

ARISTOTLE'S FALSE AND DANGEROUS SIGNS AND THEIR REVIVAL IN THE CONTEMPORARY NEW MEDIA

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One thing is a sign of another thing
Aristotle, *Rhetoric to Alexander*

ABSTRACT. “A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else,” wrote contemporary Italian semiotician Umberto Eco in his classical textbook, *A Theory of Semiotics* (1979:7), without even acknowledging Aristotle. Not only Eco’s modern classification of signs actually derives from the Aristotelian ancient semiotic point of view, but also the entire “Empire” of currently produced new signs (paraphrasing Roland Barthes) in contemporary media supports the little known Aristotelian semiotic classification. Aristotle’s less familiar typology – **true, false, recognizable and dangerous signs** – actually articulated throughout the entire body of his works (if carefully read) happens to be not only surprisingly correct and applicable for modernity, but stands at the core of the proper decoding of signs and current methods of analysis.

KEYWORDS: semiosis; semiosphere; cultural, dangerous, false, recognizable, true signs; cultural detour; signification; decoding; nature; culture; universe; knowledge; belief, truth; myth.

1. Introduction

Millennia ago, Aristotle had already anticipated widening of the semiotic frontiers and the semiotic reformation of the distant unknown future when he stated, “We shall obtain in abundance signs, done or said, or seen, taking advantages or disadvantages” (1984, vol.2:2287). Precisely this is happening right now, in front of our eyes, with the arrival of the new technology, new forms of communication and the thus formed secondary new reality and new **semiosphere**.

This paper focuses on some social, political and existential challenges and disadvantages, triggered globally by the intense proliferation of new **dangerous** and **false signs** en masse, or by the new media, paradoxically foreseen by Aristotle in the remote antiquity.

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2. Aristotle's Definition of *False Signs*

Two millennia ago, in his less read *Rhetoric to Alexander*, referring to the signs beyond the natural ones or *cultural semiosis*, Aristotle wrote: "One sign causes belief, another knowledge" (1984, vol.2:2287). Defining the basic principles of multiple, complex and **multilayered signification** tied to the production of Culture, cultural products, including the early science of his day and the resulting intellectual ambiguity, Aristotle had surprisingly diagnosed the cause of numerous cultural conflicts. He defined the etiology of the permanent universal confusion between the authentic and imagined reality, truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, myth and knowledge, blocking the search for truth and understanding of Being in the Universe. This profound **semiotic categorization** Aristotle made at the dawn of human science and in the presence of the most plentiful powerful mythological conceptualizations about the universe. It enabled him to summarize in one single definition the underlying cause of the obstacles on the way to the understanding of the numerous natural and cultural processes, i.e. what actually prevents humans from the acquisition of genuine knowledge about cosmos, biological processes and constructed by humans cultural ones, constituting civilized society. One phenomenon which comes to mind immediately as the Aristotelian **belief-causing sign** and, turning out to be ultimately false, is Religion, which, perhaps, Aristotle wished to expose already in his day. Not the religion as a collective therapy of humanity, but as an **obscurantist cultural product**. In Aristotle's time, as well as many centuries afterwards, all explanations of origins of life, natural processes and cultural events had been examined from the mythological religious perspective, invariably involving the divine intervention and the will of God(s). It had been blocking human reasoning, essentially paralyzing human will, taking away human ability to control the world around them. The cornerstone postulate of any religion, as Aristotle perceptibly concluded, is invariably founded on the major **dominant false sign** – blind belief. If philosophy is based on Doubt and ongoing evaluation of the established notions, the edifice of any religion is built on the concrete foundation of unshakeable Belief. Any doubt, inherent in human reasoning, thought processes and accompanying analysis, is ultimately rejected by religious mythological ideology and its institutions.

A century before Aristotle, the pagan Greek martyr Protagoras (483-410 BC) had been banished from Athens, his books burnt publicly, solely for his refusal to accept the false sign to be true. His tragedy started with his uttering the following blasphemous lines, "I am unable to arrive at any knowledge whether there are any gods (1988:231)." Without any experimental preliminaries, the ancient Greek materialist thinkers dared to doubt the most powerful and meaning-valent false sign, and the recorded punishment of Protagoras for his doubt is the best illustration of the religious crusade. The earliest science and philosophy crushed the most enduring ancient religious myth, making the priests and shamans fearful of learning and knowledge. One can appreciate the defiance, intellectual

courage and greatness of thought of the early thinkers and scientists, considering that the “wisest children of humanity” had, by that time, already invented and possessed the divine pantheon of over 30,000 gods, presumably in charge of Nature and Culture, and influencing human and animal life, and their Being in the World.

