Marianna Papastephanou*

Edusemiotics and Karl-Otto Apel's transcendental semiotics

Abstract: The semiotic turn and the twentieth century critique of the philosophy of consciousness presented a unique challenge and stressed the problematic status of old binary oppositions such as the subject versus the object, the mind versus the body, and the private versus the public. Karl-Otto Apel has responded to this philosophical occurrence with a theory of transcendental semiotics, a highly original endeavor to avoid mere reversals of older binary oppositions and pernicious consolidations of new hierarchies. This article aims to unravel Apel's semiotics and to make it relevant to the philosophical-educational themes that preoccupy edusemiotics. After a brief overview of how Apel reworks the theories that influenced him into his own transcendental-semiotic account, the article focuses on some specific points adding more depth to the venture of associating Apel's theory and edusemiotics.

Keywords: dualism, positivism, consensus, communication, classroom dialogue

1 Introduction

Two opposing theoretical models stand out from the plurality of tendencies that shaped early twentieth century philosophy: one is the subject-object model; the other is the so-called linguistic turn. The former (mainly through Husserlian phenomenology) radicalized Cartesian themes related to philosophy of consciousness. The latter attacked philosophy of consciousness and shifted philosophical attention to formal language analysis. Already existing tensions between Anglo-American thought and European philosophizing were exacerbated as the then-emerging analytic camp became rigidly demarcated from the continental philosophy of consciousness and its subject-object springboard. Later, a further change of direction, this time toward ordinary language and its performativities, superseded the early analytic emphasis on formalized (philosophical) language and pollinated in diverse ways both sides of the divide, the analytic and the continental. Among the theories that had already paved the path to such a development was C. S. Peirce's semiotic

*Corresponding author: Marianna Papastephanou, Department of Education, University of Cyprus, E-mail: edmari@ucy.ac.cy

pragmaticism. Though in no way homologous (and surely not always compatible) the semiotic and linguistic turn continued to present a unique challenge to the philosophy of consciousness, which stood accused of consolidating old binary oppositions such as the subject versus the object, the mind versus the body, and the private versus the public.

The need for continental philosophy to respond to such challenges diversified its directions and practices. Rich and innovative philosophical approaches emerged in various continental contexts, most of them united by the determination to overcome philosophy of consciousness and its metaphysics of presence. Chief among them, the second generation Frankfurt School, represented mainly by J. Habermas and K. O. Apel, took a major critical distance from the subject-object model. It explored the possibility of a philosophy based on intersubjectivity and the "always already" of language, i.e., on the fact of "semiotic or linguistic mediation" (Apel 1998b: 54) of any human understanding and interaction. Although the anti-Cartesian spirit of the times often led some of the French versions of continental philosophy to an anti-foundationalism and anti-transcendentalism that swept along all Kantian efforts to formulate conditions of the possibility of thought, it did not always block the path toward a renewed transcendentalism. In the French context, a kind of transcendentalism was evident in J. Derrida and a transcendental empiricism was propounded by G. Deleuze. In the German context, the issue of transcendentalism was to effect a rupture in second-generation Critical Theory: Habermas was reluctant to think his universal pragmatics through to transcendentalist implications whereas Apel saw precisely in Peirce's pragmaticism a prospect for reformulating conditions of possibility in the form of transcendental semiotics.[1]

Diversely and richly influenced by the twentieth century philosophical settings, philosophy of education passed through various phases of initial fascination with analytic philosophy and – mainly Deweyan – pragmatism. Then came a gradual questioning of the analytic grip, an ongoing interest in Deweyan themes was preserved and an increasing engagement with continental philosophy entered the picture. Current philosophy of education maintains some (post-)analytic perspectives to a degree, borrows from German-continental contexts and constantly draws from the French-continental persuasion.

However, many educational-philosophical responses to the above tendencies on both sides of the post-modern (continental)/post-analytic (Anglo-American) divide have not consistently maintained the anti-dualist commitment that accompanied the pragmatic and semiotic turn. Edusemiotics presents a fresh and most welcome alternative that questions established binarisms and aspires to cross

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1 On the Apel-Habermas debate and the stakes of their disagreement see Papastephanou (1997).

divides.[2] In bringing together sources at first sight as diverse as Deleuze, Peirce, Merleau-Ponty, and Jung, edusemiotics enacts precisely the discursive inclusiveness, philosophical openness and interpretive boldness that it promotes at a more abstract level. However, a philosophical source that has not yet been mined in edusemiotics is the Apelian transcendental-semiotics. The present article aims to introduce Apel's thought and draw some initial connections with the premises of edusemiotics.

2 Apel's transcendental semiotics

Apel has responded to the philosophical occurrences described in the above introduction with a theory of transcendental semiotics, a highly original endeavor to avoid mere reversals of older binary oppositions and pernicious consolidations of new hierarchies. This article unravels Apel's response making it relevant to some of the philosophical-educational themes that preoccupy edusemiotics. Influenced by Peirce, Heidegger and Wittgenstein among others, Apel's philosophy acknowledges the *a priori* dimension of world-disclosure through language, while steering clear from blanket critiques of reason, justification and objectivity.

