

4-1-2005

Duck Watch: My Sign Can Beat Up Your Sign

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Recommended Citation

Spinks, C. W. (2005) "Duck Watch: My Sign Can Beat Up Your Sign," *Trickster's Way*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 1.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/trickstersway/vol4/iss1/1>

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my sign can beat up your sign

The last presidential election seems to have left the country in a quandary struggling with rainbow America coming down to being only two or three colors. Folks either seem to bluster or soul search about “values” and run scenarios of disaster apocalypse, fraud or mandate. Now I don’t wish to play political pundit. My own views would twist my comments, and punditry is probably one of the more useless endeavors that one could be called to. But I do what to look at incompleteness and semiotic approximation to caution against the atmosphere of absolutism that seems to be marking political discourse these days. What I want to do is use the instantiation of trickster as a semiotic device for the direct reconciliation of extremes. In the discourse of values, I want to look at how both reason and faith can work in completeness and incompleteness to push people to the edge, and I want to engage in a discussion of how we need to be semiotically humble (if one can avoid the dysfunction of Uriah Heep) in the face of our incompleteness. I want to move toward something of [Godelian axiom](#) in sign interpretation, something of a [Heisenbergian principle](#) of semiotic uncertainty, following rather faithfully [Peirce](#)’s notion of an ever receding [final Interpretant](#). Whatever, I want to is celebrate [fallibilism](#) and look at that notion as something permeated with Trickster.

But here I must start backwards complaining about the semiotic absolutism that has come to mark so much of current discourse; that is the reason, the subtitle is “my sign can beat up your sign” The very opposite of my goal here is semiotic domination – sometimes by manipulation, sometimes by exploitation, sometimes by demagoguery, and sometimes for correct knowing (faith, reason, or spin). Surely, the members of this society clearly understand than signs are in flux – if Peirce taught us anything it is that signs change. They may move and [evolve teleologically toward the Absolute Final Interpretant](#), but that is more of a theoretical necessity than an actual state of human mentality. Like the Oneness of God, the perfectly semiotic connection is more the fantasy of theo-philosophical thinking that it is experiential. What really is necessary is the Community of Inquirers who examine, discuss, criticize, and direct sign processes toward a hoped for, but unseen goal. That is the reason, for my main title: “for we now see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known.” (I Cor, 13:12)

Of course, one can see that I refer to glasses in the plural, and that too is a part of my concern here. Too often in semiotic discussions, I have heard folk trying insistently, without full admission or perhaps awareness, to establish a prioritized reading of signs. This agendized semiosis tends to quickly declare that there are good signs and bad signs, that there are proper and improper Interpretants, that they are enlightening and misleading metaphors, or functional and dysfunctional icons, or accurate or null references, and although later I intend to use Dawkins’ idea of memes, I really have always distrusted the need or the attempt to prioritize one set of sign readings over another even if I prefer one reading over another, but I think Peirce’s of fallibilism is too important to let go.