What some future scholars would undeservingly describe as “primitive,” the Aristotelian scientific position and his analytical paradigm had been, in fact, grand and subversive, having revived the revolutionary stand of the rejected and blasphemous Protagoras. Following in his footsteps, Aristotle had established a permanent universal **cognitive continuum** in search of knowledge and the pursuit of academic freedom. He came to his position, often also relying on the poetic guesses of his predecessors, such as Hesiod, Homer, Evenus, Epicharmus, synthesizing poetry, philosophy and philosophy, and insisting on the possible search for **true signs** within the **semiosphere** of the **observable signification**. Observing the unfolding of the Cosmos, Aristotle strived to decipher the Ultimate inner puzzle – the Why of it. His famous *Metaphysics* commences with the following:

*All men of nature desire understanding.
This is the gift of humans, who, unlike animals,
live not only by experience, but by art and judgment
(1966:3).*

His theoretical position would be later re-iterated in the thought of the Achaean statesman Polybius (?210 BC-128 BC), who would treat religion as a form of mass delusion and an instrument of societal control, “Unreasoning anger, and violent passion, the only resource of keeping them [masses] in check by mysterious terrors and scenic effects of the sort” (E. Bevan, ed.1927:77; A. Makolkin, 2009:46). Aristotle’s ancient (albeit little known today) semiotic theory had laid out the foundation for the future scientific thinking in a **secular society**, among other discoveries, having outlined the analytical pathway for overall universal scientific inquiry or the search for “**the signs, causing knowledge.**” Paradoxically, the Aristotelian paradigm and secular premise would be abandoned in the fateful struggle for knowledge, during the later victorious parade of the religious myth, which would last nearly two millennia, only to be revived during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

2. Lucretius, a Roman Advocate for *True Signs*

The Romans, who actually followed the Greek cultural pathway in the sphere of the arts, political principles and civic governance, had some trouble adopting fully and completely their divine pantheon. The Roman society, initially also pagan, would eventually develop into an exemplary firmly secular civilization, with a rather dismissive

attitude of all religions, keeping them on the margins for the first time in recorded human history. It is not in vain that, a couple centuries after Aristotle, a daring Roman Lucretius (99-55 BC), a poet-philosopher, would bluntly denounce religion as a **dangerous false sign**, reiterating the Aristotelian stand. In his grand poem *De Rerum Natura*, the longest of all in European literatures, Lucretius would proclaim that

*Religion (read false Aristotle's sign)
breeds wickedness and has given rise
to wrongful deeds
(2007, B. I: 4).*

His poem vigorously defended the ancient Greek materialistic outlook on cosmos and Roman secular model of society's development, having bluntly and defiantly exposed the negative and obscurantist role played by religion. The work was his poetic hymn to Human Reason, philosophy, free reasoning, Aristotle himself, and Aristotelianism which had somehow perceptibly and profoundly anticipated, even centuries prior, the soon coming triumph of myth, religion and the tyrannical world view, imposed by the Church. Already in Lucretius's lifetime, there was an observable regrettable cultural shift, away from the ancient **materialistic paradigm**, which would later arrest the development of science and knowledge for over millennia. Only the poetic wisdom could enable one to foresee and capture the future cycle of decline. The inquisitive, joyful and knowledge-seeking Roman *homo ludens*, the cultural achievement of the Roman Empire, would be later destroyed and crushed by the dogmatic theology and myth making, originated in the distant backward province of the stretched out Roman Empire. Witnessing the ideological fermentations among the subjects of the Eastern provinces and fearful of, or anticipating the future fall of the Roman paganism and secularism, Lucretius, the poet, made a nearly prophetic warning, centuries prior to the official adoption of Christianity. He rightfully expressed his "fear and trembling" about the possible victory of this false sign and its enormously negative consequences in society. His sole hope was in the man-thinker of the Greek antiquity, who, he feared, could be conquered and destroyed by religion:

*When Man's life upon the Earth [lay] in base dismay,
Crushed by the burden of Religion,
Whose face...
Hung
One Greek man...
His spirit's valiance, till he longed the gate
To burst of this low prison of man's fate,
And thus the living ardor of his Mind*

Conquered
(E. Bevan, ed. 1927:52).

