

## What Moved the Signific Movement?

Concerning the History of Significs in the Netherlands\*

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Commemorations – days for this and years for that – usually serve to turn our attention backward toward important events and revered or significant personages. Looking back and remembering, we retrospectively affirm a portion of our life history or even the history of Western civilization. Events, persons, objects, ideas – they are “reborn” in our memories. We stage their “renaissance”, fitting them in so doing with renewed relevance in the here and now. But let there be no mistake; to a great extent it is social processes, reaching out into our own life histories, that have directed the course of our forgetting, causing us to recall and revere this or that only very selectively. For what a society or a group (such as scholars) is prepared and able to recall says at least as much about the remembering ones as about the object remembered. We in Germany have our own particular experience in this field. Just as remarkable, though less embarrassing and brazen, is the stance of many scholars toward the history of science and thought.

This is the year 1987. Four hundred years ago, J. van den Vondel was born; 100 years ago, Multatuli died. There may be new editions of their works, commemorative stamps, readings. There will surely be lengthy articles in the Sunday newspaper supplements justifying the social act of commemoration and its selectivity. Perhaps notice will be taken of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the De Stijl Movement, depending on the stature of the editors in charge, the art historians, the commissioners of cultural affairs. But one thing is certain; this year there will be no commemoration of the Dutch significians, nor of the signific movement, nor of its ideas and goals – at least not far beyond the boundaries of this select circle – even though the near future holds no date more suited to such a commemoration than this year, 1987.

A commemorative year would be superfluous to the signific movement; not so an occasion to *recall* and re-evaluate its rise, its motives, its goals. Therefore, allow me to take 1987 as the point of departure for a modest exercise in remembering on the wide plane of cultured and philosophical history.

One hundred and fifty years ago was the birth date of Victoria Lady Welby, the founder of significs. With the early 90s of the last century, Lady Welby began to develop her conception of significs as a basic science which began to encroach upon the linguistic and philosophical trends that were predominant at the time. The emphasis of this conception is threefold (cf. Schmitz 1985a). (a) Contributions to a unique theory of signs placing

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studies of meaning ("sense", "meaning", and "significance") of concrete signs used by a speaker/author alongside analyses of the interpretation processes on the part of the hearer/reader; (b) a stern critique of inadequate insight into the workings of communicative processes, the resulting inadequate use of language, and, above all, the burgeoning terminologies of the scientific disciplines; (c) the development of goals pertaining to teaching and education and social reform, with religious and ethical motivation, and springing from the conviction that social and political problems are basically communication problems (cf. Horstman 1986). Thus, Lady Welby viewed the basis for problems of knowledge and the dissension among the sciences in her day as problems involving the use of signs and communication. And she identifies a lack of insight into the workings of interpersonal processes of making oneself understood as the cause of social problems. Hence her unshakable belief in the urgent necessity of signfic research, as well as her perseverance through the years in winning over prominent scholars of her day to the systematic pursuit and development of signficis.

*Ninety-five years* ago the first encounter, which was to have such far-reaching consequences, between Lady Welby and the young poet and practicing psychotherapist Frederik van Eeden occurred. This marks the birth of signficis in the Netherlands. For, not least of all, it was his acquaintance with the works and goals of Lady Welby which drew Van Eeden's attention back to the thematic complex of language, knowledge, and communication, leading to two works quite unlike each other in form, style, and epistemological mode. These are: the first two books of *Het lied van schijn en wezen* (Song of Appearance and Essence) (Van Eeden 1981), and the significant treatise "Redekunstige grondslag van verstandhouding" (Logical Basis of Communication) (Van Eeden 1897; 1975), which has rightly been deemed the first signfic study in the Netherlands.

