

Magical and Imagined: Lacan in Uexküll

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Introduction

There exists a double-blindness in Academia that I wish to correct. As the popularity of French psychoanalyst and semiotician **Jacques Lacan** grows in contemporary discourse, it is increasingly baffling that no bridges are being built between his own teachings and those of the ecologist **Jakob von Uexküll**. On one hand, **Uexküllian Biosemiotics** finds its interpretive limit at the notion of **'Magical Worlds'**, which could easily be extended by Lacanian Theory. On the other, Lacan's structurations attribute great importance to the semiotics of the organism as presented by Uexküll, but neglects them. I would like to build the first of many bridges by comparing the imaginary Lacanian notions of **connaissance** and **savoir** to the **search tone** and **search image** as presented by Jakob von Uexküll 2010.

Terminology

I will begin with Lacan's triad, the **real**, **symbolic**, and **imaginary**. The imaginary, the first to appear in Lacan's writings, is a collection of signifying **imagos**. These imagos ultimately **originate in the real**, but are only **enunciable as symbols**. Elsewhere (Chein 2006: 55), the imaginary has been identified with the Uexküllian *Umwelt-Innenwelt* threshold. Lacan elaborates the relation:

"The imaginary was then the world, the register, the dimension of images, conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined. In this respect, 'imaginary' is not simply the opposite of 'real': the [imagos] certainly belong to reality and Lacan sought [them] in animal ethology" Lacan, 1973

For Lacan, knowledge exists in two ways; symbolic knowledge or **savoir**, and imaginary knowledge or **(me)connaissance**. Whereas **savoir** is **articulated knowledge**, **connaissance** is **experiential**. In its symbolic nature, **savoir** would be used to select a particular **search image**, whereas **connaissance** would be the functioning of a **search tone** or **mood**. Uexküll (2010) writes "Only after it has eaten a worm (...) is this [search] tone accompanied by a determinate search image." Lacanian 'knowledges' agree.

Uexküll to Lacan

In Figure 1.1, I have replicated **Figure 39, The Process of Perception**, from Uexküll's *Foray*. It is remarkable how easily the Lacanian system slips into an analogous structure, seen in Figure 1.2, using the established terms.

Figure 1.1 - Uexküll

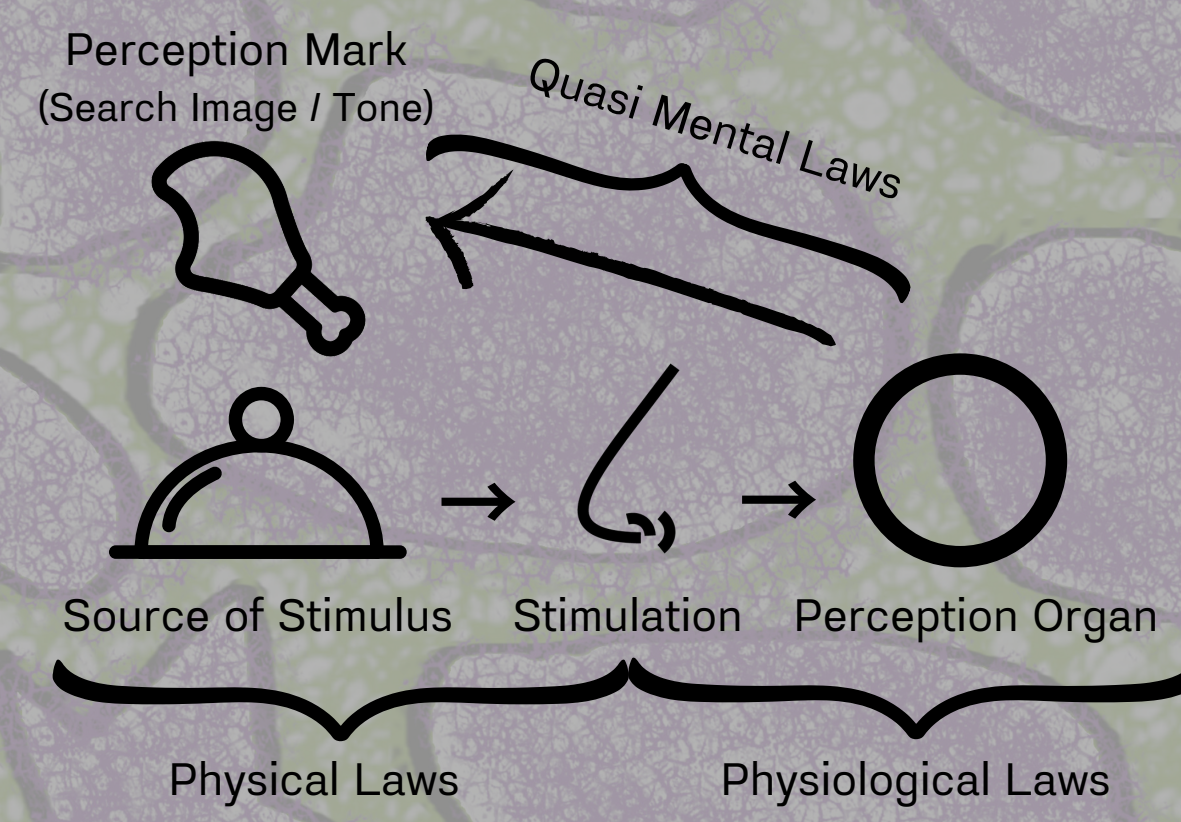
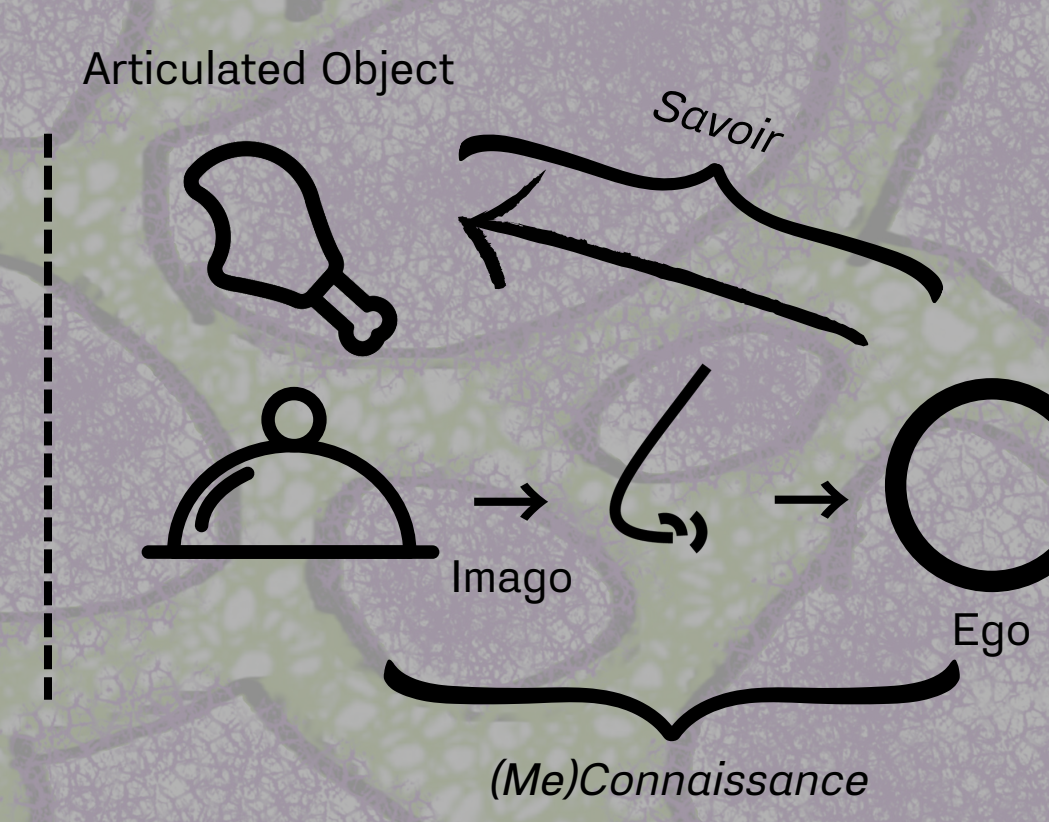