3. Christianity/Religion - A False Sign

The worst fears of Lucretius would prove to be justified a couple centuries after his death. Since the official adoption of Christianity as a state religion in mid 4th century, the development of science, representational art, music and social norms as a form of true sign production, had been virtually arrested. The free thinking and art-producing Greek and Roman man had been assassinated by the most tyrannical religious myth. In the long lasting post-Christian period, from the 4th up to the 17th century (!), European culture would have to evolve under the watchful eye, strict supervision and in the presence of the most political religious censor – the Church. The educational institutions and the entire public life would be run by the Church fathers. Arts, sciences and music had been tolerated as intended to sustain, confirm and serve the religious dogma. The vigilant censorship had forever impaired creativity and free thinking, the production of the **true signs**, having replaced them by myth, the mythological thinking and the theory of **false signs**. The religion-victimized post-Christian civilization had been evolving in the atmosphere of the complex and harmful duplicity, surviving in between the two paradigms – the suppressed secular and dominant religious one. This state of bipolar existence not only obscured human vision of the world and its discovery, but it also posed a real obstacle to the acquisition of knowledge. It placed a **false sign** – Religion – and the myth of the afterlife ahead of any activity **Here and Now**. All the present transgressions and errors of judgment of Today were made insignificant, a part of the process of making the so-to-speak **existential draft** – the life Here – for the sake of the second one, **There and After**, allegedly more significant than the first one.

Centuries before the Enlightenment, before the persecution of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1648), the enigmatic Florentine intellectual, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), frequently misinterpreted in cultural history, dared to embark on his crusade against religion in general and Christianity in particular. This was his greatest contribution to Reason, the best expression of the **cultural continuum** and another gesture of revived Aristotelianism during the Renaissance. Machiavelli had enough courage to have fearlessly and openly condemned the adoption of Christianity, which the Renaissance thinker treated as the cause of the decline and demise of the Roman Empire and the entire progressive Western civilization! Machiavelli was convinced that the Graeco-Roman pagan/secular antiquity had been standing and would forever stand as the cultural foundation of the Western civilization while the prolonged Judeo-Christian mythological reign was nothing more than a regrettable **cultural detour** from the pathway of human development. Living in the 15th century Florence, he also saw even the contradictions between the dogma and the life of the dogmatics, the hypocrisy of the

proponents of belief. Centuries before the Enlightenment and the religion-negating Marxism, Machiavelli exposed the spirit-weakening and reason-eroding effect of Christianity as the ideology of passivity, obedience, submission, stupor and essential resignation, castrating the thinking and action-minded man:

*This mode of life thus rendered the world weak,
and given it in prey to criminal men, who can manage it
securely, seeing that the collectivity of men
could go to paradise, think more of enduring their
beatings than of avenging them
(1996, II, 2:131).*

However, Machiavelli mainly attacked Christianity for being the most oppressive cultural force, the deluded sect which had

*“persecuted all the ancient memories, burning
the works of poets and historians, having ruined many visual
images and spoiled every other thing which might convey some sign of
antiquity”
(1996, D. II: 5.1)*

Machiavelli regarded the reign of Christian church as a criminal regime which had destroyed the rich cultural legacy of antiquity, having robbed the post-Christian civilization of all the achievements of the pre- Judeo-Christian past. He ruthlessly tore off the mask of propriety from priests, monks and cardinals whom he perceived as no more than cultural pirates. Machiavelli could not comprehend how the urban, advanced and highly civilized Romans could have ultimately succumbed to the myth of the rural, nomadic and backward tribe, the troublesome subjects of their progressive secular Empire. He could not fathom how Roman society had to abandon “even the man’s names of Caesar and Pompey for Peter, John, Matthew,” or why even the “new divine pantheon had even to invade the domain of the most private, affecting even naming of one’s children” (1910, 12-13). He would not share the fate of Giordano Bruno – Machiavelli’s condemnation of the church and religion did not lead to his physical destruction, but his blasphemous writings had been placed on the *Index Prohibitorum*. The desperation of the church in the 15th century did not reach yet the climax, he would be spared the ultimate punishment, but burning Giordano Bruno at stake in 1600 would mark the despair of the church fathers, their fury of the failing false sign producers and mythmakers in front of the able decoders, scientists and free thinkers. Despite the brief cycle of rational thinking and denunciation of the Church during the Renaissance and later during the Enlightenment, the religious myth – making or false sign production would never leave the arena of

signification. The brief cycles of Doubt were destined to be displaced by tyranny of Belief, despite new knowledge.