Yet it is not as Lady Welby's docile student that Van Eeden appears in these works. He chooses to follow poetry as his road to "cleaning up language". Only the poet can overcome the difficulties which led to Lady Welby's call for their own salutary discipline – signficis. Here we have Lady Welby disclaiming the clarity of meaning and determinability of scientific terms by careful definition; there is Van Eeden assuming the exact opposite, at least with respect to the natural sciences. Here we have Lady Welby arguing that linguistic suggestiveness and flexibility are no more noxious than any ambiguity, nor are they to be expunged, but are instead inherent characteristics of language which make possible all communication under constantly changing conditions; there is Van Eeden claiming exactly these features as characteristics of poetic language alone. While Lady Welby looks to Van Eeden for a scientific contribution to signficis, he urges her to write more like a poet. Their motivation and goals are similar, but their methods are incompatible. In 1908, Van Eeden writes Welby: "Our points of gravitation lie in the difficult question of 'art' or 'science'." (Van Eeden/Welby 1954: 80)

Furthermore, Van Eeden considered signficis premature from 1897 on: "The material condition of society is as yet too undeveloped, how can a pure language grow on an impure and disturbed society? [...] Who knows what will come, when the equipoise of society is reached, when universal peace and equality reigns, when mankind becomes one nation. And this seems by no means an all too utopistic hope, when we consider what has changed in our short life-time." (Van Eeden/Welby 1954: 28)

Now the pioneer and social reformer Van Eeden entered the forefront. Not until he failed, as Lady Welby had predicted as early as 1898 he would, did he begin once again

to occupy himself with signific questions in his publications. From 1906 on, he became the international proponent of significs, as he had assimilated it to his ideas and ideals; significs solely in terms of a critique of language and concepts, with critique of language amounting almost exclusively to the misleading, incorrect, and unconscious use of metaphors or figures of speech in general. He now considered mathematicians – and, of course, those poets in the truest sense of the word who strive for more than mere formal virtuosity – to be the standard bearers of signific analysis, critique of language, and linguistic reform. The *goal* of significs was to be an everyday language created anew in the image of mathematical language, and the necessary social changes and the unification of all nations ought to follow from it as a matter of course. – The problems of mankind and of humans getting along together equal to the problem of communication.

Seventy-five years ago, Lady Welby died. And right from 1912 on, the poet and jurist Jacob Israël de Haan, influenced by Van Eeden and Lady Welby's writings, endeavored in nearly 40 essays and two books to lay the groundwork for a significs of jurisprudence and the analysis of legal problems from a signific standpoint. In his dissertation in 1916, he defines the *goal* of a significs of law as a logical legal language, i.e. a language "in which the use of old words and creation of new ones follow strict rules applied with full awareness" (De Haan 1916: 79). Thus, for him the quality of being logical has two basic aspects: keeping with etymology, and conscientious adherence to certain rules of word formation in word usage and coining new words. Thus, significs ought uniformly and systematically to reorganize jurisprudence. For, to quote De Haan: "Better language is better justice". – Not until the following years did De Haan rescind the limitation of significs to the reach of Bréal's semantics. This occurred especially as a reaction to Brouwer's criticism of his dissertation and under the influence of Brouwer's intuitionistic and linguistically relevant philosophical concepts. Yet De Haan's activities as jurist and significian came to an early halt with his emigration to Jerusalem in the year 1919. In 1924 he was the victim of the first political assassination of a Jew by Jews in Palestine.

The spring of 1915 saw the beginning of preparations for the founding of the present day "Internationale School voor Wijsbegeerte te Amersfoort" (International School for Philosophy in Amersfoort), half a year after World War I started. The undertaking followed three central guiding ideas: the ideal of a *synthesis* of religion, science, philosophy, and practical experience; the ideal of *internationalism* which ran counter to the events of the day; and, finally, the new idea of *adult education* (cf. Van den Hoven 1986; Schmitz 1986). Van Eeden and his old friend, the author, sinologue, and journalist Henri Borel, had already propagated the two first ideals several years before in the Forte Circle. From the autumn of 1915 on, L.E.J. Brouwer joined them in the conceptual preparations for the planned international school for philosophy. These three, together with the social worker H.P.J. Bloemers, related the central guiding ideas of those years to significs.

