity is strongly linked with boundaries. Boundaries of the self, the group and the other. Cultural identity is no different. If we were unable to distinguish skin-color we’d never have invented racism, we’d only have had culturism, or xenophobia ... but we’d have invented something for sure, IQ-ism, or EQ-ism, some sort of boundary to allow us to come together in a manageable counter-group.

This identity-driven search for an opposable difference is, in my view, genetically inescapable and it’s one of the reasons why we live in “the best of possible worlds”. No difference, no sentience. No difference, no economy. No difference, no marketing semiotics.

Diversity is the illusion we need to feel unique. All of us, unique. Uniquely the same. Or as our friends in Thailand used to repeat over and over again: same, same but different.

What might yield some insights is to analyse the word-sign “diversity” with Ponzio’s definition in mind: *“Signs are not things, but processes, the interlacing of relations which are social relations ...”*(Ponzio 1990). How would we describe “diversity” in terms of a social relations process? How much identity do we need to include while making the outward judgement which the use of the term diversity implies? How does it include the social relation back to the viewer?

wherein *lies* this diversity* is just funny because of its ambiguous reading possibilities hinting at U. Eco’s famous statement.

on the semiotics of the void.

This is where, for me at least, it really becomes interesting: the void. The Tao has already taught us the true worth of the void: "... We shape clay into a pot, but it is the **emptiness** inside that holds whatever we want. [...] We work with being but non-being is what we **use**." Remember the always implicit presence of the yuan (the void) in the ying-yang symbol.

Coming from the art world, it is astonishing how many people I have met investigating non-sense, non-meaning and how important it is. Ever since I started writing on my *Semiotic Architecture* I've never edited the first page. It's a very simple little statement: "*nothing makes sense, everything else just has a sense*". The obvious that needs to be pointed out here is that the verb to make is to be interpreted as an active verb: something makes something else. In this case "nothing" makes "sense", it produces it. And if it doesn't produce it from a conscious volition, it still remains the *conditio sine qua non* without which it would be impossible to make ... anything really.

The hard sciences have already demonstrated that the clay pot holds no emptiness at all. It is filled to the brink! More so, the pot itself is contained, enveloped by ... the invisible. This x, call it emptiness if you must, wherein a diversity of entities exist, but that are not perceived by our very limited, or should I say limiting, senses. In itself not a bad way to go, the limited senses as limiting senses i.e. the natural boundaries of the senses imply the boundaries we think we actually perceive, or sense.

Phenomenologically speaking we perceive something as nothing. We see the invisible as a visual. Space appears to have a designatum (one that has no limits?) but it doesn't have a denotatum, or does it?

As for the semiotics of the void. I believe there would not be a semiotics if it weren't for the apparent void. The blank space between two words, the apparent invisible space between two objects, the invisible air between two animate beings on this blue ball. The appearance of dis-connectedness through not-seeing allows to formulate: "*the difference between two signs, is its difference*."

The void is where the actual connections lie, where the action is.

MOMA NY published a brilliant art book called "From postwar to postmodern / Art in Japan 1945-1989". It's not a glossy, high res photobook, but untranslated texts from the artistic scenes in Japan. One of the previously, only available in Japanese texts is by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki entitled: *Ma: space-time in Japan* (1978/2009). I'm including some of my highlighted sections:

"MA is literally defined as 'the natural interval between two or more things existing in a continuity', or 'the natural pause or interval in which phenomena arise through time' ..."

"MA divides the world. The Japanese word hashi means among others: chopsticks, only the word hashi did not mean a specific thing but rather implied the bridging of MA (the space between two objects) - *in this case bridging the gap between table and mouth*"

"MA is filled with signs of the ephemeral. ... At the root of this idea lies a sense of the dissolution of all things. Thus all phenomena may be regarded as existing at a temporary stage ..."

MA is such a special concept for Westerners, but so incredibly embedded in the Asian mindset, and aesthetics, I'm absolutely convinced we Westerners have little to offer except a very attentive ear to the East. *

