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Book Review

Staude, Martin. 2012. *Meaning in Communication, Cognition, and Reality*. Exeter: Imprint Academic

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Martin Staude, in the book *Meaning in Communication, Cognition, and Reality*, intends to elaborate on a theory of meaning, both as a theoretical program and methodological proposal. This idea of building a new theory is conceived as the incorporation of existing theories and approaches to meaning (in Semiotics, Linguistics, Sociology, Psychology, and Philosophy), and in return as the foundations for these other theories of meaning. Accordingly, the book has an empirical orientation and offers research questions. Power and law, chosen by Staude as social phenomena and vital concepts in the aforementioned disciplines, are being analyzed with the view of testing this theory, both at psychic and communicative levels.

Chapter one outlines the definition of meaning in the theory and is followed by chapter two where its philosophical foundations are discussed. Non-dualism is claimed to have hardly been pursued in the social science, whereas, as the author continues to argue, ontological heterogeneity between meaning and world is wrongly assumed as unbridgeable. Although non-dualism is here considered as a countercurrent to both constructivism and realism, Staude himself admits it resembles constructivism (in the sense of

Peirce's pansemiotism) and thus may be treated as its radicalization and/or continuation. Chapter three discusses meaning in the semiotic triangle and chapter four is the extension and refinement of the definition of meaning from chapter one. In chapter five, the author enters the intense and long-lasting debates in social anthropology (emic *versus* etic) and in epistemology (realist *versus* constructivist) with the aim of showing they are not irreconcilable. The chapter ends with methodological and methodic proposals, all of which refer to the value of the multitude of empirical descriptions from different observers, as well as to the necessity of combining the method of introspection and extraspection. Chapter six integrates newly developed categories of meaning, such as meanings, meaning fields and meaning universe, and addresses the question of how a preconscious implicit meaning (medium) is transformed into a conscious explicit meaning (form). This process of activation (of meaning) is here not only communicative but also psychic, and the process of non-activation is taken into consideration as playing an equally vital role. As a result, the scope of social phenomena bears resemblances to Husserl's concept of *Sonderwelten* encompassing both social-communicative and psychic-cognitive worlds.

The book has obvious key advantages. First of all, the theory is applied not only to communicative but also to psychic systems. It is illustrated with the example of law/power phenomena, which are conceptualized not exclusively in terms of communication (this being the case of Luhmann's system-theory notion of communication media). Taking into consideration psychic operations and their role in the meaning activation process enables a broader conceptualization of social phenomena, including law and power. The author refrains from including here those psychic operations that remain completely unconscious, internalized uncritically and/or assimilated and integrated. This seems to be a conscious researcher's decision, but he risks, in this way, the neglect – for a meaning remaining in the unconsciousness may produce similar effects as it is during conscious activation.

Furthermore, the significant advantage of this book is the theory of meaning proposes new concepts, such as meaning fields and activation. It is being shown how they may be applied to a concrete empirical case, giving at the same time methodological guidelines for future research. In this sense, Staude presents the theory for it seeks to provide concepts/hypotheses, and methods, especially those that are worthwhile, being those that are the effects of critical study to the existent ones.

All aforementioned advantages of the book lay the basis for one more advantage. The theory of meaning, apart from being consistent, achieves its objective of combining universalism with relativism as it refers to a formal, abstract area of fundamental research, and thus can be applied to a wide range of concrete empirical cases.

One aspect of the theory, not entirely consistent, however, is its reference to an ontological monism of meaning, and a fundamental philosophical debate (dualism *versus* non-dualism). Integrist approaches are in essence encumbered by the critique of *coincidentia oppositorum*, an uncritical conciliation of opposites, especially if it implies combining opposite theoretical assumptions and paradigms. This seems not to be the case here as the reader is provided with specific and critically selected arguments. Nevertheless, whereas the first version of dualism *etic versus emic* is presented in a clear and coherent way so that the reader could perceive the link between the philosophical stance and the research field, and their logical constructs, the second version, realist *versus* constructivist, is unclear and incoherent. Omitting the author's suggestion to some of the readers to skip the philosophical chapter, an epistemological discussion concludes there with Staude's admittance of what he proposes is constructivism; besides, one cannot see there, unlike in the aforementioned debate in social anthropology cases, a clear linkage between a theoretical and an empirical case. This part of the discussion seems, therefore, to be of little productivity, given the fact that the final conclusions, the main concepts and methodology of the theory of meaning, are so closely related with several existing social science concepts, dualistic in nature.

Last but not least, the author's attempt at presenting his theory in a logico-mathematical, (semi-)formalized manner, is both unconvincing, resembling more a typical visual way of presenting arguments, and fruitless since formal logic is widely recognized as sufficient for the social sciences.

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