That Apel's philosophy crosses philosophical divides and provides fruitful encounters between diverse persuasions has pertinently been argued out (Mendieta 2002: ix–xvii), and I shall not delve into it. Apel's prolific work proves useful for a long array of themes including science, hermeneutic understanding, communication, discourse, globalization, technology, multiculturalism, and social justice (Sikka 2012: 21). His semiotics has a clear bearing on epistemological issues like the explanation – understanding [*Erklären-Verstehen*] controversy. It also offers a powerful critique of: scientism; the early Popper's deductive-nomological model of explanation (and its application to history via Karl Hempel's "explanans-explanandum" theory) to the later Popper's theory of the three worlds; and the neo-Wittgensteinian response to these problems down to von Wright's epistemology (Apel 1984, 1998a).[3] From the broad scope of his philosophical interventions I will mention below only those that ease the passage to associations with edusemiotics.

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2 As becomes evident in Inna Semetsky's texts, edusemiotics continues and re-interprets the intellectual legacy of major philosophers and critical theorists, crossing over American Pragmatism and Continental philosophy.

Apel's commitment to a relational ontology against subject-centered reason marks his departure from Cartesian solipsism and from aspects of Husserlian phenomenology.[4]

In this vein, Apel takes distances from those Kantian assumptions that enable scientism: when Kantianism "restricts the scope of the constitution of the objects of experience," one may draw from it "the methodological consequence of a radical scientism" which "limits the idea of knowledge to modern natural science and, at best, to a quasi-natural science, the categories of which have been reduced accordingly" (Apel 1984: 32).

Heidegger's diagnoses of a suspicious alliance between science and technology that "enframes" the world often provide a reference point for Apel's critique of scientism. Such an "enframing" (*Gestell*) leads to "de-worlding" (*Entweltlichung*), to a departure from a contextual world-understanding in the wake of an over-preoccupation with the present-at-hand. Praxis is sacrificed on the altar of *theoria* in the name of scientific objectivity. But, to Apel, Heidegger failed to see that the objectivity making the world available to science does not have to lead to a scientistic conception of the world. Hence Apel's opposition to scientism in the light of hermeneutics does not entail a blanket critique of scientific reason; likewise, his opposition to transcendental mentalism and methodical solipsism does not commit him to relativism (Apel 1998a: 25).

Apel is also critical of analytic philosophy to the extent that, despite recognizing the pragmatic dimension of semiosis, it failed to deploy "a genuine transcendental reflection on the semiotic place and epistemological function of intersubjective understanding" (Apel 1998a: 13). He critically reviewed and contrasted the three main paradigms of *prima philosophia*[5] to argue why the first two cannot account for the possibility of the constitution of a common world of meaning and for the possibility of truth as intersubjective validity of knowledge (Apel 1998b: 51).

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3 True, some of the epistemological questions that Apel has discussed may no longer be as fashionable as they used to be. But, in my opinion, what brings them back to the fore is precisely the postmodern currency of the debates about singularity, plurality, and representational economy, given the fact that these issues basically revolve around questions of determinism, knowledge, and causality.

4 Apel writes: "when Descartes or Husserl insisted on the apodictic evidence of the *ego cogito* ... they completely overlooked the fact that – even as empirically solitary thinkers – they were already arguing, that is using public language and participating in an argumentative discourse" (Apel 1998b: 52).

5 These are: ontological – Aristotelian – metaphysics, philosophy of consciousness and transcendental semiotics.

In terms of semiotics and the logic of relations, Apel's approach "expands the two-place expression of a relation, 'x explains y' into the three-place expression 'x explains y for the subject of knowledge z.'" Yet, he differentiates this from the empirical pragmatics of the subjective context of cognitive achievements whose implications comprise discrimination "between the different everyday explanations for schoolchildren, members of different professions, and social groups or cultures." Rather, the expansion Apel proposes is based "on the three-place character of the sign-relation (Peirce), and thus, on linguistically mediated acts of knowledge" (Apel 1984: 190). In Peirce's semiotic logic Apel finds epistemological possibilities that were "missing in the twentieth century's analytic philosophy" (Apel 1998a: 32).

Peirce is praised: for distinguishing "semiotically between different types of (linguistic and non-linguistic) signs, namely, 'symbols', 'indices,' and 'icons'" (Apel 1998c: 72); and for his three fundamental categories of semiotic representation of the world (presentation of suchness, encounter between I and non-I, and conceptual mediation or interpretation; Apel 1998a: 35). Based on Peirce's triadicity, Apel will claim that "only by the conceptual-symbolic interpretation, which … completes the abductive inferences, can the cognitive result of the perceptual judgments and hence their truth or falsehood emerge" (Apel 1998c: 72).

Favoring a process of truth-seeking (Apel 1998c: 73) against axiomatic "truths" in all fields of endeavor, Apel also promotes a deliberative notion of justice in (world) politics. To this end, "a mediation between universalism and particularistic communitarianism has to be accomplished" (Apel 1998a: 33) in ways that go beyond facile glorifications of liberalism and respond to current political challenges (Apel 2001). His discourse ethics represents an important variation of Frankfurt School communicative ethics (Papastephanou 1997) that has recently been expanded by Kettner (2006: 303) among others to develop the issue of discursive power and to contribute to bioethics (Kettner 1999). It is important for what follows here to keep in mind that transcendental semiotics combines post-Heideggerian hermeneutics, the later Wittgenstein, speech act theory (Austin and Searle), and Peirce's pragmatic semiotics in order to argue for a model of language and meaning (Sikka 2012: 12) that steers clear from extreme confidence in acquired and settled knowledge and from quick dismissals of claims to transcendental conditions of truth and knowledge.