Ten years earlier, Brouwer had written a critical examination of language and the possibility of interpersonal communication in his book *Leven, kunst en mystiek* (Life, Art, and Mysticism) (Brouwer 1905) which remains little known even today. In the context of his mysticism and his idealistic view of the world with its solipsistic bent, Brouwer turns his attention to the fundamentals and objects of communication. In so doing, he establishes the existence of a suggestive use of language as a negative social phenomenon (cf. Brouwer 1916) on the one hand; the use of certain words (e.g. "property", "fatherland"), a national constraint thwarting the individual and his will, appears utterly natural, which hides its lack

of legitimacy. On the other hand, he finds a lack of primary words for the numerous, essentially more primary concepts. Finally, words for spiritual values of life, which, among other things, would make possible the communication of mystical experiences, are not available at all. All of these conditions, in Brouwer's view, have a lasting negative impact on the individual's developmental potential, on morals, and the creation of a just social order. Thus, he sees in analytical and synthetic significs instruments suitable to modify social communication processes in a fundamental way and defend the primacy of the individual and of morals against social and economical constraints.

To this end – according to Brouwer's basic plan – an International Institute for Philosophy ought to be founded with the goal of “a renewed definition of values for the life elements of the individual and society”. This goal was to be reached by founding and maintaining an “Internationale Akademie voor Praktische Wijsbegeerte en Sociologie” (International Academy for Practical Philosophy and Sociology) with the task of critique of language, redefining values, and creation of new words to designate such values. Finally, the achievements of the academy were to be disseminated, taught, and publicized by founding an International School for Philosophy. One feature of this plan which cannot escape notice is that analytical significs plays a subordinate role among the tasks of the academy, while synthetic significs stands in the forefront. The primarily normative function of the academy is underlined by the adjunctive school, an institution of teaching and dissemination.

As we all know, the significians were not able to prevail in the constituting committee of the present day “Internationale School voor Wijsbegeerte”. They therefore went their own ways, courted international support for their plan – which was not forthcoming – through circulars in Dutch, German, English, and French, and proceeded, exactly 70 years ago, on September 12, 1917, to found their own “Internationaal Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte te Amsterdam” (International Institute for Philosophy in Amsterdam). Among the founding members, in addition to Van Eeden, Brouwer, Bloemers, and Borel, were Gerrit Mannoury, who was elected president of the administrative board, De Haan as secretary, and the physicist from Utrecht, L.S. Ornstein.

Gerrit Mannoury, born 120 years ago on May 17, 1867, had just been appointed associate professor at the University of Amsterdam in 1917. In 1915, he was one of those who had worked for the founding of an international school for philosophy in Amersfoort by their expressions of support. Now, however, he joined the ranks of the significians at the urging of his student Brouwer. In one respect, this was not surprising, since he had been studying the problems of language and meaning in epistemological processes ever since about 1903 in the course of his studies on the foundations of mathematics. Yet, on the other hand, his relativistic psychologistic point of view and his Marxist oriented attitude toward cultural and social developmental processes clashed with Van Eeden's and Brouwer's positions. Above all, Mannoury took exception to Brouwer's highly personal programmatic system, based on his philosophy and the sociological and political views derived from it. But what then was Mannoury's motivation in 1917 when he joined the significians? Well, Mannoury had observed that a large part of the differences of opinion in social questions, and numerous hindrances to scientific progress as well, could be traced back to a mass of misunderstandings and a lack of “reasonable communication”. The confrontation which is called for on both fronts misses the mark, because it is often only a “fruitless and unfruitful



duel of words" (Mannoury 1918: 14). But as far as Mannoury is concerned duels of words can be resolved by a mathematical turn of mind alone (cf. Mannoury 1917). This involves taking the meaning and purpose of the words into account, and detailing precisely *those* elements, together with their interrelationships, which are used to define the terms. At the same time, the mathematical mode of thought is the opposite and the antidote to the ideological mode of thought, by which Mannoury means all definitions aimed at generalities. Mannoury is convinced that the mathematical mode of thought has among its consequences a freer judgment, freer choice of means to reach a judgment, criticism of dogmas, and the destruction of any belief rooted in words alone.

To him, analytical and synthetic significs are just the right techniques needed to conduct human methods of thought and speech more mathematically. Thus, Mannoury ascribes to significs an immensely important scientific function, particularly an epistemological one, and a significant social function, but *not* a universally normative role, as do Brouwer and Van Eeden.