4. Paradoxes of Post-modernity

The last two centuries after the Enlightenment could be described as the periods of another **cultural detour** and gradual revitalization of the old semiosphere, with the proliferation of the **familiar false signs**. The battle for the dominance of the false (religious) signs has been resumed, with the difference that at present, not one, but several powerful mythologies vigorously compete with each other for the allegedly correct mythological narrative and its tyranny. The modern century is abundant with the false signs in every realm, signifying “what has been said or has not been” – as Aristotle foresaw millennia prior – “signs of what existed, or does not exist” (1984, vol.2: 2287). The precursor of the current intense **false semiosis** paradoxically lies in the post-Renaissance and post-Enlightenment century. After a brief overture of secular thinking, which lasted only a couple centuries, humanity plunged again into the morass of false signification. The 19th-century intense struggle for the romantic assertion of a cultural identity, language, political independence and re-division of geographical maps invariably involved the resurgence of the religious mythology, i.e. false signification. The trend for the cult of the particular carried with it not only a particular political history, but a cultural one as well, which involved particular worship. Nationalistic movements of the 19th century coincided with the revival of the religious differentiation – interest in Judaism and Zionism, for example, or the correct mythological Christian narrative (that Christ had been actually a German, as per the myths of the Fascist ideologues) occurred at the same time.

The Romantic 19th century not only conceived the ethnocentric myth, with the accompanying it collective strive for the recovery of the alleged true roots, but it also brought on the regrettable return to the semi-forgotten paradigm of the Religious, the resurrection of Belief, fusing multiple false signs and paving the way to the religious feuds of the next century. The roots of the religious discourse, encroaching on the secular one in the neo-romantic 20th century, could be found in the particularity-obsessed previous Romantic 19th century, which had lost its decoding power, having surrendered to Feeling. The delusional confused discourse about race and religion, revived in the Victorian times, nurtured the resurrected conflict between the Judaic and Christian mythology. Paradoxically, the nostalgia over the religious signification and particularity concurred with the arrival of Marxism and ideology of universality, brotherhood and equality of men. The most secular state eventually would happen in the USSR, the country which adopted Marxism, and where the **religious signs** were temporarily put to rest, while the battles for religious supremacy would eventually lead to the barbaric fight for biological and cultural supremacy. The shameful for Western civilization drama of the

20th century did not end in 1945, having spilled over to the Middle East and the New Dark Ages are upon humanity again, with the transformed battle for the right Belief and correct myth.

The cultural circumstances now are more complicated with the expansion of the religious mythological space. The new Medieval barbaric crusades again, just as in Spain in 1492, involve the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, equally antiquated visions of the world and humanity, equally false conceptions, blocking the progress of human civilization. If Christianity turned it back on the Roman secular achievements, throwing civilization millennia back, the current religious triad threatens to put humanity in the Stone Age. Learning about the actions of the radical Islam, the pandemic of suicide bombings and violence against women, one cannot help but think about the “wickedness of religion” and the wise prophet Lucretius, or Machiavelli who regarded, the known to him religious myth makers, Christians, as cultural pirates. The cycle of darkness is upon us again, two millennia after Aristotle and Protagoras.

The 20th-21 centuries, our new Dark Ages, are the most contradictory and paradoxical times – on the one hand, rather exciting and complex, marked by the discovery of new useful knowledge, new remarkable unfolding of the mysteries of life and the universe, while on the other, characterized by the resurgence of the most ridiculously false signs, inhibiting the very pursuit of knowledge and turning back on the civilized past. Despite the post-modern notional fetish of the secular, and the alleged declining numbers of the believers, the division between the Church and State, the places of god-worshiping did not disappear altogether. Moreover, the most secular countries of Europe, like Sweden, Norway, Finland or France, face the spread of the forceful, if not militant, Islam due to the intense migration of Africans, Asians and refugees from the Middle East. The powerful seat of Islam in Saudi Arabia provides substantial financial support to the European communities – most of the mosques in post-modern Europe are being erected with their help. Mosques appear even in largely Greek Orthodox independent Ukraine where mass media disseminates false information about Islam, the peaceful religion which allegedly respects women. The ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia, largely misunderstood by the West, also had a degree of religious underpinning – the rift between the Orthodox Christian Serbs and Moslem Bosnians or Albanians, backed by the invisible funds from Saudi Arabia.

To sustain the intensity of Belief and the survival of the places of worship, the post-modern religious fathers turned to the new media and technology. Anticipating the resurgence of religion amidst the new technology, Canadian scholar John O’Neil wittily described the phenomenon in his book, *Plato’s Cave*:

Even the Pope has discovered that the world’s roads need no longer lead to Rome, so long as he can make the news.