3 Basic convergences with edusemiotics

Having briefly located Apel's semiotics, let us now attempt some connections with edusemiotics. With some exceptions (e.g., Biesta 1998), Apel's philosophy has not been discussed in philosophy of education.[6] In edusemiotics Apel's work does not come up at all, and, as A. Stables (2014b: 431) acknowledges, "there are strong schools of semiotics that are not given due emphasis." A case in point is Apel's transcendental semiotics.

Edusemiotics emphasizes the educational import of the pragmatic (versus analytic) tradition that rejects "a sharp dichotomy between subject and object, body and mind, as well as an epistemology reduced to the spectator theory of knowledge" (Semetsky 2014a: 490–491). This already legitimizes an interest in Apelian philosophy as an additional source of such pragmatic justification of the decision to overcome dualisms. Apel preserves the rigor of analytic philosophers that Stables rightly appreciates without maintaining the philosophical assumptions that have historically led to "the pretensions of some analytic philosophers of education" (Stables 2014a: 224) that Stables rightly combats. For Stables argues that "the narrow imposition of means-end logic in the form of curricular aims and objectives and standardized tests, all of which serve to reduce rather than enhance education overall, is partly [the analytic philosophers'] fault" (Stables 2014a: 224).

Apel is one of the first philosophers to cross the divide between analytic and continental philosophy and some divides within continental philosophy in ways that recall the bold and insightful juxtaposition of diverse philosophical sources in current edusemiotics (e.g., Nöth 2014; Pigrum 2014) and the exploration of the rhetoric of turns (Rutten and Soetaert 2014). Apel's critical-theoretical approach to textuality and dialogue brings him close to the de-naturalization of signs and their use that Semetsky importantly promotes in her version of edusemiotics along with awareness of the interpretive nature of all codes of communication (verbal and non-verbal). "Cultural artifacts are capable of semiotic or communicative potential; different objects and events in our life carry cultural, psychological and social significance and represent symbolic 'texts' to be read and

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6 And this even in educational-philosophical theories that are especially concerned with dialogue or classroom deliberative ethics. Perhaps the reason for this neglect is that a foreshortened treatment based on a simplistic categorization of Apel's thought as foundationalist overlooks the meaning and position that foundationalism has in his work and his efforts to mediate between objectivism and relativism. In my view, if endorsed, such a treatment will force us drastically to take sides in a way that conforms to the very bipolar reasoning that edusemiotics rightly condemns.

interpreted" (Semetsky 2013: 4). A pedagogy borrowing theoretical material from Apel, much like edusemiotics, and unlike other educational-theoretical tendencies, would not give excessive priority to effective strategies for the transmission or discovery of knowledge. Rather, it would rehabilitate critical awareness of the interpretive character of what counts as knowledge at a given time and it would draw attention to the deliberative and collective aspiration and effort to truth as a regulative ideal that guides a communication community. This accommodates a claim to diversification and contextualization that should be reflected in educational policy too. From Stables' theoretical semiotic position we extrapolate that edusemiotics endorses such diversification when, "in applied policy terms," it "undermines any assumption that what we mean by education can serve as a reliable basis for constructing and imposing aspects of an educational system uniformly on a population" (Stables 2014a: 224).

The above ideas work against the lopsided account of the significance of epistemic endeavor (at the expense of the human sciences and art) that frames much of the current (academic and extra-mural) trials of the humanities. Apel defends a distinction but also a complementarity of explanation and understanding that does justice to both their difference and their interdependence. To undo the dichotomous treatment of explanation and understanding Apel adopts an "anti-reductionist crux" that recognizes that: "(a) precisely in the case of the self-understanding of the experimental natural sciences, the sharpest distinction between the two domains of explanation and understanding is required, and (b) this distinction serves the interest of their reciprocal supplementation" (Apel 1984: 63). In this way, the modes of reason corresponding to different modes of research are by no means ontologically asymmetrical. Consequently, a polemical characterization of different ways of thinking as irrational, non-rational or in some such way inferior misfires. Where there is a cognitive interest behind any form of research, whether nomological or hermeneutic, there exists a corresponding and equiprimordial kind of rationality.

Apel's philosophy can also be conducive to educational-theoretical debates concerning reason, disciplines and curricular emphases when such debates aim to trace the origins of dichotomous tendencies in modern thought and aspire to overcome them. Like Deleuze (1994), one of the major philosophers who exerted influence on edusemiotics, Apel also performs a critique of Kantianism in order to move on to his reformulation of transcendentalism. And although Apel's way out of Kant's transcendentalism diverges significantly (in ways that cannot be elaborated here) from Deleuze's (1994) own departure from Kant *via* transcendental empiricism, it is no accident that Apel's and Deleuze's philosophies often find their voice through their contrast with Kant(ianism).

