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Unfolding the Semiotic Web in Urban Discourse
Philologica Wratislaviensia: From Grammar to Discourse

Edited by Zdzisław Wąsik

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Volume 3
Unfolding the Semiotic Web in Urban Discourse
In Scientific Cooperation with Daina Teters
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Introduction

Unfolding the semiotic web in urban discourse

The idea to formulate the investigative framework for the following collective volume, which encompasses a number of papers devoted to the semiotics on the city and the semiotics in the city, has originated from the editor’s interest in the visual communication pertaining to the expressions of interpersonal distance in the urban environment during the last twelve years. As for today, this interest domain has borne fruits in some thematic proposals of doctoral dissertation research opportunities.

The initiative to organize a workshop devoted to the semiotics of the city had been undertaken in Riga at the Metamind 2008 conference. I had discussed this possibility with Daina Teters (Head of International Research and Art Project: Metamind, Latvian Academy of Culture, Riga, Latvia) and Roland Posner (Head of Research Center for Semiotics, Berlin University of Technology). Subsequently, I had submitted a summarized proposal of the workshop to the Director of the International Communicology Institute Richard L. Lanigan (from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale) at the International Symposium on Cultural Semiotics, in Nanjing, China, 15–17 November 2008.

To begin with working activities, an idea had been launched to convok the Consultant Assembly for Discussing the Idea of Urban Discourse in Semiotic Terms, which was organized in Wrocław between Feb. 27 and March 01, 2009 by the Committee of Philological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Wrocław Branch, and the Philological School of Higher Education in Wrocław in co-operation with the Research Center for Semiotics of Berlin University of Technology and the Metamind-Project of the Latvian Academy of Culture in Riga. The Program of this Assembly included the following presentations and exhibitions: “On the textual beginnings of pre-urban societies in the Viking age (An anthroposemiotic study of runic inscriptions in North-Central Jutland against the background of selected civilization models)” by Piotr Paweł
Chruszczewski (University of Wrocław, and Philological School of Higher Education in Wrocław); “Beyond corporate social responsibility: The semiotic act of renaming urban streets in Bucharest by Camelia-Mihaela Cmeciu (“Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău); “City furniture and its role in the organization of human behavior: A system-theoretical approach” by Roland Posner; “How urban discourse is patterned through the performing arts: A poster session presenting drawings of performers on the stage created during their interaction with their audiences” by Vessela Posner (Atelier in Berlin); “The city as a text” by Grażyna Sawicka (Casimir the Great University in Bydgoszcz); “Urban environment, metropolitan discourse and verbal proxemics: Searching for the meanings in the city” by Mikołaj Sobociński (Casimir the Great University in Bydgoszcz); “Semiotic aspects of the city as a space and the space in the city (with special reference to Riga)” by Daina Teters; “WELL, WELL…” by Małgorzata Tyc-Klekot (Atelier in Wrocław); “Linguistic functionalism and the principle of abstractive relevance in the metaurbanist discourse on art and architecture” by Elżbieta Wąsik (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań); and “Means-and-purpose-oriented functionalism in architecture and urbanist art and the sources of the conceptions of linguistic functions” by Zdzisław Wąsik.

Some papers published in this volume come from the participants of the planned workshop, named afterwards as “Round Table”, consisting of a plenary meeting and a thematic session with the title: “Unfolding the Semiotic Web in Urban Discourse” organized at the 10th World Congress of Semiotics, La Coruña, Spain, September 22–26, 2009: Culture of Communication, Communication of Culture. Among the invited contributors, the following authors had given their papers: Sung-Do Kim (Korea University, Seoul), “Some semiotic observations on the textual, ecology of public urban space in East Asia”; Richard L. Lanigan, “Slugging: The nonce sign in urban communicology of transportation”; Roland Posner, “City furniture and its role in the organization of human behavior – A systems-theoretic approach”; Mikołaj Sobociński, “Verbal proxemics in metropolitan discourse. Investigating how urban signs create space and influence social interactions”; Daina Teters, “Imaginative architecture and the verbal descriptions of emptiness: Ways and roads”; Zdzisław Wąsik, “Discursivism as an epistemological perspective in urban studies”, and Józef Zaprucki (Kolegium Karkonoskie in Jelenia Góra, and
Philological School of Higher Education in Wrocław), “The historical interference in the urban discourse”.