From 1917 on, significs entered its first institutionalized setting: an institute with tasks drawn up in a charter, executive officers, regular meetings, its own periodical, lectures for an interested public, etc. It was in this institute over a period of 4 1/2 years that the most important work of the early significians was carried out, *not* in the later but today better known "Signifische Kring" (Signific Circle).

The academy to be founded was given the following task:

"determination of basic words for the language of the relationships of rights and interests within society, and the publication of (multilingual) dictionaries of this language, in which all words are to be defined by means of the basic words."  
(Mannoury/Brouwer et al. 1919: 5f.)

The elected members of the academy were Paul Carus, the jurist Eugen Ehrlich, Gustav Landauer, Fritz Mauthner, Giuseppe Peano, and Rabindranath Tagore – a truly international academy, if it had ever come to be. Aside from Eugen Ehrlich, no one expressed an interest.

Working topics of the institute of relevance to the philosophy of language and the study of communication included: Mannoury's interesting theory of language levels, written as the theoretical framework for the academy's work (cf. Mannoury/Brouwer et al. 1919); the social significance of significs; formalistic and empirical psychological analyses of meaning; significs of theology; feminine and masculine varieties of thought and speech; misunderstandings caused by inadequate use of language.

By the first part of 1918, Bloemers and Ornstein had left the institute; De Haan emigrated in 1919. Beginning in late 1919, the theologian, psychologist, and linguist Jacques van Ginneken was a guest at the meetings, as were the linguists Verschuur and Faddegon later on.

Among other things, it was Van Eeden's and Brouwer's insistence that the institute engage in more public activities and urging of increased cooperation in influencing the public – that led to the institute's demise. Brouwer, Van Eeden, Van Ginneken, and Mannoury worked out a declaration of principles on "Signifische taalstudie en wijsbegeerte" (Signific Study of Language and Philosophy) in common, and, *sixty-five years* ago, on May 21, 1922, they founded the "Signifische Kring" (Signific Circle). Yet the public campaigns

urging social change did not take place. Plans for an "Encyclopedia of Significs" as well as the envisaged collaboration with the psychologists Géza Révész and Grünbaum became entangled in conflicting interests. Instead, the work in the Circle was primarily of a retrospective nature; minutes of the *institute* meetings were edited for publication. This led to the "Signifiëse dialogen" (Signific Dialogues) published in *Synthese* in 1937 (Brouwer/Van Eeden et al. 1937). At the end of 1924, Van Ginneken left the Circle under mysterious circumstances; and on December 2, 1926, the first phase of the signific movement ended with the last meeting of the "Signifische Kring". The attempted collaboration had failed, due not so much to theoretical differences as to the incompatibility of goals and motivation which gave impetus to the various significians and the early signific movement.

Gerrit Mannoury was the link between the first and second phases of the signific movement, with regard to both the theoretical development of significs and the socially integrating personal relationships which formed the foundations of all signific organizations. Even back in the days of the institute and the circle, he introduced basics of signific thought into his annual lecture on "Wijsbegeerte der wiskunde" (Philosophy of Mathematics); it was in one of these lectures in 1921 that he conducted the first signific experiment on the concept "language of mathematics" (cf. Mannoury 1923), among other things. Among Mannoury's students at that time were Arend Heyting, David van Dantzig, and J.Ch. Bolland.

But Mannoury's signific analyses were also to be found in many of his articles in political and economic periodicals and in his numerous lectures<sup>1</sup>. However, the literary and philosophical masterpiece of the time is *Mathesis en mystiek* (Mathematics and Mysticism) (Mannoury 1925), which originally was supposed to bear the title "Signifiëk en formalistiek" (Significs and Formalistics). Here we find an amalgamation of all of Mannoury's motives that led him to significs, to the signific work that he once termed his "damned duty" (cf. Scheffer 1956). The subtitle gives some indication: "A Signific Study from a Communist Standpoint".