Television reaches ever greater height of efficacy. For now technologies need to muse whether the Papal blessing reaches those who watch it as well as those who kneel in His presence (1991:178).

By 1991, when the book appeared, John O’Neil did not see the YouTube yet, nor did the religious gurus use it either, but already those who preached, asking to rely on the divine help, paradoxically resorted to the new manmade tools. Now, the most ridiculous drama unfolds when they vastly advertise the divine help and contact their parishioners not only via email, fax, but also on the web sites and face books. The word of God, whether he is Christ or Mohammad, reaches all everywhere. The religious institutions no longer rely solely on the religious iconography, the beauty of palaces, cathedrals and mosques, and traditional signification – they now, in a modern fashion, successfully employ and incorporate new **secular semiosis** of the new media. It equally applies to all religions. With the now widely spreading and globally asserting itself Islam, the Christian churches no longer have a monopoly on owning the souls and the arena of spirituality.

The religious fathers (be they in the church, mosque or synagogue) have quickly understood that religion was spiritually akin to the new media cult – both are in the business of convincing to accept the false signs as the true ones, while creating the **numbing existential effect**. The alleged spirituality or, in fact, the most vigorous propaganda of faith, which it is, and the technologically induced discourse reach for the same – Human soul and Trust, turning the human being into an apolitical, passive, non-thinking and blindly believing individual. The institution, which maintained that God was the creator of the universe, and technology, which “once promised to make us the lords of creation,” is actually the **twins of distortion**, producing equally false signs and raising false hopes while arresting the very process of human reasoning, analyzing and decoding.

Armand Mattelact and Yves Stourdze, in their 1985-volume, *Technology, Culture and Communication*, long before the trappings of another new technology, diagnosed the trend:

They [producers of new technology] are guilty of an enormous intellectual swindle when, in messianic fashion, they infer social novelty from technical novelty and present this technological transformation as an instrument of “salvation,” bitterly neglecting the segregation and social relations of force prior to this new, so-called “information society” (1985:37).

The “intellectual swindle” on a global scale involves corporations, industries, producers of goods, media barons, consumers, gullible individuals and scheming producers of false signs, both in the secular and the religious realm. All became engaged in constructing

the new massive gigantic **semiosphere of false signs** – the utopia of a successful (be it affluent or ideal) new society, allegedly nourished and sustained by instant electronic connection and information. Another myth of salvation has been created – one could be saved by the flood of data, which includes now the places of worship.

The crisis of the global financial system apparently did not start in 2008-2009. Back in the sixties, the French government, aware of the power of new proliferating technology, had already mobilized scientists to invent a solution for tying democracy and technology, and inventing a “new agora” for the market economy. And electricity (God-given or man-made?) brought unexpected salvation via electronics. Temporarily, the ongoing production of electronic gadgets saved the *body politic*, boosting the general consumption and manufacturing, gratifying with global (real or imaginary) profits and inspiring for new banking electronic games.

The myth of tie between democracy and technology was invigorated by the so-called Arab spring movement, induced by belief that a sole appeal via the so-called social media and call to demonstrate for democracy would actually instantly bring it, or that the societal metamorphosis, usually taking centuries, would be accomplished with the cyber magic in weeks. The religious groups, who would eventually come to power in the Arab countries, as an aftermath of the social media aroused revolt, again benefitted from the **false signification** and false promises. Technology, this most powerful deity, came into the wrong hands.

The so-called “information society,” among other promises, promised to improve the process of knowledge acquisition, and education – but the significant part of the present global population actually has no access even to primary education. Paradoxically, in the age of information, majority of people live uninformed or less informed than centuries prior. The cellular phones, the twitter, the texting gestures, the cyber freedom have brought neither more freedom to the oppressed, nor more bread to the hungry, neither the jobs to the unemployed, nor cure to the sick. Technology, the last hope of salvation for the decaying system, turned out to be a band aid solution against the malignant tumor. The technological innovations actually have made many jobs redundant, or unnecessarily complicated the existing positions for those left to deal with them. For instance, a simple old job operation at the bank, restaurant or a store which before required a hand written entry, now requires new software, annually changed which only the initiated can operate without the nervous breakdown. The havoc that technology could inflict was obvious to the few unknown wise thinkers.

Back in 1985, Armand Mattelart wrote to that effect:

The universe of communication is becoming a privileged space for neutralization of politics, a euphemized universe in which

conflicts of interest, relations of force, cleavages and sociological depth are to be absent (1985[1991:29]).