The subject matter of this “Round Table” had constituted a semiotic approach to the discursive patterns and practices of people who communicate in the urban environment. The notion of urbanity had been defined as a way of life in cities, towns, and their agglomerations (metropolises), specifying the distinction between “urban vs. rural”. The notion of discourse, in turn, had been taken as defined by philologists, or in a broader context, by representatives of social sciences. In that particular context, it had been noticed that practitioners of philological sciences, linguists and theoreticians of literature, used to refer the term discourse to the relational properties of text-types or types of text-processing activities embedded into the social roles of communication participants and their culture. In such a narrower disciplinary scope, discourse was seen as the realization of language in spoken and written texts determined by the functional circles, interest spheres or the domains of human behavior.

However, from the perspective of cultural-communicational sciences, discourse was proposed to be specified in terms of semiotic codes and processes that link human individuals as communicating selves into interpersonal and intersubjective collectivities when they create and interpret similar meanings embodied in material bearers. Accordingly, the unfolding of the semiotic web was understood, firstly, with respect to observed phenomena, as detecting and evaluating the growth and manifestation of the sphere of meaning-bearers or a sequence of meaning-bearing events, and secondly, regarding the observer’s focus of attention, as identifying and explaining the constituents and aspects of discourse in the light of signs and/or sign-processes that aggregate individual participants of communication into discursive linkages on a lower level and discursive communities on a higher level of social grouping.

It was expected that the “Round Table” might have offered the opportunity to bring the practitioners of text-and-sign-oriented disciplines together who perceive and apprehend the formative nature of urban discourse at various planes of its expression, creating thus a combination of conceptual simplicity and complexity, as well as the simultaneity of varying types of views where the described and descriptive objects intermingle, where the explanatory statements are explained in terms of other statements. In their papers, they might have had the opportunity to expose such semiotic aspects of human interrelationships in the urban environ-
ment, as the opposition between, e.g., public vs. private, global vs. local, strange vs. intimate, alien vs. proximate, foreign vs. domestic, distant vs. near, anonymous vs. distinctive, etc.

As it was assumed, the inquiries of semiotics- and discourse-oriented participants might have concentrated around such individual- and group-communication related categories of concern, as for example, requirements, needs, values, power, authority, conflict and accommodation, cooperation and competition, etc. Also invited had been those researchers who were interested in the conditions under which the semiotic objects might be treated as vestiges of man’s communicational customs which unite the inhabitants of towns, cities and metropolises into organized communities. Prospective proposals for papers following the rules of 10th World Congress of Semiotics as to the length of the abstract had been invited to be sent to the moderator of the workshop, Daina Teters, having been nominated President of the “Round Table” according to the customs of congress organizers.

Two papers of Daina Teters and Zdzisław Wąsik, selected for this volume, have either utilized or extended the contents of the papers presented and simultaneously published in Consultant Assembly III: In Search of Innovatory Subjects for Language and Culture Courses (Organized in Jelenia Góra between May 15 and 18, 2010 by the Philological School of Higher Education in Wrocław, Karkonosze College in Jelenia Góra and State Museum “Gerhart Hauptmann House” in Jelenia Góra in co-operation with the Research Center for Semiotics of Berlin University of Technology and the Metamind-Project of the Latvian Academy of Culture in Riga).

Appreciating her crucial role as organizer of three stimulating international research conferences: Metamorphoses of the Mind: Out of One’s Mind, Losing One’s Mind, Light-Mindedness (2006), Metamorphoses of the World: Traces, Shadows, Reflections, Echoes and Metaphors (2008), and Metamorphoses of the Absolute (2010), as well as co-organizer of three Consultant Assemblies in Poland, subsumed under the framework of Riga-Berlin-Wrocław Triangle for Semiotics and Communicology, I have felt obliged to express my indebtedness to Professor Daina Teters by inviting her to act as an Associate Editor in this volume.