But "Mathematics and Mysticism" is no theoretical introduction to significs such as could have served Mannoury's students and colleagues as a point of departure and reference. A first approach to the latter was *Woord en gedachte* (Word and Thought) of 1931, an extended development of significs' roots in association psychology. In 1934 there followed the first major application of significs to the basic questions of a scientific discipline: "Die signifischen Grundlagen der Mathematik" (The Signific Foundations of Mathematics), which appeared in *Erkenntnis*, the central organ of the Vienna Circle and the Unity of Science movement.

However, the influence of Mannoury's writings on the psychologist from Utrecht, David Vuysje, who was later to become Mannoury's son-in-law, was the critical factor leading to the revitalization of the signific movement. Vuysje urged Mannoury to revive the collaboration among significians. Upon Mannoury's skeptical and reluctant reaction, Vuysje, along with several of his scholarly friends, founded their own journal with the programmatic title *Synthese. Maandblad voor het Geestesleven van onzen Tijd* (Synthese. Monthly Journal for the Thought of Our Time). Among those involved in editing the journal were: the psychiatrists from Amsterdam, A.J. Westerman Holstijn and J.C.L. Godefroy; the astronomer from Amsterdam H. Groot; the biologist W.M. Kruseman; the theologian and expert on ethics N. Westendorp Boerma and his colleague, A.H. de Hartog; and, like

back in the year 1915, M.H.J. Schoenmaekers. We recognize first of all two guidelines in the program of *Synthese* which had belonged to the deciding motives for the founding of the school at Amersfoort and of the "International Institute for Philosophy" back at the time of World War I: the idea of synthesis, and the principle of internationalism. However, as with the early significians, they are accompanied by the motivation of exercising a guiding or corrective influence on social and cultural processes by means of studies, enlightenment, and criticism. In an "Overzicht van het Arbeidsveld van de Stichting Synthese" (Overview of the field of endeavor of the Synthese Foundation), we find the goal defined as:

"To serve a universal social, ethical, and cultural interest by fostering the exchange of ideas about certain scholarly and philosophical problems, by conducting conferences and congresses, and the publication of relevant writings, books, and periodicals. Furthermore, by disseminating information and by entering into contact with persons and institutions abroad, who are striving to meet a similar goal."

In the same source, the following is said about the journal *Synthese*:

"This journal intends to strive for direct insight into the major issues facing the modern generation. It shall track down the internal connections between scientific disciplines through all barriers of advanced specialization in nearly every area, and it shall be a forum for the scholars and philosophers seeking to bring clarity into the world of thought and feelings."

The appearance and program of *Synthese*, with its 300 copies every month, initially out of focus, gradually took on sharper contours after 1937. *Synthese* became the favored journal of significians and closely associated authors!

Exactly 50 years ago, on May 29, 1937, Mannoury held his farewell lecture on "De schoonheid der wiskunde als significisch probleem" (The Beauty of Mathematics as a Signific Problem), and on September 5, 1937, the newly formed "Internationale significische Studiegroep" (International Group for the Study of Significs) convened for its first meeting in Blaricum. In addition to the organizer and international propagandist for the significians, David Vuysje, the moving forces behind the founding of this new organization of significians were<sup>2</sup> the previously mentioned psychiatrist Godefroy and Wim Scheffer, a banker acquaintance of Mannoury's since 1925, who became one of Mannoury's most consequent significs followers and signed his books and articles on significs simply "Significus" or with the pseudonym "Wim Esch". Along with them, Mannoury, his student Van Dantzig, and also Schoenmaekers took part in the first meeting. Schoenmaekers was soon to leave the group. but by October, 1937, the "Studiegroep" included 16 members from the Netherlands and 3 from other countries. The latter were Otto Neurath, living in Holland at that time and a prominent member of the Vienna Circle; Friedrich Waismann (Cambridge), who was more closely allied with Wittgenstein than with the Vienna Circle; and Josef Schächter (Vienna) a member of the Vienna Circle who by rights was deserving of more recognition. Among those from the Netherlands were the physicist J. Clay, the psychiatrist Albert Daan, the biologist Jordan, and others. Soon they were joined by Esser, Heyting, and Beth; the group of significians grows – in 1939 there are already over 60 members – and now becomes a genuine movement, from an outsider's point of view. However, the insider realizes that the swarm of members remains quite dependent on the

organizers, Vuysje, Godefroy, and Scheffer and on the leading thinkers Mannoury, Van Dantzig, and, to a lesser degree, Vuysje, Esser, Daan, Scheffer, Godefroy.

