The Signal Is Mute About Its Rule

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Ideamorphic Studies — disputatio

This research note re-examines Proposition 11 of the ideamorphist corpus under the disputatio protocol. The proposition, as written, describes ideas travelling as waves through the senses conceived as narrow openings, and denies that any sense transmits without loss. Instructed against the philosophical literature, its letter does not hold: the channel image it relies on was already withdrawn from Proposition 2, and its own adversaries supply the correction, since a message cannot travel and only a signal can. The antithesis, instructed in four blocks — direct perception of others, direct perception of the world, notational preservation, and the conjecturability of a rule — returns witnesses that anchor the displaced thesis rather than overturning it, while abduction and the poverty of the stimulus jointly impose one real concession. The practice section supplies four cases, including a control in which the channel is held constant and only memory varies: violet laid down under intention is read as blue days later by the same colour-blind eye. The resolution establishes that no signal carries its own rule, and separates two stages that do not compete: reception, which cannot fail and always executes the cheapest available codex by economy rather than truth, and access to the emission, which requires the rule declared beside the work. Loss is thereby relocated as the gap between two rules, measurable only against a declared prescription; the term aberrant falls; the ouverture migrates from the organ to the codex; and the written codex is identified as the prosthesis of the emitter's own retention. Verdict: false in its letter, the object surviving displaced, with one falsifiable threshold stated.

No signal carries the rule that governs it — not for another, and not for the one who laid it down.

Arnaud Quercy — Ideamorphic Studies

I. Quaestio

Can an idea pass from one person to another without decoding, or does every passage require an interpretation that transforms it?

I frame the question so that it admits two answers, and I instruct both. I will show, before the end, that the question is itself badly put — that it presupposes a passage, and that nothing passes.

II. Current Statement

Verbatim, from *The 31 Propositions of Ideamorphism* [1], without alteration:

> *Proposition 11 — Sensory Diffraction. Ideas travel as waves. Senses are ouvertures — narrow openings through which waves must pass. No sense transmits losslessly. None. Ever.*

III. What My Practice Says

I began from the principle that every idea, even the simplest, must be interpreted. Our interface is sensory, and therefore imperfect by nature. But I never restricted myself to the senses in their biological sense — sight, hearing, speech. I meant the conceptual idea of an interface between two human beings, an emitter and a receiver. Even if they were connected without their senses, interpretation would remain necessary, because what one encodes the other must decode, and that decoding answers to memory, to culture, to capacity — intellectual or physiological. The human being is imperfect by nature, and in this differs from the machine. Decoding is therefore required, and the diffraction occurs at that moment.

The wave was a metaphor, and I meant it as one. A wave does not die at an obstacle or at a partial opening; it diffracts. I borrowed the image to say that $1 \to 0$ is as improbable as $1 = 1$ the moment two human beings are involved.

Four cases from my own practice pressed on this, and they did not all press in the same direction.

The first is musical enculturation. Musical codes are transmitted very early and involuntarily. Music is heard from birth, perhaps before; one hears rhythms, one learns without wanting to the musical culture that surrounds one, and decoding becomes innate — or so one believes. In reality, when I listen to North African music charged with quarter tones, I perceive them as exotic at best, or not at all, if my brain abstracts them away. I simply never acquired the codes of that culture. My memory has no access to that library and remains inside the Western one.

The second is abstraction in vision. From birth the child is equipped to recognize visual things and to give them meaning: the mother's face, the father's, the square, the toy. Everything is arranged so that direct observation of a thing is immediately decoded into the object that best represents it. But when someone is exposed for the first time to an abstract painting, they have no codes. They try to see a face, a landscape, they grasp at whatever they can in order to interpret — and they cannot be sure, because the painting is abstract and resembles nothing familiar. The question for me is therefore not whether the brain can decode abstraction. It does so in music from the earliest age, without being able to read a score or name a chord. The question is why it does not do so naturally in vision — unless one accepts that abstraction answers to another code, one the receiver does not possess.

I hold that decoding abstraction is not possible for vision, quite simply because the codex is not visible in the signal. If I give the codex, it becomes decodable and turns into a matter of deciphering. Without the codex, it is impossible. How could anyone know that this red is a C, and not an impression of warmth, a summer lost at the edge of a beach?