Apel owes much to Kantian thought. However, he takes distances and advances a critique that begins from Kant and Kantianism yet can be generalized beyond them in order to become a vehicle for arguing against current residues of positivism as reflected in educational policies and curricular provisions. "Kant wanted to ban the freedom of the will from the world of experience, first, by distinguishing between things-in-themselves and appearances, then, by confirming freedom in the sense of 'intelligible' freedom" (Apel 1984: 33).[7] Hence the priority of the practical over the theoretical is inverted by the Kantian ontological commitments to the idea of the human being as citizen of two worlds, the noumenal and the phenomenal – something that did not remain unexploited by neo-Kantian positivism.

Apel detects *inter alia* in Neo-Kantianism (Apel 1984: 64) a lopsided and positivist treatment of modes of rationality and concomitant interests. On the one hand, Kantian epistemology and ethics suggest a priority of a practical interest. But on the other, Kantian implicit theoretical ontology, namely, the dualistic distinction between matter and mind and the understanding of external reality as the totality of knowable, objectifiable, and causally explicable natural phenomena gives priority to a positivistic interest in pure theoretical knowing. For its part, edusemiotics "offers an alternative starting point for considering issues of human development and decision making that does not divide mind from matter" (Stables and Gough 2006: 272–273) and does not divorce competence (Pikkarainen 2014) from all-round personal growth. Thus, it converges with Apel's diagnosis when it associates the mind-body dualism with "the development of a highly productive, but nevertheless narrow form of empirical science, under which a supposedly disinterested rational observer studies supposedly objective data" (Stables 2014a: 224). Edusemiotics discredits the mind-body and realism-relativism dualisms that continue to inform the received educational views on learning, choice and language. It declares that it "posits not only language but all signifying systems as elements within and across semiotically functioning organisms rather than being mere representations, means of expression, or 'tools'" (Stables and Gough 2006: 271).

As Apel among other philosophers of previous decades made clear, we must trace some of our current theoretical difficulties (that have had unmistakable practical consequences) to the mode by which Descartes attempted to mitigate ontological metaphysics with the turn to the subject. Semetsky credits

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7 Furthermore, "for the human sciences it must remain deeply unsatisfying that, in contrast to natural events, their basic, empirically given phenomena – intentional actions, as well as speech acts and texts – were not even recognized by Kant as themes in the sense of the constitution of the empirical world" (Apel 1984: 32).

edusemiotics – and correctly so – with the appropriate departure from Descartes and exploration of its benefits for education. "The dualism of man versus nature is overcome due to the action of signs crossing over the Cartesian schism with its isolated non-material 'I think'" (Semetsky 2014b: 571). Apel's transcendental semiotics is aligned with this among other reasons because it relies on Peirce's semiotics whose contribution to such a departure cannot be overestimated. Hence it is no wonder that Apel's semiotics comprises the following points: the rejection of methodical solipsism and the affirmation of intersubjectivity, the denouncement of reductive and abstractive fallacies[8] that derive from one-dimensional or two dimensional considerations of semiosis (for, "semiosis always presupposes a sign, a real thing for which it stands, and a community of sign users for which this sign denotes a designatum"; Mendieta 2002: 92).

That "learning from signs is equivalent to pursuing education in the three Is," i.e., insight, imagination and intuition, "contrary to the long-standing tradition of three Rs of formal education" (Semetsky 2013: 6), presupposes a modified account of the context of learning that echoes the paradigmatic certainties of the semiotic turn. Thus "learning occurs not only in formal settings such as a classroom; the concept of learning pertains to real-life human experiences and cultural events that can embody significant meanings" (Semetsky 2013: 4). This position accords with Apel's arguments in favor of the idea that "all experience," even the theoretically guided, experimental experience in the natural sciences, "is primarily knowledge through engagement in life" (Apel 1980: 49). That this point is shared by edusemioticians becomes evident in all of Semetsky's contributions that set the stage for edusemiotics in the first place.

As even critics of Apel acknowledge, to him, language cannot "be ascribed uniquely to the laws of the Kantian A-priori of consciousness but also to an A-priori which has not been taken into account by the philosophy of consciousness and which Apel defines as *Leibapriori,* i.e., a bodily *a priori*" (Teobaldelli 1998: 140). Real life and embodiment are also basic framings of edusemiotics, as becomes manifest, for instance, when Olteanu emphasizes the educational significance of the lifeworld (2014: 459) and claims that "teachers should offer the learner the optimal experiences for learning so that the learner develops her logical (semiotic) capacities for handling real-world events" (Olteanu 2014: 469). Productive learning processes of the kinds that interest pedagogy cannot occur without the acting of signs and the embodiment of sign-processes (Strand 2014:

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8 Apel explains the term "abstractive fallacy" as the tendency "to reduce the triadicity of semiosis through replacing transcendental reflection on the third place by some kind of semanticization strategy, either directly by empirical (e.g., behavioristic) pragmatics or by formal pragmatics as a meta-language of empirical pragmatics" (Apel 1998a: 14).

442). That all this ties well with the critique of dualism and scientism (as has already been explained above) becomes clear in S. Pesce's formulation that "emphasizing the embodied character of cognition entails rejecting the dualist view of cognition, the idea that cognition may be summed up by the metaphor of computation" (Pesce 2014: 482).

