

PREFACE

"Victoria Lady Welby belonged to two worlds in each of which she led a different life, namely to the early Victorian era on the one hand and, due to her own studies and to her trust in scientific progress, to the threshold of the future." This statement by Charles Whibley (1912: 706), which is quite accurate, holds true, with the necessary changes having been made, for signifiCS also, a discipline which Lady Welby founded. For signifiCS is on the one hand, in terms of its conceptual outline, the offspring of the scientific situation at the close of the 19th century. On the other hand, it includes issues and rudiments of their solutions, which foreshadow conclusions that reach well into the first half of this century and which contributed in many respects to the increasing concern with the problem of meaning.

In Lady Welby's own treatment of the problem of meaning and in her conceptualization of signifiCS, one can cite three areas of emphasis (cf. for example Welby 1911). There is first of all the work on her own theory of signs. This involved establishing a balancing between studies of meaning — broken down into "sense", "meaning", and "significance" — or, more concretely, of signs used by a speaker/author and interpretation of such signs by a listener/reader, whereby both perspectives were given equal importance. Second, we find sharp criticism of inadequate understanding on the part of her fellows of how communicative processes work and the resulting inadequate forms of language usage, including in particular the apparently rampant scientific terminologies with their unreflected images and confusing inconsistencies. Finally, Lady Welby dealt with developing and pursuing pedagogic and social reformist goals, based on the assumption that an advanced sign theory could contribute to a fundamental improvement of interpersonal communication processes via changes in accord with her ideas in rearing and educating children and youths. Lady Welby was convinced that widespread understanding of interpersonal communication processes and compliance with fundamental communication ethical principles would eventually prevent or solve most social problems. In connection with the second emphasis, this also entailed the expectation of improving and securing the potential and results of knowledge which is intuitive (purveyed by "primal sense") and facilitated by signs when proceeding from the basis of a more developed science of signifiCS.

This last named focus of significs in particular, a very central driving force in all of Lady Welby's scientific endeavors, unmistakably shows the cast of her thought's religious and ethical background. This provenience joined and was in a mutually influencing relationship — as was so often the case in the last days of the 19th century — with an untainted belief in progress, especially in the realm of physical science. On the other hand, the two other points of emphasis — sign theory and analysis of meaning; and critique of language and terminology — closely relate Lady Welby's significs to the cultural and intellectual transition at the turn of the century and to several related movements and trends between 1890 and 1920. At the same time we are dealing here with those aspects of her thought and research approaches that pertain to subsequent scientific developments extending far into this century.

Lady Welby herself was able to realize that with her significs she had at quite an early point in time entered upon a way of thought that would unite her with a constantly growing number of contemporary scientists and philosophers as time went by (cf. Schmitz 1985a). Thus she recognized the affinities in at least some areas with the efforts of R. Eucken and Ferdinand Tönnies in Germany; F. van Eeden in the Netherlands; Bréal and Lalande, but also Bergson in France; Vailati and Calderoni in Italy; P. Carus, Peirce, and J.M. Baldwin in the U.S.; Stout, Schiller, Russell, and later Ogden in England. She remained unaware of the intellectual closeness to Fritz Mauthner, who placed significs alone of all the contemporary theories of meaning within range of his critique of language (cf. Mauthner 1910/1911, I: 91f; Weiler 1970: 125).

Just like Mauthner became acquainted with significs by way of J.M. Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (1901–1905), numerous other thinkers came to know the body of signific thought by means of Lady Welby's publications, but primarily through her acquaintances and those with whom she corresponded by letter. Among these go-betweens were P. Carus, Peirce, Stout, Schiller, Ogden, Vailati, Tönnies, and van Eeden. The last was perhaps the most successful of those mentioned. For the rise of the Signific Movement in the Netherlands can basically be attributed to his activity. This movement constituted the Dutch pendant to and contender against the Vienna Circle and the Unity of Science Movement in the 30's and 40's.

The fact that such international connections and evidences of signific thought were possible in the first place and the fact that connections which were in part quite close could evolve between significs on the one hand and various philosophical, semiotic, linguistic, and other movements addressing a critique of language and terminology on the other by means of these interactions or in

other ways, draws attention to a remarkable state of affairs; namely, that despite all their differing national traditions, various countries of Western Europe and the U.S. shared significant similarities in their respective cultural and intellectual situations at the turn of the century. What Janik and Toulmin (1973) described in their investigation of the historical and socio-cultural background of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* as the typical ambience and philosophical attitudes of the Viennese society at the turn of the century is not entirely unique to Wittgenstein's Vienna. To another not insignificant degree it is characteristic of general European tendencies of that period.