Free receptions exist, of course, and they are the easiest process of all. The brain is built to interpret. If the form is not immediately recognizable — a red dress, a red car — then only the colour remains, and the colour is warm. These are all learned codices, but not necessarily the emitter's. So there is diffraction, there is interpretation, and it is creative. I have no quarrel with that. But to reach the emission beyond one's own interpretation, one must have access to the codex.

It is like lightning looking for the fastest way to earth. The brain will use the fastest codex available to it to produce an interpretation. It is a matter of efficiency, not of truth.

The fourth case concerns me alone, and it is the one that turned the proposition around. I lay violet on a star, and I see it as violet, because my brain holds the codex that carries it at that moment. Later, I have forgotten the intention of that violet, and my colour-blind eyes see blue. I know this phenomenon very well, and I tame it through my codex and my notes. Without them, it is a lost cause. A few days are enough.

IV. Videtur quod — the thesis, sourced

Four supports carry my proposition.

Mediation is universal. There is no such thing as an uncoded message [2]: there are only messages written in more familiar codes and messages written in less familiar ones, and when a code becomes familiar enough it ceases to appear as a code at all — one forgets that a decoding mechanism is there, and the message is identified with its meaning. This is the mechanism of the illusion I described: a codex acquired early enough passes for nature. Understanding, likewise, is never reproduction [3]: getting inside another's head is impossible, understanding is guided by expectations and horizons one does not control, and interpretation does not merely serve understanding — it enters into the content of what is understood.

The code model itself concedes the gap. In its own canonical exposition, communication succeeds only if the receiver's decoding is an *approximate inverse* of the emitter's encoding, and the coding of any message is a function of the global context — the background knowledge of both parties [4]. Memory, culture, capacity: the list I gave in my own terms is the list the model requires.

Perception constructs. On the predictive account [5], perceiving is guessing: the incoming signal serves to tune and nuance the guess rather than to deliver a rich encoding of the world. And the guessing is economical before it is faithful — this is the lightning, stated without the metaphor. But the same account holds that the construct tracks real structure in the signal's source. Neither a copy nor a fantasy: exactly the interval between 0 and 1 that I was trying to name.

Divergent decoding is documented. The mismatch between the sender's encoding and the receiver's decoding was named and analysed as a general condition of mass communication rather than an accident [6]. My two cases of failure are not the same failure, however, and this distinction I claim as my own: where the library is absent, the receiver assimilates to the nearest thing he has — the quarter tone becomes exotic, or vanishes; where the library is present but inadequate, he projects it onto what refuses it — the search for a face on an abstract canvas.

V. Sed contra — the antithesis, sourced

I instructed the antithesis in four blocks, and it did not go as I expected. Three of the four returned witnesses who anchor my position instead of overturning it. That result is itself an argument, and I record it as one.

Direct perception of others. The strongest attack on my second stage is that some access to another's emission requires no codex at all. We are directly acquainted with another's joy in his laughter, his shame in his blushing, his threat in the clenching of his fist; expression and expressed form an expressive unity given at once, divided only afterwards by abstraction [7]. If this holds, understanding sometimes arrives without any rule having been declared. But the same account grants two things. That immediacy is constituted at the very earliest stage of life and later overlaid by cultural formation; and the same shake of the head takes on different meanings in different situations, so that the expression is legible only within a context I already possess. The account also holds that even in this most immediate access the other remains partly opaque, never completely known [8]. Read at its source, the objection describes the deepest library any of us has, acquired earliest and therefore invisible — which is my first stage stated in another vocabulary.

Direct perception of the world. Perception may be described as the pickup of invariant information in the ambient array, without inference or decoding, and as veridical rather than economical [9]. But this position divides against itself in the same file: the information actually picked up is abstract — retinal disparity, texture gradient, relative motion — while the world as perceived is concrete, and the gap between the two is precisely the rule the signal does not carry. The illusory triangle is the clean case: its contour is not given in the stimulus,

it is produced by the organization [10]. And the predictive account refuses the choice altogether, holding that the perceptual relation should be reconceived so that one need not decide between direct and indirect [11]. Efficiency and veridicality do not compete; the shortcut tracks the world.