According to Umberto Eco, it is a natural semiotic process – “a sign is everything that can be taken as significantly substituting for something else” (1979:7). But the electronic information society or its designers and controllers have actually expanded the field of all **cultural signs**, by having produced a **secondary semiosphere of false signs**. For instance, the electronic feedback to the TV (as a primary electronic signal) or radio, used by the officials, government and private elite, have achieved what is necessary for sustaining a new myth, new universe of false signs – they have substituted the original actual democracy with full participation of the members (e.g. the 9th-century AD first European an open space Icelandic parliament) with the electricity – induced and nurtured delusion of participation in governance that never occurs, but only appears as it does. Instead of the open face-to-face discussion, one has now a Facebook (often with a false face or identity). Instead of venting one’s anger over the order of things in the privacy of one’s kitchen, now public has the electronic space to burn electronically one’s, perhaps futile, frustration over injustice or disorder. The things stay the way the powerful club decides and where the masses have no say, but a simple electronic channel serves as the illusory democratic expression.

5. False Identity and New Media

The new media claims to possess now rejuvenated and allegedly updated definitive encyclopedic knowledge, which is hard to sift through So many individuals contribute to the data bank without any proper qualifications. The electronic medium, ungovernable by any laws, is not only a free collection of unchecked, often misleading knowledge, false information, but also an unlimited space for criminal activity, be it pornography, spam or financial scam. If the harm of unverified or misleading information is relatively of low consequence, but propaganda of violence, hate, suicide (or even cannibalism) poses the most powerful danger to society. We daily witness the **steady erosion of the moral fabric**, ethics and human character on a global scale, electronically induced and daily competing with other traditional forms of cultural expression. What is banned in print, in public discussion or public places has a free reign in the electronic domain. It is enough to recall the notorious Canadian “Magnotta case” when the act of dismembering the body parts of a viciously murdered man (a Chinese exchange student) was recorded and transmitted to millions, and then body parts had been sent by mail to the members of Canadian parliament. Or the most recent suicide case by a 15-year old bullied teenager, who has filmed and recorded for posterity not only her death, but prior to it, her unclad body to the anonymous male cyber friend. The numerous exhibitionist impulses of the mentally ill or criminal elements find gratification on the Internet which, beyond other

positive uses, has become an instrument of debunking the social mores and norms or civilized behavior, the very customs that have taken millennia to construct and inculcate. The virtual universe swiftly and electronically daily untangles all the moral taboos, having turned into a diabolic hell, with every second unleashing another crusade against civilization. It has taken millennia of trial and error to arrive at the code of safe, satisfactory and civilized human conduct, morality and ethics, while the modern electronic monster net is daily destroying all the moral taboos, so painfully and painstakingly attained by humanity.

The Internet has created the false semiosphere of **pseudo-culture** where old rules do not apply, feigning emotions, unleashing the evil impulses, arousing malice and the darkest human emotions and intentions, exploiting human alienation, public and private discontent. Facebook “friends”-phenomenon is the best illustration of an attack on traditional human interaction (a 30-year old sexual predator, posing as a female teenager and luring to meet) and dangerous **substitution of signs** – the false one is posing as true. The veil of electronic pseudo-privacy may easily hide a criminal. Regrettably, we hear only about the advantages of the cyber communication.

The non-traditional medium that has changed the millennia-old rules of conduct, ethics, morality, communication and the basic concepts of right and wrong is still viewed from the traditional perspective of a private discourse. E-mail correspondence, having no shield of privacy, gone with the vanished postal envelope, still carries the false illusion of intimacy, easily destroyed with a single command “forward”. The original intention of a computer to compute figures quickly has been put to numerous unexpected uses. John O’Neil, not even witnessing the full gamut of negativity of the new information modality, gave a rather pessimistic but realistic analysis in his *Plato’s Cave*

*Our fire technology no longer inspires us with its Promethean revolt.
Our technology once promised to make us lords of creation, [instead] we find
ourselves cosmic aliens, polluters of nature, and barbarians of galaxy
(1991:151).*

He has drawn an apocalyptic, but a quite probable picture of our technological age, which he labels “the age of death whose end obliges us to revision its origins”. We see that the media has completed the cycle of “uncivilizing” *homo sapiens*, having turned one back to the cave stage when one is a prisoner of one’s own ignorance and barbarism.

Note: A shorter and slightly different version of the paper was presented in November, 2012 at the Int’l Conference of the Semiotics Society of America in Toronto.

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