FROM ANTHROPIC ZONES TO ANTHROPIC LEVELS

Abstract. We will first present our interpretation of François Rastier's theory of anthropic zones and discuss how to use it. Next, extending François Rastier's theory on the three levels of social practices – phenophysical, semiotic, and representational – we will integrate the concepts of anthropic zones and levels of social practices into a larger whole that we describe as a system of "anthropic levels", that is to say, ontological levels in which human beings exist and move. Extending Rastier's distinction between the phenophysical (the world as we perceive it) and, implicitly, the noumenophysical (the world as it is in itself), we will apply the pheno-/noumeno- distinction to all the major levels and their subdivisions. We will, of course, discuss whether the noumeno- dimension exists. Different reductions (whether justified or unjustified) are possible between levels of a higher or lower order, and between levels of the same order. For example, to take the example of the semiotic level: the semiotic can be reduced to the physical (signifiers would then be physical stimuli) or to the representational (signifieds would then be mental images); the physical can be reduced to the semiotic (e.g., in Greimas's semiotics of the natural world), and the cognitive to the semiotic (according to the cognitive semiotics of Groupe μ). To give another example, in some theories (e.g., Berkeley's solipsism and the Buddhist principle of *cittamātra*), the physical is reduced to the cognitive: the mind creates the world — thought solidified — whether it does so at every moment or once and for all.

Keywords: anthropic zones, transcendence, semiotics, interpretive semantics, noumenon

1. Introduction

I will first present my interpretation of François Rastier's theory of anthropic zones and discuss how to use it. Next, extending François Rastier's theory on the three levels of social practices — phenophysical, semiotic and, representational — I will integrate the anthropic zones and the levels of social practices into a broader whole that I describe as a system of "anthropic levels", that is to say, the ontological levels in which human beings exist and move. I will then look at the various reductions (justified or unjustified) that are possible between major levels or between the levels that subdivide them. For example, to take the case of the semiotic level: the semiotic can be reduced to the physical (signifiers would then be physical stimuli) or to the representational (signifieds would then be mental images). Finally, I will discuss the relationship between phenomena (things as perceived) and noumena (things as they are), an opposition that runs through all anthropic levels.

2. Anthropiczone

2.1. General Presentation

Let us first look at Rastier's (2018, for the most recent presentation) model of anthropic zones (from *anthropos*, "man, human being"), before integrating it into an even more comprehensive model, that of anthropic levels.

According to Rastier, in all cultures, semiotic contents (signifieds) and representations (mental "images") can be classified, theoretically without remainder, into three anthropic zones, grouped into two worlds and separated by two boundaries. The "obvious world" comprises the identity zone (that of coincidence, or the individual, e.g.,"I") and the proximal zone (that of adjacency,or of congeners, e.g., "you", and of the empirical context). The absent world comprises the distal zone (that of foreignness, e.g., "he"). The distal zone is reserved for the absent, the impossible, the fictitious, the inconceivable, etc., and therefore also for the transcendent (at least according to one understanding of this concept).

Between the identity and the proximal zone there is an empirical boundary, on which we find intermediate objects called "fetishes". Examples of such objects on the semiotic level would include signs, tools (e.g., cell phones), transitional objects (e.g., cuddly toys), and money. On the representational level, these objects would include fantasies (not necessarily sexual ones), in the sense of scenarios in which the "I" represents itself in interaction with others, or represents the interactions of others. Personal myths would also be fetishes of this type.

Between the first two zones (identity and proximal) and the distal zone there is a transcendental boundary, on which we find intermediate objects called "idols."Examples of such objects on the semiotic level would include works (artistic works, laws, codes, philosophies, scientific theories, religious works, ritual objects), instruments (musical, scientific, ritual, etc.), etc. If we take them as semiotic products, myths that are held collectively would also be idols in this sense. On the representational level, these idols would include beliefs. When myths are "believed" (or when we see them asbeing believed by others but not by oneself), they constitute representational idols.

The model allows for dynamic descriptions, accounting for different paths between zones and boundaries, and also between semiotic and representational contents (including marked conservation, where a phenomenon remains in its position even though a change of position was expected), and, finally, between a position outside the model and a position inside it. Let us consider some examples of possible paths. First, a non-myth can become a myth, or vice versa. A myth can be "downgraded" from being a belief (a representational idol) to being a mere work (a semiotic idol), when it is no longer believed. A real mythical basis (in the eyes of believers), which is therefore external to the model, can be downgraded by being incorporated in the model but only as a representational idol: for example, if the real God is reduced to a concept of God, that is, his representation as an idol.

3.   Further Information

Let us examine the model in greater depth.

Zones and boundaries can be viewed from either a categorical perspective (which does not allow any gradation) or a gradual perspective (with gradations or degrees). From a gradual perspective, for example, boundaries become boundaryareas.

Movements of objectsin the model can be expected (thus realizing the norm) or unexpected (thus realizing a deviation from the norm). Movements can take the following forms:

1. From zone to zone; for example, from the identity zone to the distal zone (Rimbaud, "Je est un autre" — I is another).

2. From zone to boundary, or vice versa; for example, from the identity zone to idol (the narcissist thinks he is a god).

3. From boundary to boundary; for example, from fetish to idol (the idolatry of money); or from idol to fetish (spirituality — idol — is reduced to its function of social communication — fetish — and so one goes to the temple simply to be seen there).

4. From the semiotic to the representational, or vice versa; for example, from the signified of "God" to its associated mental image, both of which are idols.

5. From a phenomenon external to the anthropic zones to a phenomenon that is internal to it, or vice versa; for example, from a real cell phone to its signified or mental image; or from real transcendence to transcendence as an idol (God reduced to the concept of God).