So what did the new organization of significians want to accomplish? In the above-cited prospectus of the "Stichting Synthese" we read:

"It is the aim of this study group to examine more closely the basic concepts of the arts and sciences, including philosophy and epistemology. It opposes 'demagogy' not only in the field of politics, but also in scientific disciplines and philosophy. It aims to arrive at a purified set of concepts by means of uncovering pseudo-questions and pseudo-problems, by the analysis and synthesis of conceptual terms, and it strives, by these and other means, for an improvement in mental technique. As did the earlier 'Signific Circle', it proceeds on the assumption that the signific study of language could be pursued more systematically than heretofore, and this requires allocating more space to experimental and statistical methods in addition to the introspective study of subconscious elements. Textbooks and handbooks on significs. Signific studies of schoolbooks. Signific library. Constitution of separate subject groups for special signific studies (legal, medical, theological, comparative significs, etc.)"

Here there is more at stake than significs' claim to being a fundamental area of study, a claim raised in a similar fashion by semiotics today. The significians have no desire to be stranded in the rarified atmosphere of a philosophical ivory tower. They want more, namely to contribute to the solution of social problems. What is more, this was one of the few elements of cohesion between Neurath and the significians in their over three-year debates on the analysis of language and communication and the anti-metaphysical position of the Vienna Circle – incidentally, a climax in the scientific debates of significians between 1937 and 1940 (cf. Van Bochove 1986). The same can be said with reference to other issues. For instance, one of the Synthese Foundation's goals was to contribute to "improving the mental habits of the newspaper-reading public". Sponsorship of "signific publications" in the press. Preparation of a "signific newspaper".

Furthermore, the movement's leading thinkers reacted with great speed and sensitivity to political events, e.g. those of 1938<sup>2</sup>, which imbued Mannoury's old goal ("to immunize the great masses to overblown words") with a new relevance. On November 22, 1938, Mannoury proposes a concrete study of the phenomenon of demagogy, establishing a mass significs, a kind of mass communication studies, next to individual significs. This eventually led to the constitution of a mass psychology section within the "Studiegroep" in July of 1940, which included the social psychologist Kurt Baschwitz, who had emigrated from Germany and became professor of mass communication in Amsterdam in 1948.

There were other sections for biology; ethics and jurisprudence, which attempted to lead on where De Haan left off; and a section addressing the possibility of analyzing or verifying utterances in baby talk or under pathological conditions.

The movement's international character was voiced in discussions with representatives of the Vienna Circle and the Unity of Science movement which took place in Amsterdam and Cambridge, but also in *Synthese*, where a specific "Unity of Science Forum" was created. In addition, internationalism was demonstrated at the first summer conference for significs in 1939 in Naarden (cf. Heijerman 1986).



To be sure, the "Studiegroep" was able to keep meeting until September of 1944, but the results of scientific collaboration could be published in *Synthese* only through late 1939. The journal then interrupted publication and was not allowed to resume until 1946.

Now in 1946, all the movement's activities blossomed once more. An unforeseen wealth of studies, publications, annual international summer conferences took place during the early post-war years. Significians spoke out on the question of war guilt, the problem of the annexation of German territory, the controversy over the death penalty, the relationship between individual and society, freedom of opinion, etc. At the request of UNESCO, they conducted an empirical study of the use of several political terms in the Netherlands, which was supplemented by Van Dantzig, who wrote a study analyzing the concept of democracy (cf. Van Dantzig 1951). At approximately the same time, books by Mannoury, some of which had long ago been completed, could be published: 1946 *Relativisme en dialectiek* (Relativism and Dialectics), 1947/48 the *Handboek der analytische signifika* (Handbook of Analytical Significs) in two volumes; 1949 *Signifika. Een inleiding* (Significs. An Introduction), and finally, 1953 *Polairpsychologische begripssynthese* (Psychologically Polar Conceptual Synthesis).