None of the other significans after Lady Welby has pointed out the unique qualities of the widespread cultural transition around 1900 with as much perspicacity as Gerrit Mannoury, the Dutch mathematician, teacher and friend of L.E. J. Brouwer. As early as 1935 he concluded, looking over the past, that in various countries different movements evolved from that particular situation at roughly the same time. These movements raised the topics of the critique of language and concepts, problems of the foundations of science, and the precariousness of interpersonal communication in general to prominent status. In a listing which is probably not quite exhaustive, he subsequently differentiated between three such trends questioning conceptualization: a) the "analytical" trend in England and the U.S., more or less inspired by *The Meaning of Meaning* by Ogden and Richards (1923); b) the "axiomatic" trend represented primarily by the Vienna Circle; c) the "relativistic-psychologistic" trend, namely the Signific Movement in the Netherlands (cf. Mannoury 1949: 6–11). In so doing, Mannoury saw the origins of the Signific Movement in Lady Welby's work, but he overlooked the influence of Lady Welby's significs on Ogden and the effect on Neurath and thereby on the Vienna Circle which can be ascribed to Tönnies (cf. Schmitz 1985a: cxvii–cxli; 1985b).

In line with his historical point of view, Mannoury had, interestingly enough, the following view of "significs":

[. . .] the cultural phenomenon in its entirety, which addresses itself to the critical investigation of any and all word usage, a cultural phenomenon, which has been taking on ever sharper contours in recent decades. And this cultural phenomenon definitely is not confined to the 'educated Dutch', even less to Lady Welby's specific term and its use. (Mannoury 1939a: 5; 1939b: 564)

And he outlines the intellectual origins of this "cultural phenomenon" as follows:

Carnap speaks of the Logical syntax of language, Van Ginneken of Psychologie linguistique, and Feigl of Logical analysis, what's in a name? Still, it has been stated

in thousands of versions that something has been stirring in the world of thought for the last twenty or thirty years, and that both physical science and the liberal arts (and therefore also mathematics, which bridges the two) have been undergoing a crisis regarding their foundations. And anyone wishing to get to the heart of this crisis must search farther than signifiics and 'pseudoproblems'. He must also inquire into the meaning of the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, of psychoanalysis and Gestalt psychology; and he must, above all, not hesitate to be fully conscious of the continuing influence of these concepts on the life and thought of peoples. (Mannoury 1939a: 13f)

Of course, these conclusions of Mannoury's touch only upon a few elements of the intellectual and cultural context of signifiics and related philosophical trends and traditions at the turn of the century. But this is hardly unusual, since even today this context has hardly been historiographically illuminated at all. Any adequate understanding of this extremely fruitful period in the history of science would in fact require a more exact analysis of this context. There is also a need for studies of the extremely varied development of this period regarding the theory of signs and language in order to gain more insight into their connections, similarities and differences, their acceptance and repression. For such a well researched grasp of these movements is a prerequisite for successfully integrating the basic questions, research approaches and theories of those days into the present-day semiotic, linguistic, and communication theoretical controversies, possibly utilizing them also for current problems in constructing theories.

To help tackle this task is the goal of this group of "Essays on Signifiics". Signifiics serves as the point of departure and orientation for several reasons:

1. Signifiics is one of those (by no means exclusively) sign theoretically relevant movements which arose at the turn of the century, which was not only re-discovered only a few years ago (cf. Hardwick 1977; Van Nieuwstadt 1978; Eschbach 1983; Schmitz 1983; 1985a; Petrilli 1984, 1986), but which can now for the first time be more carefully studied again, thanks to the improved accessibility of Lady Welby's writings, which are so basic to signifiics, in reprinted versions (Welby 1983; 1985). Thus, there is quite a lag in historiographic research on Lady Welby's signifiics and especially on the Signific Movement in the Netherlands.

2. As can be readily seen from studies on signifiics and its history conducted thus far, the signifiic writings of Lady Welby and her followers are worthy of renewed attention on their own merits. In addition to the predominantly communication oriented approach to the problem of meaning distinguishing signifiics from some semiotic or linguistic approaches, it is primarily the contribu-

tions to a critique of language and terminology and the more epistemologically oriented studies of signifiants in the Netherlands which appear to warrant further study.

3. Lady Welby's signifiants did, after all, establish a philosophical tradition which, from its very inception — mediated by the respective intellectual context, by personal contacts, and by multitudinous shared partial theoretical aspects as well as those which diverge — was interlaced with widely varying movements ranging, for example, from Bréal's semantics to Carnap's and Neurath's logical empiricism. This is the very reason why it is a favorable jumping-off point for historical studies of comparison and contrast. The unique appeal of such studies lies in sharpening the contours of competing positions. Thus, a more thorough examination of signifiants also promises to yield a better knowledge of research approaches in linguistics, semiotics, philosophy, and psychology with which it was related or vied for acceptance.

These considerations are the basis for the relation of the various contributions to this book and for their sequence as well. The first two studies (Ch. I) by David Hughes and Paul Chipchase deal with the family and therefore also the social and cultural environment in which Lady Welby grew up and which, as she herself said, significantly formed her character — above all her mother and travels with her. Since Lady Welby's attitudes toward knowledge, language, and the literary forms of expression of her day were not shaped by any formal primary or secondary education, not to mention at a university, we must look for the foundations of her subsequent philosophical work in her social origins and the influences of her more intimate surroundings. It may be that the role of language and of verbal expression and composition within her family surroundings did not actually cause her to choose to devote her studies later to the principal topic of language. Nevertheless, they probably affected her individual, ever more critical study of language as much as some of her adherence to the linguistic patterns and stock ideas of her day and her social class did.