Wrocław, December 2010

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On homeworld and community models of the city: The communicology of egocentric and sociocentric cultures in urban semiotics

1. The city as embodiment

City is a name that constitutes both a consciousness and experience for me, as it does for every person. I first became conscious of the notion of a city when, at age nine, I declared my ability, as Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914, U.S. philosopher, mathematician, and physicist) would say – my capacity, to take a public transit bus by myself into the downtown section of the City of Albuquerque, New Mexico, then as now, part of the United States of America since statehood in 1912. My father, Richard Sr., was the first baby born in the new State which has forever officially tied my family with that sense of local place called home. With an assumed adult consciousness, I was confident that my child’s body could take care of itself without parental supervision. The consciousness of that unknown alien reality of getting on the bus, which became the experience of a known actuality of riding the bus, forever transformed by sense of lived embodiment.

At the time, I did not realize that I was a living embodiment of one of the major model for defining a city, namely the Kinetic-Chronemic Field Model in which a city and it domain are measured by how far a person

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1 The present paper is a substantially expanded, revised, and updated version of Richard L. Lanigan’s article published in Finland (2008), and it utilizes, in particular, some relevant parts pertaining to the cultural logic of China discussed in Lanigan (2010a), which also have been expanded and updated here.
can travel spatially within a certain span of time. Irregardless of culture, most human beings use this model to locate, to center themselves in their village, town, or city; this is to say, in their Home World. When any of us asks how far it is to some destination, the first measure is the inquiry “Can I walk there?” and the next question is “How long will it take?”. The walking question is a human body measure of proxemic location typically noted by an emblematic building (architectural object), and, the time taking question is a chronemic measure of kinesic action (phenomenological subject). The sum of both answers is a semiotics of embodiment referred to by communicologist as the HomeWorld Model of communication. Home is where the body is (position), World is where the body goes (activity).

As may be apparent to some, my method in this analysis is a semiotic phenomenology approach known as Communicology. In the first instance for this approach, I am following the recommendation Roland Barthes (1986 [1967]: 97) whose own urban analysis concludes with this research advice:

In conclusion, I would like to say only this: in the comments I have made here I have not touched on the problem of methodology. Why? Because if we want to undertake a semiology of the city, the best approach, in my opinion, as indeed for every semantic venture, will be a certain ingenuity on the part of the reader. Many of us should try to decipher the city we are in, starting if necessary with a personal rapport. Dominating all these readings by different categories of readers (for we have a complete scale of readers from the native to the stranger) we would say that it is not so important to multiply the surveys or the functional studies of the city, but to multiply the readings of the city, of which fortunately only the writers have so far given us some examples.

In the second instance, my approach follows the perspective of Umberto Eco (1986 [1968]: 58) who reminds us: “A phenomenological consideration of our relationship with architectural objects tells us that we commonly do experience architecture as communication, even while recognizing its functionality”. In his analysis, Eco offers us a full consideration of the semiotic levels of human communication ranging from social interaction to mass media as they impact our understanding of urban architecture. However, my interest is the contextual urban space, it place and locality, beyond the buildings that mark that spatial semiosphere.

Returning to the nine year old boy that I was on that first bus ride downtown to where the tall “sky scraper” buildings stood, I became
fascinated with the phenomenology of the emergence of the embodied city. The street where I lived, the neighborhood of that street, the neighborhoods in that section of the city known as the Valley (versus the Heights to the East and the Mesa to the West, and the imposing Sandia Mountains to the Northwest and the Rio Grande River to the Southeast). These are places of the body and embody the spatial locus and temporal focus of my lived-experience. River and mountain were the walking boundaries of the city.