A point on which Apelian semiotics may add a new framework for edusemiotics is, in my view, the dialogical and communicative. Certainly, the unconscious is one path to be educationally retrieved by the edusemiotic turn so as to give room to students themselves "to produce their abductive guesses" and to other activities "understood as apprenticeship in signs" and also to help teachers accept such activities as valuable learning "contrary to the isolated 'end' represented by standardized testing" (Semetsky 2014a: 501). But this path is not at odds with a consensus and process account of discourse. In fact, if the former is valuable as a critical-deconstructive move, the latter may also be an indispensable, critical-reconstructive move that goes hand in hand with it in the effort to avoid dichotomizing deconstruction and reconstruction. If this is valid, then, to adapt a point by Apel concerning the sign-interpreter in general, the student should establish "a communicative relationship with regards to the signs to be interpreted – actual utterances or texts." But this relation will have to be further determined "by the heuristic anticipation of the possible intersubjective consensus of all possible sign-interpreters about the claims to validity (sense, truth, truthfulness, normative rightness) that are bound to speech acts" (Apel 1994: 251). This chimes with a more general position deriving from the overall reception of Apel's work – a position that asserts that Apel's transcendental semiotics "should be considered in light of its potential contribution to contemporary communication thought." It is argued that, in a novel way, Apel "accounts for the very nature of communication itself. His focus on the universal rules of language, lifeworld assumptions, rational discourse, intersubjectivity, truth based on consensus formation, and the centrality of rational argumentation forms the very ground of communication" (Sikka 2012: 21). In this respect, Apelian semiotics may contribute at the more reconstructive level of edusemiotics.

Be that as it may, this section has mainly focused on the common cause of edusemiotics and transcendental semiotics that is most directly discernible and forms an initial point of reference. Divergences are often more exciting and perhaps more productive, but the aim of this article is introductory. Nevertheless, let us now go into more depth and indicate some possible directions of the encounter between edusemiotics and transcendental semiotics.

4 Fertile though as yet not-mined ground

From very early Apel argued that communicative rationality needs no grounding in extra-linguistic realities since the notion termed "normative presuppositions of argumentation" is non-circumventible *within* the linguistic confines themselves. Hence, communicative reason escapes the charge of solipsism and dualism, while by preceding experience linguistically it remains transcendental. Thus, the normative presuppositions of argumentation are transcendental in so far as one cannot deny them "without at the same time supposing them and thereby committing a performative self-contradiction" (Apel 1975: 250). From then on, the notion of a performative self-contradiction becomes a constitutive element of Apel's semiotics, one that I would like to single out here and develop.

Before describing Apel's treatment of contradictions, let me make explicit some implicit assumptions that separate his approach from that of some postmodernist thinkers glorifying any contradiction as apocalyptic. Many contradictions that result from insufficient information or untenable premises or dogmatism might appear disguised as contradictions of reason itself (paradoxes with which, according to P. de Man's well-known position, we have to reconcile ourselves). When this happens, the social currency of such contradictions obtains justification through recourse to unconscious or mystical pretensions. A line between the two kinds of self-contradictory argumentation (the one due to incomplete information, prejudice, or fanaticism and the one due to shortcomings endemic to reason) cannot be clearly and unmistakably drawn.

However, it is possible to identify some contradictions that borrow a mystical meaning wrongly – as it does not truly pertain to them. Often, contradictory conclusions owing to faulty premises, hence in principle surmountable, are elevated to the status of contradictions inherent in reason itself. Theoreticians who declare their contradictions, or the contradictions of their predecessors,[9] as endemic to reason shield precisely the closeness and the dogmatism of the I from the inexorable questioning and scrutiny posed by the other (the interlocutor). They do so by appealing to an authority that is only disclosed to them but is not communicable because it is ineffable. This is hardly informative and conducive to the public sphere and what pertains to it. On this point, Apel offers a more nuanced and qualified connection of reason and contradiction than they do.

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9 Arguably, Derrida (1981) can also be criticized as falling prey to this tendency. His defense of Nietzsche when the latter is charged with contradiction, inconsistency, etc., might be a case in point; but this is only mentioned here as a possible line of research and cannot be argued out for reasons of focus and relevance.

Apel's critique of formal logic is sharper, more substantial and profound than the anti-modern/post-modern critique often is. Apel writes that "the logico-mathematical type of *logos* is, as analytic *logos*, minimally informative." The criterion of the prohibition of the logical contradiction "a and non-a" that this logos comprises is merely formal and dependent, for any content, on the semantic filling in of the variable "a." The application of the criterion pertaining to formal logic "is always dependent on axiomatic premises that are themselves in need of justification" (Apel 1993: 46).[10] The following shows how this critique against formal logic operates with reference to the notion of contradiction as reformulated by Apel. A performative self-contradiction can first be approached with an example. For Apel, "the paradox of the liar does not occur because of the self-referential use of language alone as it manifests itself in statements such as 'All men lie' or 'I always lie' or 'I am now lying'" (Apel 1993: 29). Such statements are paradoxical also because, in making them, the speaker simultaneously denies "his claim to truthfulness and thereby also his claim to speak the truth." Now, Apel explains that the rule that forbids the commission of a performative self-contradiction is not introduced, like the principle of non-contradiction, as an axiom of propositional logic. Rather, "it is the result of a reflexive insight: i.e., the insight that the introduction of any conceivable theory or any conceivable set of axioms already presupposes the performative self-consistency of speech." That makes a performative self-consistency a requirement of thinking and argumentation that cannot be side-stepped. From this follows "that the rule prohibiting performative self-contradiction cannot be grounded, "as is customary in the tradition of logic," in "the process of deductive or inductive inference from final premises" (Apel 1993: 29).