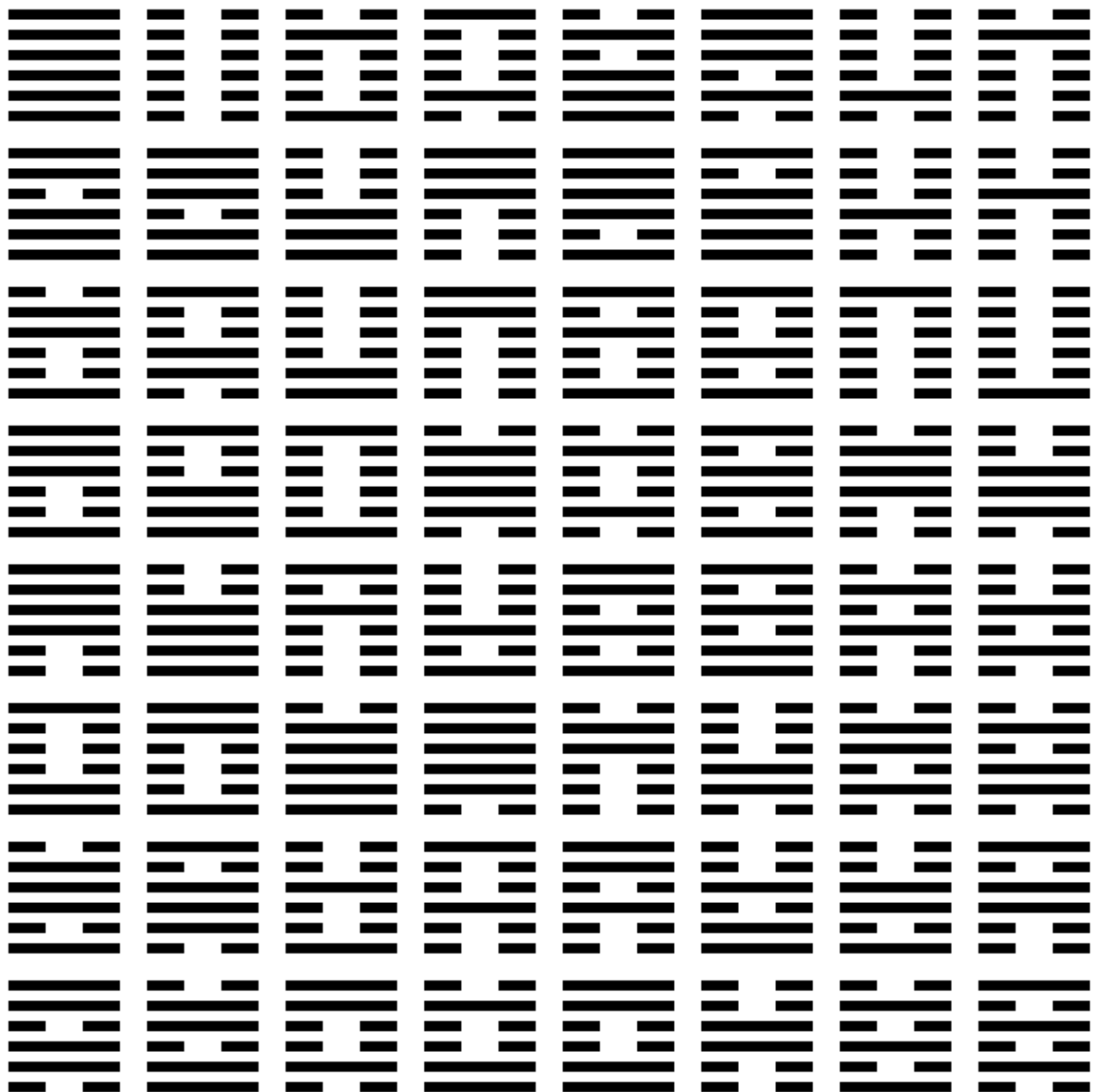
* It's probably quite apparent that I'm not too thrilled with the prospect of not attending semiofest14 in Shanghai.

Continuing the submerging, not so long ago I wrote: "*we are born **out of knowledge***". A train of thought akin to "*infinite is in.finite*" which I found resonates well in Mathematical Philosophy where I heard "we define finite sets through them not being infinite" and "we have more difficulties understanding finite beings than the infinite". The idea behind "we are born out of knowledge" is the idea that if "we" (sentient beings) come from the nebula of sheer possibility, of firstness, where we were one and

all-knowing. When we are born, we dis-connect from this oneness, from the knowledge, and start building sentence through alienation (and opposition). After which we try to understand, or to know, what we once knew. Only, from oneness to identity we've undergone a revolution, no evolution (change which does not change the system), but a revolution (change that changes the system, becoming other). So becoming other, means losing knowledge. My guess, right now, is that this knowledge resides inter.relations ... but attaining that knowledge again will come at a cost. The cost of losing identity, and the actual concept of knowledge - i.e. without hope of ever achieving knowledge again in the current state of disconnectedness.

As for the Yi-jing

I know the book of the Yi-jing as the book of change. When Malcolm mentioned a visual for diversity to be used in China, I immediately thought any visual I could come up with would not hold up against the visuals already in place. I tried to find something that could offer a kind of “added value” feel, but I don't seem to find anything that has more “added value” than the Yi-Ying chart:



Visually we're just talking about two elements, a complete line, and an interrupted line ... of course there's the visible "invisible" element, the space between, the blankness of the page.

What it does for me, is it shows the idea of diversity and similarity at the same time. The power of the void wherein both diversity and similarity have the room to operate/exist ... And, personally, I have the feeling that it unites the concepts of diversity and the semiotics of the void:

Is not change the link between diversity and the void? As diversity can only be in the void, where it changes in the eternal flux of positions?

- *thierry* 18-21/4/14

Note: I had the idea of making an animated visual of the Yi-Ying, but as you both know I don't believe in originality, so every idea I have I do a quick search to see if someone already made something similar or not. In this case I found this: <http://taolodge.com/flash/sequencer.html>
It's called the I-ching sequencer, just hit "play" when it opens.