During my youth, three books came to form the core horizon my understanding of the embodied city I have just described. First was Paul Horgan’s *The Centuries of Santa Fe* (1956). I first picked up this book of historical fiction because I was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a city founded by the Spanish in the year 1610, after first being settled in the year 1540 (about the same time that the French were founding a city known as Montréal, Canada). Please note that the established City of Santa Fe occurs ten years earlier than the disorganized settlement of Plymouth by the English in 1620, although the lesser known Jamestown settlement was founded in 1607.

Horgan’s book details the emergence of a unique city, Santa Fe, that became the boundary condition between the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic culture of white people riding horses and pulling four wheeled wagons and, by comparison, the Spanish culture of brown people riding donkeys and pulling two wheeled carts. The white pioneers carried breach loading rifles, and six shot cartridge pistols; the Spaniards carried muskets and single shot powder and ball pistols. In fact, the technology of the 18th Century had arrived at the doorstep of the 17th Century. Even the image of the horse and the donkey were mutually frightening to the animals themselves!

The second book that stimulated by embodiment of culture was James Leslie Marshall’s *Santa Fe: The Railroad that Built an Empire* (1945). Unlike the first book of influence, this is a book of history. Simply put, the book details the replacement of the Spanish donkey and the Anglo horse by the “iron horse”, the railroad in the late 1800s of the United States of America. The corporation known as the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway (cf. Bryant 1974), i.e., moving people, livestock, and commodities West from Atchison, Kansas to Santa Fe, New Mexico, is simply a technology version of the previous Anglo-Spanish encounter in Santa Fe. The existential addendum to my embodi-
ment of the city, however, is the fact that all my grandparents were emigrant laborers from Ireland and they built the railroad line and later staffed it stations. For generations, the extended family name “Lanigan” became synonymous with “railroad” and the cities it connected. I should like to note, with some irony of tradition, that on 19 April 1996 I gave the 1896–1996 Centennial Distinguished Lecture at Southwest (Tangshan) Jiaotong (Railroad) University in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province of the People’s Republic of China.

The third book of influence was read during my Freshman college days. Lewis Mumford’s *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (1961) has forever guided my understanding of how the *eidetic* comes to constitute the *empirical*, in the present case how the person comes to embody a city. The essence of Mumford’s analysis is fondly summed up in the closing paragraph of his book, to which I shall return as the close of my paper.

Let me now turn to the analysis of my paper which is to say a discussion of the following central themes:

– The HomeWorld Model of communication (section 2),
– The nature of human groups and the proxemic code distinction between “Place Community” and “Non-Place Community” (section 3, i.e., 3.1. and 3.2.),
– The Egocentric and Sociocentric cultures in human cosmology (section 4., i.e., 4.1., 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3., furthermore, 4.2., 4.2.1., 4.2.2., and 4.2.3.); and finally,
– The essence of the City as human embodiment (section 5).

All that I have to say may be foreshadowed and summarized by employing Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977 [1972]: 18) notions of *hexas* and *habitus*, explained in his own words:

*H*abitus, [is] a system of schemes of perception and thought which cannot give what it does give to be thought and perceived without ipso facto producing an unthinkable and unnameable [hexas]. Insofar as it is an outsider oriented discourse it tends to exclude all direct reference to particular cases (that is, virtually all information directly attached to proper names evoking and summarizing a whole system of previous information)… it is understandable that anthropologists should so often forget the distance between learned recognition of the native world and the native experience of that world, an experience which finds expression only in the silences, ellipses, and lacunae of the language of familiarity.
In my view then, the *City* is a paradigm case of *habitus* (and its consciousness as *hexis*) that can be explicated by a semiotic phenomenology of embodiment (*mimesis*). Bourdieu’s (1990 [1980]: 25–26) own cultural analysis offers a confirmation of the appropriateness of a “semiotic phenomenology” approach to human communicology.