Simply put, it is not the propositional content of a sentence on its own that informs us about being self-contradictory or not. The illocutionary element in its pragmatic manifestations makes us aware of the fact that the context, the language game, or the paradigm we presuppose and not only the intrinsic logic of a proposition contradicts our assertion. For instance, the "I am not here" of an answering machine is very different in its pragmatic dimension from the "I am not here" an annoyed person shouts at an obtrusive visitor. And this difference cannot be captured by a formal-logical approach limited to a mere analysis of the propositional content. Therefore, the argument of a performative self-contradiction is too interconnected with a reinterpretation of logic and

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10 "Every justification through logical inference, however, (i.e., deduction and induction) necessarily leads into the trilemma whose alternatives are infinite regress, *petitio principii*, or the dogmatic insistence on the truth of the premises" (Apel 1993: 46).

rationality within semiotics, to be dealt with as merely a variation of the argument of contradiction within formal or dialectical logic.[11]

Does this entail, however, that Apel's insistence on avoiding performative self-contradiction and on acknowledging normative presuppositions of argumentation leads to a notion of consensus that edusemiotics (at least of Stables' version rather than Semetsky's) might find too rigorist or even dogmatist? To tackle this I believe that Peirce's figure becomes highly relevant. Consider Stables' statement: "For some (including myself), he [Peirce] is historically important but in key respects superseded; for others (including, I think, Inna Semetsky) his fundamental position is still strong enough to drive forward the development of new forms of semiotics" (Stables 2014a: 225).

In fact, Stables detects a Peircean proximity to rationalism and argues that this distances Peirce from semiotics.[12] To Stables, semiotics is relativist because it is "*axiomatic of a fully semiotic perspective* that no philosopher or philosophy (semiotics included) can provide any final answer, as signs are always interpreted and the context of interpretation always varies" (Stables 2014c: 1 emphasis mine). Let us ask here: does the word "fully" above not bring along problems regarding associations of plenitude? And does a fully semiotic perspective (relying on an axiomatic assumption as italicized) not provide a final answer, e.g., on the issue of Peirce's qualifying as a fully semiotic thinker?[13] If it does, is

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11 As Foucault, Derrida, Gasché, and de Man have done in refuting charges of inconsistency directed from a traditional-logical point of view. For these reasons I disagree with Martin Jay's (1992) approach to this subject-matter in his otherwise very carefully argued and interesting essay. I would expect more emphasis on the presuppositions and implications of the concept of performative contradiction within a pragmatic philosophy of language and I would not consider the Foucauldian or Derridean response to formal logic even in the least as an adequate or effective answer to Apelian and Habermasian charges. On the other hand, although I consider the argument of performative self-contradiction plausible, I do not see it as a complete response to the postmodern-poststructuralistic challenge. The encounter between German philosophy and poststructuralism can be very fruitful in revealing the implicit assumptions and implications of theories within both camps as well as the unrecognized complicity of some poststructuralist ideas with arguments that justify the operations of strategicality and power.

12 He does so in a rich argumentative way and raises important points, but I think that, even if some of them do apply in the case of Peirce, do not work in the case of Apel. But a head-on discussion that would do justice to the rich argumentation of Stables (2014c: 4–8) cannot be carried out here for reasons of focus.

13 In like manner I would question any expectation of a semiotic philosophy (or any philosophy for that matter) to be a fully satisfying schema and I surely do not consider Apel's to be such a schema. The problems confronting Apel's theory could not be discussed here for reasons of focus. But not to be a fully satisfying schema is one thing; not to qualify as a semiotic philosophy is quite another. Besides, can edusemiotics present itself as a fully satisfying schema without committing performative self-contradiction?

this not a performative self-contradiction, since the final answer (that is, something static) undermines both inconclusiveness and the integrative openness of edusemiotics? Does it not introduce rigid criteria of demarcation that exclude not only Peirce but also semioticians suspect of taking equal distance from mentalism and relativism (instead of subscribing to the latter)? This question does not aim to adjudicate the Peircean issue within edusemiotics, but only to indicate in advance that an affirmative and final answer to this question renders Apel a wrong candidate for consideration from an edusemiotic point of view because, like Peirce, he also does not take infinite interpretive variety as supportive of relativist negations of truth. For relativism may not quite mean the anti-dogmatic negation of a final answer (that much is accepted by Peirce and Apel's fallibilism) but rather the epistemic rejection of any (even provisional) supra-individual, context-transcending truth. And this raises questions about the standpoint from which the relativist can use terms such as "unreal" or "confused" philosophical distinctions (Rorty 1998: 45). This is precisely why R. Rorty writes: "my strategy for escaping the self-referential difficulties into which the 'Relativist' keeps getting himself is to move everything over from epistemology and metaphysics to cultural politics, from claims to knowledge ... to suggestions about what we should try" (Rorty 1998: 57).