Notational preservation. The hardest bound on my *never* is that a system can be built for lossless preservation. Where syntactic and semantic disjointness and finite differentiation hold, the identity of the work is retained across every step of the chain — compliant performance to score, score to performance, score to true copy — and this is ensured by the notational character of the language and by nothing else [12]. I concede this entirely, and note what it concedes to me. It specifies *when* one reaches identity and at what price: the price is a declared, disjoint, differentiated system. This is my deterministic regime, the deciphering that begins once the codex is given. And the same author records that none of our ordinary natural languages is a notational system. Outside declared notation, underdetermination is the rule.

The rule as conjecture. Here the antithesis bit. Abduction is the only logical operation that introduces a new idea: from a surprising fact, and from the observation that a certain rule would render it a matter of course, one concludes that the rule may hold [13]. The rule is not given in advance; it is guessed from regularities. And the success rate is the striking part — a physicist arrives near the correct hypothesis in a dozen guesses where trillions were available. A receiver facing a regular corpus is therefore not condemned to the summer on the beach; he may conjecture. But two limits arrive with the same source. Abduction concludes only problematically; its justification is that a deduction can draw from it a prediction testable by induction — and my receiver has no induction available, since no one will tell him whether his conjecture was right. And the logical form of abduction does not explain the selection of the hypothesis: among many possible rules, what qualifies the guess [14]?

Acquisition without instruction. I expected this to complete the attack, and it reversed. The structure a learner acquires is radically underdetermined by the input; and the decisive detail is negative — the errors children make are narrowly circumscribed, where empiricist learners collectively trying out many grammars would err in highly variable ways [15]. Learning without instruction succeeds because the space of hypotheses is already constrained. Applied to my case: a receiver with no chromatic-harmonic library has nothing to narrow the trillions.

The zero case. I pushed the logic to its limit and asked whether there is a space in which emitter and receiver are the same person, where no codex is needed and the idea passes in the phases of reflection without further formality. There is not. Hearing oneself speak seems to be pure auto-affection, the signifier diaphanous, the voice traversing no exteriority — but it is temporal: the hearing is a repetition of a speaking that has already elapsed, and a difference divides the one from the other, so that indicative signs are not idle in inner life but essential and irreducible there [16]. Interior monologue resembles my experience of external speech, in which a distance separates me from my hearer; the delay and the distance are the truth of the experience [17]. From another tradition and without metaphysics: a thought becomes clear to someone only as he utters it, which would be impossible if it hovered finished in consciousness before formulation; the intimation of the thought is not the thought [18]. What attests the right expression is not the resemblance of a copy to an original but a feeling of release — the question is closer to *is that what will satisfy you?* than to *does this expression resemble the thought?* On the practical side, what lies at the basis of a work is not the formed whole but its conception, and the finished work differs considerably from what was planned; often the author does not know what his work will become in his hands [19]. And the diagnosis of the illusion itself: what makes us believe in a thought existing for itself prior to expression are the already constituted, already expressed thoughts we silently recall, which give us the illusion of an inner life; that supposed silence is buzzing with words [20].

The zero case does not exist. What follows from that — an interval graded from the living present to the complete stranger, with the alterity of another person as its maximal case only — exceeds this proposition. I record it and reserve it for Proposition 25.

VI. Respondeo

The question was badly put, and the instruction showed it. It presupposed a *passage*, and therefore something in circulation that might arrive intact or degraded. The correction is written in the adversary's own camp: communication is achieved by encoding a message, *which cannot travel*, into a signal, which can [21]. Nothing passes; so nothing can arrive whole. The question becomes: what is missing from the signal, and to whom?

In one sense, no — nothing is lost, because no content was in circulation. The loss does not occur in the channel. The illusory contour is not in the stimulus. My violet stays violet on the canvas when my eye reads blue there. The signal does not degrade; it never contained anything beyond itself. What Proposition 11 called loss is an artefact of the channel image — the same image I already withdrew from Proposition 2 [22].

In another sense, yes — and here is what separates the two senses. **No signal carries its own rule.** This is the single claim the instruction did not dent, and each of the four blocks confirmed it in its own way. It holds because the rule is not in the material: the rule is what *elects*, among the relations the material admits in superabundance, those that will carry the idea [22]. Electing is not inscribing. A stipulated codex institutes a correspondence in the act of stating it [23]; it deposits nothing in the red.