2. The HomeWorld Model of communication

The discipline of semiotics is emerging progressively as a focal point of analysis within the cognate discipline of Communicology. This is especially true in the subdiscipline known as intercultural communicology. Interesting enough, the discipline of semiotics has taken up the specific question of whether or not a person can create culture. This is to ask if the embodied person in his or her engagement, motility, and speaking constructs a shared world with others through the mediation of the body. Intriguing is the interpolation offered by Jürgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson (1987 /1951/) to the effect that the body mediates the “communication center” (mind) in the body to the effect that embodiment is the founding or endowing of the Self in a World of Others. In this context, the original model of Leroy Stanley Harms (1973) called the “homeworld model” has become a focal point of analysis. In brief, this model suggests that the “local” embodied consciousness of persons (*hexis*) is the dominant code for the “universal” embodied group consciousness (*habitus*) that is culture. The “cultural transmission model” of Margaret Mead (1970) is also relevant here as the *habitus* that is autocommunicated as *hexis* among generations of a specific culture.

Thus, in my discussion of the HomeWorld model of semiotic communication, I propose to explore the convergences and divergences among the semiotic and phenomenological approaches to persons constituting cultures and, reflexively, cultures that code the expression and/or perception possibilities of persons born (or emigrated) into them.

2.1. Leroy Stanley Harms’ HomeWorld Model

The HomeWorld Model of human communicology was first proposed in one of the early textbooks on intercultural communication written by L. S. Harms (1973). This model has a relatively simple concept with far
reaching consequences including a *correction* of the mistaken idea, used by many early urban planners, as Richard L. Meier (1962) and Mark Gottdiener (1986), that human interaction could be reduced to a binary probability as part of “information theory”. While Meier (1962: 114 and 121) was aware of the behavioral semiotics put forward by Charles William Morris (1901–1979) and the application limits of Claude Elwood Shannon’s (1916–2001) informatics, he misunderstood, the place of informatics in urban social systems theory, in contrast to, for example, Anthony Wilden (1980 /1972/).

The Harms’ model takes note of the close connection between the embodied notion of *home* (cf. Alapack and Alapack 1984; Buckley 1971; Eckartsberg 1986) and its extension as *habitus*, namely: systems of durable, transposable dispositions. The home codes are predisposed to function as *structuring* codes, that is, principles of the generation and control of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way (1) being the product of obedience to rules, (2) objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends, or (3) without an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, (4) being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (cf. Bourdieu 1977 [1972]: 72). In less technical terms, the home *habitus* is simply the experience of the “local” as represented in the communication and conduct of “local people”. Locals are psychological and sociological “insiders” who are readily distinguished from “outsiders” by their comportment (use of tropic logic), i.e., the recognition of *intended* behavior. Wilden (1987) captures this complexity with the simple aphorism that “the rules are no game”, meaning that constitutive knowledge (Game as a Whole) is not a precondition for regulative understanding (Action Rules for Parts). This is the fertile ground for confronting the *stranger* or *alien world* notion where alternative cultural logics are possible new behaviors.

In my adaptation and expansion of Harms’ model (Fig. 1), the local or *Home Community* is counterpoised to the *World Community*. Here, the concept of community is the *Gemeinschaft* [community] and *Gesellschaft* [association; society] of standard sociological thought since Ferdinand Tönnies (1957 [1935 /1887/]). This is to say, the home community is a group of people who are collected together on the basis of *affinity*, common purpose, shared goals, and a sense of location that suggests both space-binding and time-binding in their communication, kinship, and
exchange systems with others, i.e., choice associations (hexis) that form social practice (habitus). We shall sort out the cultural types of groups in due course. Let me say for the moment that space-binding is Harms’ conception of the Transportation Communication Network [TRANSCOMENT] centered on the exchange of commodities (empirical) by people and time-binding is the Telecommunications Network [TELCOMNET] centered in turn on the exchange of services (eidetic) for people. In addition now, there is the complexity of services which are commodities (tropic logic of metaphor) present in culture as the Internet Communication Network [INTERCOMNET] metaphorically nominated as the World-Wide-Web.