Figure 1.2 - Lacan



Differences begin to arise. Although Uexküll is clear that **search tone experience precedes search imagery**, in the figure presented, search image and search tone are made to share the blanket term, Perception Mark. In Lacan's conception of the organism, the imaginary imago is separated from the object's being for the subject *qua* object, with the articulated, static image coming about in its own semiotic register. Uexküll and Lacan's contrasts do not indicate conflict, but rather room for collaboration.

Example



Figure 2

Lacan concludes his *Presentation on Psychological Causality* with a biological example that will serve to distinguish these terms. Female pigeons will not begin ovulation until they can see other pigeons. However, the **same ovulation process can be by giving the pigeon a mirror** (see fig 2). In Uexküllian terms, we say that the pigeon enters a reproductive functional cycle; thus the pigeon's reflection served as the perception-mark to effect ovation. But **what is the tone, and what is the image?** The trigger of the functional cycle is obscured where **the ovation-tone and the image are simultaneous and synonymous**. By using Lacanian relational categories, we can say that in this case the *Imago* of the pidgeon in the mirror holds *imaginary* significance, but not necessarily symbolic. The Pidgeon-mirror effect relation is one of *connaissance*, not *savoir*.

Conclusions

In concluding, it is hopefully clear that the tone-image distinction is improved upon by adding the Lacanian imaginary. By distinguishing orders of knowing into *connaissance* and *savoir*, image and tone are **separated and strengthened** as phenomena under research, while objectivity in Uexküll slips along Kantian phenomenalism.

"The approach of *Umwelt-research*, which aims to reconstruct creative nature's 'process of creating', can be described as 'participatory observation'." T. v. Uexküll, 1992

As Thure von Uexküll describes it, *Umwelt-research* is the twin-process of **participation and observation**. Here, observation is the ascertaining which signs registered by the observer in his own experiential world are also received in the subject of study's, followed by the participative *umwelt-reconstruction* therefrom. Lacanian psychoanalysis can be said to have enriching contributions to both; Lacan's semiotic theories **magnify our own umwelt & clarify the reconstruction of others**. Magical realities, or any realities that do not proceed from objectivity, are the logical conclusion of Uexküll's work. For Lacan, precisely these are his starting point. **There is work to be done.**

"The objective realities of the surroundings never appear as such in the environments. They are always transformed into perception marks or perception images and equipped with an effect tone which only then makes them into real objects [*qua* objects] even though no part of the effect tone is present in the stimuli." Uexküll, 2010

Works Cited

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