From this, two stages, which do not compete.

The first stage: reception cannot fail. The receiver always executes a rule, and he executes the cheapest one — recognizable form first, then colour, then memory, and failing all of these, nothing at all, the pure abstraction of the unheard quarter tone. Lightning: the shortest path to earth. What governs the election is economy, not truth. The libraries themselves are neither innate nor chosen; they are deposited by exposure, from before birth, and that priority is what makes them invisible. At this stage nothing is lost, because nothing was owed. The red dress, the summer on the beach, are not failed decodings: they are free receptions, and the receiver who institutes his own equation inherits the gesture rather than the rule [23].

The second stage: reaching the emission requires the rule. To execute *the emitter's* correspondence — not merely to feel something — the rule must be available, and it can only be available from beside the work: declared, documented, learned. The Voyager record gives the complete inventory of what an emitter can do when the receiver shares nothing at all: the rule engraved on the cover, an anchor in an invariant that is not a convention, and redundancy across a large corpus. Three gestures, and no fourth. No one has ever decoded that record; it proves nothing about reception. It proves that the emitter's problem is real, and it exhausts the emitter's options.

What the synthesis produces, and neither the thesis nor the antithesis contained:

First, loss changes address and becomes measurable. It lies neither in the organ nor in the channel: it is the difference between the rule executed at reception and the rule of emission. A gap between two rules, not the degradation of a content. It is measurable on one condition — that a rule has been declared as reference. This is exactly what the prescribed-and-realized instrument does [24]: it does not record a depletion, it compares an execution to a prescription. My first note gave loss its qualitative address, the halo that was never transmissible [22]; this one gives it its normative address.

Second, truth enters only with the rule. At the first stage there is neither true nor false, only faster and slower; the feeling of rightness a congruent pairing produces arises without there being any objective truth in the matter [23]. The emitter's codex therefore does not make a reception false: it is the norm of no reception whatever. It is the norm of the **measurement**, and of that alone. From which: *aberrant* falls. The term measures decoding against the encoder's norm and carries a judgment that nothing here supports. Decoding with one's own library is not aberrant; it is the ordinary regime, and it is creative. This is an inversion of value with respect to my source, and I record it as a debt.

Third, the ouverture migrates. If access runs through the rule and not through the organ, then the senses are not ouvertures. Vision is not a narrower opening than hearing; it is mute about its rule, as every signal is. **The codex is the ouverture** — not what narrows, but what gives access. My corpus knew this without knowing it: it is the title of Proposition 14.

Fourth, the apparent asymmetry between the modes is an asymmetry of libraries, not of senses. The ear takes abstraction without protest; the eye hunts for a face on the abstract canvas. Not because vision is figurative by nature, but because the default code of the visual is massively figurative and acquired very early, while tonal listening was calibrated on relations without referent from the beginning. My decision that a mode is individuated by its rules and not by its channel therefore stands [22].

Fifth — and this is the limit the instruction imposes on my thesis — the impossible admits degrees. A regular, paired, redundant corpus is in principle approachable by abduction. But the conjecture cannot close: no induction is available to test it, and without a constrained space of hypotheses nothing elects the right one among the

trillions. **I concede the degree and I maintain the threshold**: the codex is not conjecturable from a single work; it may be approached from a paired corpus; and the conjecture remains without validation for as long as the rule is not declared. Disclosure does not create access. It closes the loop.

Sixth, the threshold holds for the emitter too. The violet I lay down is violet while I hold the intention; a few days later my colour-blind eye reads blue. The channel has not moved — that is the control: same canvas, same eye, only the memory varies, and the result changes. What has been effaced is access to the rule. Hence the office the written codex performs before any transmission whatever: it is the prosthesis of my own retention. It is also the practical reason for the externality my second note required — without a formulated rule I cannot even correct myself, because my impression of the moment does not survive the week [23].

VII. Verdict

False in its letter; the object survives, displaced.

Three withdrawals. *Travel* — nothing travels; I established this in my first note and I do not reopen it. *Transmits* — there is no transmission, and therefore no transmission with or without loss. *Senses are ouvertures* — the ouverture is not the organ.