The HomeWorld Model allows both (1) a person’s self-perception as same-reference perspective, anchored in the Home Community by reason of birth into a family in a given village, town, or city, and (2) the alterity of a stranger’s other-perception as different-reference perspective anchored in the World Community by reason of threat (death) from an unknown (alien) group in an unknown (foreign) place. Given this context, the model describes the analogue progression from a Self situated (by linguistic, rhetoric, and logic codes) in the known Local time and space moving toward the unknown Future time and space of the Other. As we see in Fig. 1, the vertical column indicates that at the Local level, a person relies almost exclusively on Home Community knowledge and understanding present in the semiotics codes of proxemics (space), kinesics (action, movement), olfactorics (taste, smell), and vocalics (aural, oral sound characteristics, such as accent). The proxemic field is an analogue measure of distance from or to the residence House: Close-to-home; Far-from-home.

By contrast, World Community information for this person is distant and lacking in relevance – as recorded in the conceptual abstractions (mathematics code) of chronemics (time), ocularics (visual perception), and haptics (touch, the sense of contact with another). The Chinese embody this view with the aphorism: “Heaven is high and, the Emperor far away” (a version of the Western saying that “all politics is local”). As a person’s comportment involves progressively greater social activity and contact, the analogue scale balance between Local and World Community begins to shift.
At the Regional level there is less Local concern and more Regional influence. The same phenomenon moves the person to a National sense of community which becomes a functionally perfect balance between the Local and the World views. Nationalism in every country is an example...
On homeworld and community models of the city

In the idea of “neighborhood” (or “mainstreet” or “home village”) is generalized to the whole country.

When events occur that bring the nation into contact with another nation, the International level of community gives greater weight to the World influence and diminished concern for the National cum Regional/Local levels. Next, there is the projection of international relations to the level of Worldwide concern. In most cases, this Global level is a an extrapolation in which the World is made Local, somewhat along the lines of Marshall McLuhan’s “global village” metaphor. Simply put, the largely spatial condition of the Home Community is transferred to the largely temporal condition of the World Community. The result is a Local personal concern for the Future of people, since the Local seems to offer little guidance about the unforeseen arriving from some other place! This problematic is intensified by technology. This is to say the advent of the world-wide-web INTERCOMNET destroys our normal concept of social space and time such that the embodiment of the person per se is the only referent point (Dreyfus 2001: 3, et passim; Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986). Embodiment, not digital presence, is the foundation of social stability. As Ruesch (1972:36) reminds us,

The precarious balance between individual identity (image of self when considered alone) and group membership (image of self when with others) can be achieved through control of the perceived social differences that exist between the self and others. Perceived social differences can be increased or decreased through three fundamental processes of communication: understanding, acknowledging, and agreeing… With these three processes, people regulate their social encounters and the tensions that these encounters produce.

The best example of the over all HomeWorld model is to think in terms of political economy and the role of government. People are most concerned with Local governance of their lives. Yet, people progress in their concerns as outside influences come to bear, regionally, nationally, internationally, and globally causing an adjustment in their definition of place (World) and time (Future).

A typical example on the INTERCOMNET is YouTube or Facebook where the Local is indistinguishable from the Global. By contrast, an unfortunate case in point is the advent of the cell phone and its use by a suicide bomber in an act of terrorism which collapses the World to the Local and the Future to the Present. On a more positive note, there are
two excellent accounts of the developmental process of understanding, acknowledging, and agreeing in human communication that accounts for the Home-World Cross-Cultural Communicology Model, those of the anthropologists Tom McFeat and Margaret Mead. Their anthroposemiotic contribution to the explication of group autocommunication in the formation and generational transformation of culture can be depicted in Fig. 2. A detailed account of the tropic logic inherent in this helix model is presented in Lanigan (1988: 58; 1992: 16, 92, 110).

![Figure 2. Richard L. Lanigan’s Semiosphere Helix Model of Communicology](image)

2.2. Tom McFeat’s small-group cultural transformation model

Culture can be viewed from a small group perspective in which groups form and interact to create settlements and eventually cities. Using a phenomenological experiment, McFeat (1974) demonstrates that the history of human settlements is confirmed by the *habitus* and *hexis* dispositions of several experimental groups that he simulated in different years. His qualitative research demonstrates that human groups develop a culture in a three step sequence of (1) Content-Ordering as a diffusion of innovation by a logic of metaphor, (2) Task-Ordering as a definition of
activity function by a logic of metonymy, and (3) Group-Ordering as a function of communication by a logic of simile (irony) and synecdoche.

