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# SEMANTIC PLAY & POSSIBILITY

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## Editor's Introduction

The ironist ... takes the unit of persuasion to be a vocabulary rather than a proposition. Her method is redescription rather than inference. Ironists specialize in redescrbing ranges of objects or events in partially neologistic jargon, in the hopes that by the time she is finished using old words in new senses, not to mention introducing brand new words, people will no longer ask questions phrased in the old words.

– Richard Rorty (1989, p. 78)

The purpose of this section of *Complicity* is to take up Rorty's challenge. Contributors to this section are asked to select one term that is prominent in the educational literature and to give it a complexivist spin. It is usually a venue for questioning the semantics of educational discourse in light of complex thinking. Semantics is about relationships among words, symbols, and representations. The piece presented in this issue is an attempt at defining abstract complexity by highlighting relations; and although the article has little to do with traditional educational discourse, teaching and/or learning, per se, it may provide insights for the kind of teaching that aims to develop complex thinking.

Complex thinking is that which "arises in the realization that certain sorts of self-organizing, self-maintaining phenomena give rise to new rules and transcendent possibilities" (Davis, 2005). New rules and transcendent possibilities may, perhaps, become apparent when we begin to play, to place in relation things/concepts that would not ordinarily have that relation; to bump concepts up against observations and experience; to over-leap analytic reason and run wild with ideas. In play, one may be inspired by the fantastic, the chaotic, the impossible. Yet, as complexity science indicates, it is not always chaos that develops, but rather, under particular conditions, what occurs is a phenomenon of emergence that belies analytic logic. In some circles emergence is thought of as the creativity of dynamical self-organizing systems. Creativity, whether evolutionary or Biblical, artistic or technological, is the question of the ages and it has

been at the heart of metaphysical discussions by farmers and philosophers since time began.

Mariusz Stanowski's article, published here, can be read as a stand alone piece or played off against his ideas about art, representation and creativity, detailed on his website ([http://www.stanowski.artinfo.pl/prace\\_teksty\\_en.htm](http://www.stanowski.artinfo.pl/prace_teksty_en.htm)). Stanowski's (2003) project is to define creativity in relation to art as a form of representation, suggesting that creativity, like change, "call[s] for the most suggestive possible expression of the content (definition)." His ideas about creativity—also by way of explaining his new form of art—concern relations between and among "the assemblage of elements" where the new is already embedded within known elements. He says,

I have come up with...a method of creation whereby a particular selected element of the art of painting, such as a portrait, act, quote, square or photograph, is constructed from some other elements I select; for example, a square is built from female acts, an act from a quote, photograph, square, object and text. By its nature, creative process of this kind eliminates any possibility that the work may be classified as something known, and thus abolishes the known goal of generating novelty. Autonomous creativity becomes the sole aim.

Stanowski alludes to an almost holographic form of expression: "the idea of wholeness, rather than of a fragment ... for each medium / element can comprehend all the fragments of reality including the medium / element itself." As Sarah Smitherman Pratt (2005) points out, connections of parts and (w)holes, relations, interconnections and patterns, are studied in non-linear dynamics of chaos and complexity theories (p. 173). So, while Stanowski's own creativity seems to come from the dynamical relations of elements, it seems not to be a part of his analytic approach in defining abstract complexity where he draws on cyberneticist and artificial intelligence theorist Francis Heylighen, adopting what seems to be the overly analytic discourse of modern science. What are the relations between art and science? Can the differences affect how we see and describe, think or reason about the world around us? Certainly, Gregory Bateson thought so, and perhaps, Francisco Varela does as well. It begins with visual perception.

## References

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