All of the post-war events in the signific movement bespeak the will to continue and intensify, in regained freedom, research and education of the public. A new organizational vehicle for these efforts was the "Internationaal Signifisch Genootschap" (International Society for Significs), founded on July 7, 1948. The membership roster of 1951 documents considerable growth in the number of Dutch and foreign members from widely differing scientific fields. The society's goal was expressed as follows:

"The society's goal is, in general, to further analytical and synthetic conceptual criticism on the basis of the psychology of communication through international cooperation, and, in particular, to further its application to the study of the foundations of the exact, social, and political sciences". (Cf. Charter of the International Society for Significs, Significs Archives, Amsterdam)

Thus we can, once again, discern a continued adherence to the old goals and ideas. Following the Second World War, the signific movement retained its resemblance to and motivation by philosophical and socio-cultural ideas from the first half of the century. However, it then became evident, during the 50s, that these ideas, without losing their general relevance, were gradually losing their attractiveness. Instead of striving for unity and synthesis, the disciplines became increasingly differentiated; new disciplines arose, among them some which laid claim to areas covered by significs, such as information theory and cybernetics, the study of mass communication, the theory of science, etc. Psychologies and sociologies which were almost exclusively positivistic in orientation won out and offered to solve almost all the problems of an industrial society. Formalization and logical analysis predominated in the new paradigm of linguistics, which nonetheless presumed to be able to describe and explain the processes of communication and understanding. And, finally, the rapid evolution of new disciplines was accompanied by widespread unwillingness to have the disciplines themselves address the respective fundamental theoretical problems that cropped up. This task was generally delegated to the theory of science, epistemology, or just plain philosophy.

In this situational context, significs as an interdisciplinary undertaking necessarily appeared as obsolete to the followers of the various disciplines as the Unity of Science.

Incidentally, this trend was mirrored quite accurately in the topics and course of the nine international summer conferences organized between 1946 and 1954 by the signficians, mainly Vuysje and Kruseman. This has recently been chronicled in great detail by Erik Heijerman (1986). Furthermore, these conferences reveal that not even the standard of internationalism could withstand the winds of time. Quite the contrary; the interdisciplinary *and* international conferences raised more communication problems than the signficians could ever have hoped to analyze or resolve.

The last straw was the death, in the second half of the 50s, of the movement's two most important theoreticians: Mannoury in 1956, Van Dantzig in 1959; and then the Reidel Publishers gave *Synthese* a completely new editorial staff and orientation after 1963. These events were the kiss of death to the signfic movement in the Netherlands. More recent attempts to revive the movement are to the second phase of the signfic movement what the late "Signific Circle" was to the "International Institute for Philosophy" – retrospective, lacking original, fresh ideas and power.

My commemorative handiwork, presented here to all of you, was by choice limited to the outward development of the signfic movement, the motives and ideas that wound it up and let it go. As we have seen, most of these motives and ideas were notions, hopes, and expectations that more or less transcended the boundaries of science in the strictest sense. Scientists hesitate to talk about that; they are more likely to turn up their noses at such ideas and pooh-pooh them. Almost as if they were unable to distinguish between a high ideal and the mental efforts required to pursue it. Looking backward, we have to recognize both, without failing to inspect, understand, and evaluate each separately: on the one hand, the idealistic basic ideas of the movement; on the other, the scientific agenda, originality of the questions raised, the persuasive power of some answers. Only in this way do we live up to the realization reached sooner or later by every unbiased historian of science and which was fictitiously spoken by the philosopher and mystic Ramón Lull in one of Fontenelle's conversations of the dead:

"Toutes les Sciences ont leur Chimere, apres laquelle elles courent, sans la pouvoir attraper; mais elles attrapent en chemin d'autres connoissances fort utiles." (Fontenelle 1684 (1971: 316))

## Notes

- 1 Cf. the first thorough but nonetheless incomplete bibliography of Mannoury's works by J. Stegeman (1985).
- 2 On the following, cf. A. van Bochove's enlightening study (1986), too.

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