In Apel's semiotics, the "always already" of intersubjectivity where science finds itself, and Peirce's pragmaticism of a communication community of scientists which filters every scientific truth or application, disclose the non-value-free character of science. They do not do so in order to relativize it radically, but to unveil its partisan character, its relation to praxis and, ideally, to emancipation. Here Peirce's notion of "mellonization" [14] is relevant. A Peircean pragmatic maxim is to explicate "all conceptual meanings by 'mellonization,' that is, by asking for the possible consequences with regard to our actions and experiences in the future" (Apel 1998a: 34), that is, to go beyond "all factual use towards the possible use by future-oriented imagination" (Apel 1998a: 36). On this I think all versions of edusemiotics may be on a par with Apel, as I extrapolate from Stables' following statement: "we rely on the upcoming generation not merely to learn what we know but to achieve what has hitherto been unachievable. We cannot achieve that through tight definition of educational aims and guidelines over transmission" (Stables 2014a: 224). Thought through to its epistemic presuppositions, this passage can be interpreted as very close to the ideal communication community, its future-orientedness and its commitment to pursuing truth as a regulative ideal. The way

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14 In 1904, in a letter to William James, Peirce mentioned the term mellonization (Ketner 1995: 336) which Peirce derived from the Greek *mellon* ('future'), by which he defined his ideality as future oriented.

that the passage ends further supports this interpretation: "We can merely have the richest communications possible with our students knowing that only they have the potential and responsibility to make something new from what they have heard and experienced in the contexts in which they find themselves" (Stables 2014a: 224).

Then again, the question persists: does Apel qualify as a semiotic thinker (even if not "fully")? Does he take adequate distance from dogmatic rationalism? I tackle this by explaining why I take issue with E. Cooke's (2010: 38) position that, though Apel follows Pierce on the possibility of error in the long run, Apel's "view is insufficiently open to error in the short run." Here is the relevant passage from Cooke (2010: 40): "The very notion of the long run presupposes the possibility of pervasive error in the present." Cooke admits that Apel recognizes this connection between a commitment to truth and the possibility of error, but she charges him with doing so only from the third person/observer point of view. "When Apel unpacks the necessary presuppositions of the actual speaker, he leaves out the Peircean speaker who must presuppose *both* a commitment to truth *and* a commitment to the possibility of error in every truth claim she makes" (Cooke 2010: 40). But, I argue, this is not the case because Apel emphasizes that for all of us as actual speakers "even if, or when, we reach factual consensus on the basis of all available criteria, the regulative idea of the ultimate consensus compels us to try to transcend it by looking for further criteria that are not yet covered by the factual consensus" (Apel 1998b: 59; for a similar conclusion see also Apel 1998c: 77). Though this accommodates the "participant version of the 'I could be wrong' admission," still, there should be a more cautious treatment of the whole issue from both sides.

To unpack this point let me first quote Cooke again: Fallibilism is a

> second-order awareness of one's first-order limitations, which informs our understanding of our own claims from a first person inquirer's point of view. I'm aware on a meta-level that I may not have the full picture. But these third person reflections must make their way back to the first person participant point of view, though, this time, a more reflective one. So, I add, "but I could be wrong." (Cooke 2010: 40)

I believe that this condition is met by Apel as the previous quotation indicated but I would like to qualify its pertinence as follows. The "I could be wrong" that a participant in dialogue adds acknowledges the possibility of error but not to the point of performatively canceling out the commitment to truth that Cooke admits as simultaneously present. Awareness of the possibility of falsification of one's claims should not be strong enough to lead to shrugging off the shoulders regarding the debated issue, to contradiction, to "anything goes" and other such implications which are not just theoretical but also practical. Consider, for instance, one taking the position: "the Holocaust happened but 'I may be wrong.'" "I may be wrong" in

cases of actual dialogue where a point of high stakes and strong conviction has been reached makes sense in quote marks, that is, as a possibility of falsity that I am aware of, as something that makes me open to the other's argument and willing to carry on discussing with her and search further for the debated issue in the future. That much, I think, is operative within Apel's discourse ethics. But if the phrase is meant in such a way that the belief in what one defends as true is annulled, then, to me, it is either disingenuous or it weakens to the point of contradiction the claim to truth that it raises. Taking the possibility of error so seriously at present so as not to believe true the actual position I am taking not only renders the claim to truth inoperative but, in cases such as "the Holocaust happened, but I may be wrong," it reduces truth to a bloodless epistemic abstraction lacking political and ethical commitment. "I could be wrong" is a statement, a cautionary admission, of a general and inescapable possibility of all thinking, but not an operative assumption, operative to the point of self-cancellation of the claim itself at a given time and place, in real dialogue. It is operative to the extent that it stops dogmatism and makes room for further inquiry; but it does not go further than that because anything further leads either to incoherence or to hypocrisy. When one believes that the possibility of being wrong is too strong, one does not raise a validity claim; it goes back to searching or becomes only a listener of the other (a perfectly legitimate move, but one that cannot be always the case without cancelling out the very possibility of dialogue).