Timothy J. Reiss and Rita Nolan (Ch. II) view Lady Welby's signifiants from differing, but complementary perspectives as a cultural phenomenon in Manoury's terms in order to uncover the roots of signifiants in and its relation to the intellectual context at the end of the 19th century. Whereas Reiss' work on this aspect emphasizes Welby's "critique of modernist culture" as an attempt to overcome, by means of signifiants, modernism as a stage in human social and cultural development and to achieve emancipation from it, Nolan focuses on the forward pushing thematic and intellectual stimuli, which Lady Welby produced as a result of her attention to the basic assumptions of her day, which

were responsible for her pointing the way toward developments in the 20th century. Taken together, these two articles demonstrate essential characteristics of the scientific positions at the turn of the century as exemplified in Lady Welby's writings and justify once again the description of that period as a "transitional" one.

Essentially, the following six contributions constitute comparative analyses. The studies by S. Auroux/S. Delesalle, G. Deledalle, J.G. Juchem, A. Ponzio, W.T. Gordon, and S. Petrilli are the conclusions based on parallel readings of texts by Lady Welby on the one hand and texts by Bréal, Peirce, Schiller, Vailati, Ogden, and finally, Bakhtin on the other. These lead to optimally evidenced similarities, some of which are to be expected (Welby – Schiller; Welby – Ogden), while others are unexpected (Welby – Vailati; Welby – Bakhtin), but also to basic theoretical differences like, for example, those between Bréal and Welby which escaped even Lady Welby and several of her contemporaries familiar with the subject (e.g. Postgate and Tönnies). Thus the essays mentioned above serve two ends. They contribute to a deeper understanding of central elements of signification, and they uncover in a contrastive method several aspects of the other respective authors which were not quite so noticeable in earlier studies on those authors.

The fourth chapter is intended to call attention in two essays to several aspects of the Signific Movement in the Netherlands. In the study by Schmitz two goals are most important. The first is to provide a preliminary summary of the movement's development after Lady Welby. The other is to trace the preconditions, form, and results of the transmission of Lady Welby's ideas by the poet, psychiatrist, and social reformer F. van Eeden. This helps reconstruct part of the history of the reception and spread of signification which had a decisive impact on the first decades of the Signific Movement in the Netherlands. It so happens that the central personality of the movement was the mathematician Gerrit Mannoury, under whose influence signification took on a greatly modified form, but also found a large following in the Netherlands. Erik Heijerman's study leads directly to the crux of Mannoury's signification research, that is the connections, which he found until the end of the thirties to be essential, between signification and the philosophy of mathematics.

The fifth chapter provides in the contributions by H. Bowsfield and P.M. Baker an overview of the copious archive material from the philosophical work left behind after Lady Welby's death in order to give the necessary guidelines for further historiographic work on Lady Welby, signification, and their context in

the history of culture. The final bibliography of publications on Lady Welby and her significs also serves the same purpose.

In conclusion, I would like to make a few remarks about the title of this volume. The first plans for a volume of collected works under the title "Essays on Significs" were conceived in the year 1909. At that time, it was none other than the philosopher, psychologist, and editor of *Mind*, G.F. Stout, who decided to publish such a book together with the sociologist J.W. Slaughter. An international circle of well-known scholars were to contribute essays on topics that have a major role in Lady Welby's significs. This was supposed to stimulate research in the field of significs for one thing. For another, this was to be a means of lending the status of a significant and recognized discipline to significs. H. Höffding, M. Calderoni and G. Vailati, F. Tönnies, W.W. Carlile, Ph. Jourdain, A. Sidgwick, J.P. Postgate, and — C.S. Peirce agreed to contribute essays.

But, as is already known, the plan failed first of all because Peirce could not complete his essay, on which such high hopes had been placed. Following Lady Welby's death in 1912, Stout renewed efforts to collect "Essays on Significs", this time as a memorial tribute to Lady Welby. But, for reasons which remain in the dark, nothing came of it.

Today, nearly eight decades later, the scientific situation in the areas of semiotics, significs, the philosophy of language, and linguistics has changed completely. Of course, many of the old questions and problems from the days shortly after the turn of the century are still acute and unresolved. Yet our relationship to significs has been interrupted by the passage of time and by the present-day intellectual context, shaped by other traditions and problems. This means that Stout's plan can no longer be implemented without considerable modification.

Nevertheless, the old title "Essays on Significs" has been revived, because this volume has two aims that may have been espoused by Stout in a way. First, the presentation of new research results on Lady Welby, on significs, and its long-term effects, and on theories or movements of that day with semiotic relevance is intended to clarify and emphasize the important role of significs in the history of semiotics, a role which was greatly underestimated until only a few years ago. Second, this book is intended to honor the memory of Victoria Lady Welby. It should remind us of the accomplishments of this extraordinary thinker, of her ideas, her tireless search for the foundations of knowledge and its transmittal, and of her daring as an autodidact to confront the "Olympians"

among the thinkers of her day again and again with questions and problems of fundamental importance, which had been shunted aside.

Bonn, July 1986

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