What remains, and what is my own: the signal mute about its rule; the two stages; loss as a gap between two rules; and the threshold of the unclosed loop.

VIII. Reformulation

No signal carries the rule that governs it. My red does not say that it is a C; it says nothing, and it will never say anything, because a stipulated rule elects relations within a material without depositing anything in it. Whoever stands before the work therefore executes another rule, and always the cheapest one available — the recognizable form first, then the warmth of the colour, then a private memory, and where nothing at all is available, silence. That execution is not a failure and I do not call it aberrant: it is reception itself, it is free, and it creates. But whoever wants to reach what I emitted, beyond what he himself makes of it, needs my rule, and my rule reaches him only from beside the work — declared, written, learned. A corpus regular enough may let him guess at it; nothing will let him know that he has guessed right, and that is the whole difference between conjecturing and deciphering. Loss, then, is not something the channel takes: it is the distance between the rule he executes and the rule I laid down, and it becomes a magnitude only because I declared mine. Nothing here is a matter of narrow openings in the body. The ouverture is not the eye: it is the codex, and it opens rather than narrows. I know this last point from the inside, because the rule deserts me too. I lay violet down and I see violet while the intention holds; a few days later the same canvas, seen by the same eye, is blue. My written codex was never first of all a way of speaking to others. It is what gives me back my own rule after I have lost it.

IX. Debt Note

The universality of mediation and the invisibility of a code once it becomes familiar are established by Hofstadter [2]; the impossibility of understanding as reproduction, and interpretation as entering into the content of what is understood, by Gadamer [3]; the divergence between the encoder's and the decoder's repertoires by Eco [6] — from whom I nevertheless depart, since I withdraw the judgment his term *aberrant* carries and hold divergent decoding to be the ordinary and creative regime rather than an accident. That a message cannot travel and that only a signal can, and that linguistic decoding underdetermines what is meant, are established by Sperber and Wilson [21]; perception as economical prediction that nonetheless tracks real structure, by Clark [5]; the notational conditions under which identity is preserved intact, and the fact that no natural language meets them, by Goodman [12]; abduction as the sole introducer of new ideas, together with its problematic status and its need of a test, by Peirce [13]. I take *diffraction* from Haraway, as the production of difference rather than the reflection of the same, and I mark it off from both dominant uses in the philosophical literature — the optical and quantum sense, and the Derridean sense of spacing — with neither of which my usage claims kinship. My own are the two stages and their non-competition; loss as a gap between two declared rules rather than as depletion; the fall of *aberrant*; the migration of the ouverture from organ to codex; the concession of degree with the maintenance of the threshold; and the written codex as the prosthesis of the emitter's own retention.

X. Condition of Falsification

My proposition falls if a receiver who has not been given the codex executes the prescribed rule beyond chance on a sample of the corpus — that is, if the paired corpus alone closes the loop that I claim only disclosure can close. The prescribed-and-realized instrument makes the test practicable [24]. It falls a second time if I myself recover the chromatic intention after the interval, without recourse to the written codex or to my notes. The degree is already conceded and is not at stake; what is falsifiable is the threshold.

XI. Remaining Objections

The regime of emotion at the first stage is unresolved. A free reception may be overwhelming without having executed anything of my rule. Nothing here contradicts that, but the relation between the two stages on the receiver's side remains to be written, and it belongs to the notes on the alterity of reception and the multiplication of creation.

The dimensional relief left standing by my second note may constrain which rules take at all [23]. I have not instructed it here, and it remains formulable against the freedom of the first stage.

My library holds nothing on phonetic symbolism or on motivated cross-modal pairings of that family; the case for unstipulated iconic correspondence could therefore not be instructed at full strength, and I record the gap.

Threads carried forward: the graded interval of memory, from the living present to the stranger, to Proposition 25; the diagnostic self-reception, which this note settles in advance, since self-reception is not a degenerate case of reception but its barest one; the codex as ouverture and as prosthesis of retention, to Proposition 14; seriality, which requires a rule outliving forgetting, to Proposition 8. And one addition to the criterion of complete execution from my second note: beside money, whose only use is circulation, chess furnishes a second family that no one can constitute alone — there it is the *ignorance* of the other that is internal to the activity. A game dies of a nil gap; a codex executes complete in the studio.

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