Small-group cultures not only are spatial, interactive, and structural, as indicated; but principally, they are communicative media. They introduce, store and retrieve, and transmit information by converting or translating it into nonverbal and verbal codes. As task groups, their members’ activities focus on goal-directed activities. In order to pursue activities, small-group members communicate on the basis of certain prevailing types of message-exchange systems, as those involving them in eidetic discourse formation: opinion, orientation, suggestion, and agreement or disagreement. These are the message systems which allow group members to articulate the group as an entity with incoming or stored information; they represent the group’s external system where opinion, orientation, and suggestion are concerned, whereas agreement and disagreement may encourage or discourage the ongoing formation of relationships among members (cf. McFeat 1974: 82).

First, there is Content-Ordering. Group culture begins as an organization in space (proxemic code), i.e., the usual process of organizing shelter, food and water, and protection from outside threats. As a result, the group initially concentrates on forms of interaction in time (chronemic code). The birth of group history, the place memory of actions taken, creates a stability of information that is embodied in the members of the group individually as collective agents of the group. Such a group is unaffected by the inflow of new information, since new experience is assimilated into past practice and the existing structures of interaction accommodate all change as an extension of the status quo forms of communication. Thus, “as a moving complex, culture diffuses, content moves from space-time coordinate of innovation in all directions at an ideally constant rate, describing what we might call an isometric [all outcomes are equal] pattern. Once innovated, the content transmission (i.e., diffusion) is assumed to stop only at some boundary” (McFeat 1974: 42; my insertion: RL). McFeat’s content-ordering is the same as Margaret Mead’s Postfigurative Culture.

Second, there is Task-Ordering. Group culture moves to a second stage of development in which the organization of space has already been accomplished. The group now concentrates on the interaction in time because group action per se begins to make information unstable. The result is a change in environment in which there is enormous pressure to
change customs and practices and the choices they represent. Time begins to alter space because a change in space becomes a change in time. In short, “we look for the information generated by a task: this is what makes the phenomenon cultural in natural task-ordered small-group cultures”. That is, “task-ordering in culture works toward or approximates an isomorphic outcome [similarity of outcomes by convergence of different inputs], that is, an outcome relevant to an internal correspondence with an externally patterned reality: the environment” (McFeat 1974: 48; my insertion). McFeat’s task-ordering is the same as Mead’s Cofigurative Culture.

Third, there is Group-Ordering. This third stage of group development builds upon the content and task ordering already achieved. Culture is organized in space and has adjusted to an environment that anticipates interaction in time. As Margaret Mead will summarize, “The Future is Now!”. The focus here and now is on information as shared meaning in the group as a concrete medium of communication choice and practice. The group is fundamentally affected by the inflow and outflow of information. There is an actual and ongoing structuring of the group as an embodied habitus and hexis. “Thus, by medium [not channel], we refer to specific group or institutional arrangements in space which provide the environment for the introduction, storage, retrieval, and transmission of messages. The concrete media of special interest in this book are small-groups”. As such, “the group is seen to ‘explain the group to itself’, thus providing contexts that are intensely local. Outcomes tend then to be group-specific; we also use the word neomorphic [new and different outcomes] (McFeat 1974: 61; my insertions and bold emphasis). McFeat’s group-ordering is the same as Margaret Mead’s Prefigurative Culture. By way of further illustration, let me point to the communicological research study by Eric E. Peterson (1987) which confirms the way in which the development of small group culture by generations creates an embodied instantiation of habitus and hexis as the group itself. The group per se embodies as a medium all the eidetic codes of linguistics, mathematics, and logics (tropes of speech).

2.3. Margaret Mead’s cultural transmission model

Mead is famous for her work in many areas of anthropology, not the least of which is the technical subdiscipline of intergenerational cultural