"Peirce argues that in order to learn we must be dissatisfied with what we already know" (Cooke 2010: 43). This is true in some cases, but it involves the following danger: dissatisfaction makes thinking conditional on something appearing already problematic or controversial; we often learn by problematizing the uncontroversial or by accumulating knowledge or building upon beliefs that we hold true. A predicament of the above interpretation of Peirce is that it gives too uniform an account of learning and it is too aphoristic. Indirectly, it echoes a certainty about learning that not only presents learning as too uniform but even disproves the "I may be wrong" that the fallibilist might have added to it for the sake of asserting her awareness of error. Ironically, this statement corroborates the view that complementing assertions with the phrase "but I could be wrong" is meaningful as a possibility in the long run, but one that does not have effects at this moment. For, at this moment, this adjacent idea ("I could be wrong") adds or alters nothing. In our example, it does not relativize the assertion that "to learn we must be dissatisfied with what we already know."

Apel's semiotic consensus theory of truth requires awareness of nuances in his notion of consensus and dissensus that have a bearing on cultivating an ethic of dialogue in classrooms. The idea of an ultimate consensus may be explained to students and made to guide their deliberative exploration of a specific issue that

preoccupies them; they may learn to view their classroom community at this point as, ideally, an unlimited argumentation community. The students may reach consensus. But they must learn that this consensus [that Apel terms "factual" and "pre-Peircean" (Apel 1998b: 58)] can function as a truth criterion only in a weak sense, since, being close to an appeal to authority and social currency (*Geltung*), does not suffice to guarantee validity (*Gültigkeit*). Students should become familiar with the distance separating a factual consensus from an ultimate consensus that works as a regulative ideal in dialogue. But what happens when students do not experience even a factual consensus (e.g., when the issue is highly controversial)? Awareness of the normative presuppositions of argumentation cultivates an ethic of dialogue that leaves deliberation open to futurity, maintains respect and appreciation of the other's contribution to the deliberative process and values inconclusiveness as an exciting prospect for further effort. Apel not only acknowledges factual dissensus (Apel 1998b: 58) but adds an important insight regarding its handling: participants in dialogue may "at least try to reach factual consensus concerning the reasons for their dissensus" (Apel 1998b: 58). In my view, this unleashes fascinating possibilities for a direction of dialogue toward self-awareness that make common cause with many tenets of the edusemiotic turn.

5 Conclusion

Presupposing a relational ontology edusemiotics emphasizes peaceful conflict resolution, dialogue, "attempts at mutual understanding" (Stables 2014b: 429) and bridging gaps owed to rigid commitments to representational thought. In this sense, it comes close to theories such as Apel's that rely on a consensus theory of truth and on deliberative justice. "Apel gets to the root of communication, as it is used in practice"; in doing so, he accounts "for how communicative acts in a pragmatic sense are connected to and facilitate larger political and social processes" (Sikka 2012: 21).

But, in my view, both transcendental-semiotics and edusemiotics often seem to assume too easy and flat a notion of peace and to reduce the political plane to the epistemic-ontological one. E. Dussel's post/anti-colonial perspective on politics, his liberation-ethics, presents an important challenge to simplified understandings of the political. Apel has been in ongoing dialogue with Dussel precisely on such issues. Just an indication of it here: although both Apel and Dussel "assert the dynamism of rationality, they localize the source of that dynamism differently" (Barber 1998: 135). Following Levinas, Dussel detects it "in the Other preceding, evoking, and questioning rationality." Dussel opts for

"an intuitive-descriptive method that depicts the way the Other comes to appearance." Dussel's suggestion that we posit the Other as an essential constituent of the ideal unlimited speech community reflects an Apelian influence. Yet Dussel's intuitive-descriptive methodology is always required "to revivify the height of the Other's demand and to prevent the face-to-face from collapsing into an 'alongside of.'" Apel believes that this prevention is accomplished through avoidance of performative self-contradiction. He locates the source of reason's dynamism "within the demands for self-consistency essential to self-critical rationality." Thus, he "employs a transcendental method, continually searching for the presupposed but unreflected-upon presuppositions of argumentation itself" (Barber 1998: 135).[15] I believe that this dialogue is as such extremely important for an educational philosophy that aspires to have far-reaching educational-political consequences. The reason why I believe so is because this dialogue has already advanced discourse ethics and complicated facile assumptions (often pervading educational theory) that political issues supposedly boil down to a relativization of one's commitments to particularist attachment.

Be that as it may, this article has provided only a brief account of Apel's transcendental semiotics, paying special attention to its complexity and multi-dimensionality. The latter justify the expectation that even those adherents to edusemiotics who will disagree with some of Apel's philosophy or with some of its conclusions will nevertheless find his version of semiotics useful and illuminating for some of their current debates. It has been shown here, or so I hope, that transcendental-semiotics and edusemiotics share an appreciation of integrative conceptual and theoretical frameworks, a justified suspicion of dualisms and a commitment to overcoming dichotomous thought. Both subscribe to the logic of signs and defend processual accounts of world-disclosure, emphasize interpretation beyond facticity and criticize evidence-based priorities and scientism. Apel's consistent critique of analytic philosophy makes common cause with the edusemiotic "conception of language understood broadly in terms of semiotic structures exceeding analytic philosophy's direct representation" (Semetsky's description of this special issue – in my possession). Finally, embodied cognition, relational ethics, and the problematics of self-formation, self-consistency and communication constitute another major point of convergence that supports the argument of the necessity of a further exchange between these two versions of semiotics.

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15 "These diverse understandings of the source of rationality's dynamism reflect fundamental differences in methodology" (Barber 1998: 135).

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