6. From one position to the same position, viewed from a categorical perspective.

7. From one position to the same position, viewed from a gradual perspective; for example, a close friend (distant identity zone or close proximal zone) becomes even closer (and therefore closer to the identity zone, or entering it, or drawing closer to the centre of it). In other words, there is a change in degree of the positional that is occupied. Note that there are two kinds of conservation, which consists here in a non-change of position: marked conservation, if the non-movement is unexpected; and unmarked conservation, if the non-movement is expected.

As for any model, we can envisage the existence of metaterms, composed through the combination of two simple terms or more complex combinations (for example, the combination of three simple terms, or two metaterms, or a simple term and a metaterm). With respect to zones, we can envisage at least two kinds of metaterms. The complete combined term would consist of the sum of the identity zone, the proximal zone, and the distal zone. A partial combined term would consist of a mixture of two of these zones (e.g., the obvious world consists of the identity zone and the proximal zone). We can also posit a neutral term with respect to the zones, corresponding to a position that belongs neither to the identity zone, nor to the proximal zone, nor to the distal zone. It should be remembered that the neutral term is not a class containing

something that simply doesnot fit intothe terms of an opposition, but instead refers to that which is marked as the negation of these terms. In this respect, the neutral term does not relate, at least in theory, to a phenomenon external to the model (e.g., a real cell phone). In principle, metaterms can include boundaries, or even both boundaries and zones.

Fontanille (forthcoming) has recently proposed a *model of anthroposemiotic topology* with four zones and three boundaries, which he derives from Rastier's model of anthropic zones. The zones are as follows: the subjectal or endotopic (e.g., "I"); the medial or peritopic (e.g., "I-you"); the objectal or paratopic (e.g., the non-person "he"); and the external or utopic (e.g., the "absence of person"). The external zone, related to the "absence of person", seems to me to correspond to a neutral term made up of the negation of the person, the co-person, and the non-person. Contrary to Rastier's model, Fontanille's model features boundaries only between zones, and not between groups of zones. One of the advantages of this model is that it considers that the boundaries or transitions between zones can have an orientation. In other words, a transition is not necessarily qualitatively the same when an object moves, for example, from zone 1 to zone 2 or from zone 2 to zone 1. This principle can also be applied to anthropic zones. This qualitative difference in transitions can be related, especially but probably not exclusively, to a model of super-contraries and sub-contraries (according to Zilberberg; see my discussion of this in Hébert, 2020). Let us consider the following model concerning the connection between nature and culture (in the sense of "produced by humans"): (1) nature (e.g., sea weed); (2) nature-culture (e.g., sea weed in a museum); (3) culture-nature (a shipwreck covered in sea weed); (4) culture (a metal boat). Position 2 constitutes the oriented transition when starting from 1 and moving towards 4 (upward path); position 3 constitutes the oriented transition when starting from 4 and moving towards 1 (downward path). Positions 2 and 3 can be interpreted quantitatively (e.g., in position 2 nature is more intense than culture) and/or qualitatively (e.g., in position 2 nature governs culture). In this case, the quantitative interpretation explains the qualitative difference between 2 and 3 just as well as the qualitative interpretation does.

8.   Anthropic Levels

The semiotic and representational levels, and thus the model of anthropic zones that they make up, form part of a global typology that I call, logically and in honor of Rastier's model, the typology of anthropic levels.

The oldest and most enduring general ontological model in our culture is undoubtedly the dualism of the levels of matter/mind, or of the physical/the cognitive. Variations of this model may place an intermediary — which may or may not also constitute a level of its own — between the two opposites, such as the biological. Indeed, triadic models exist too, such as the traditional model composed of: the physical (body) / the mind (cognitive) / the spiritual (soul). Rastier himself has proposed a new triadic model.

Rastier, moving beyond the matter/mind dualism, considers that any social practice presupposes the interaction of three levels, the second of which is an intermediary between the other two: the phenophysical, the semiotic, and the representational. The novelty of Rastier's model lies, first, in the distinction that it makes between the phenophysical (the physical world as perceived by our senses) and, implicitly, the noumenophysical (the physical world as it really is), and, secondly, in the use of the semiotic level as an intermediary: signifiers (e.g., phonemes)

have correlates that are perisemiotic physical stimuli (e.g., phones) and signifieds have correlates that are representations, which are, broadly speaking, mental "images".

It should be noted, however, that Groupe μ (1990) had already, in 1977, proposed a model in which *logos* (the word, or language) occupies a placeasintermediary between *anthropos* (the human) and *cosmos* (the world). Indeed, Groupeμ (1990) considers that all poems — or at least poetry in general — are based on a tripartite thematic structure composed of *cosmos*, *anthropos*, and *logos*, in which *logos* acts as an intermediary between the other two elements. I would generalize the *logos*, that is, the language system or linguistic product (oral and/or written), into the concept of the semiotic system or product, which we can here call the *semios*. We could also add to this model — whether or not it is merged with the *semios* — the *cognotos*, the sphere of representations (mental images, although not necessarily visual ones) and mental processes. I would argue that this tripartite structure can be found in any semiotic product (at least those of a certain size) and is not limited to poems, literary works, or even artistic works. I would even suggest that this thematic structure could reflect the structure of reality: for example, a structure in which the semiotic occupies an intermediary position between the human and the world. It remains to be seen whether such a tripartite structure accounts for all thematics (all semiotic contents), and for all of reality without remainder (without leaving any element that cannot be situated within this structure). We can superimpose the nature/culture opposition — the collective opposition that, according to Greimas,[1]forms the basis of the content of any semiotic product — onto a tripartite structure. The *cosmos* obviously corresponds here to nature, and the *semios* to culture, while the human acts as an intermediary between the first two instances. The human pertains to nature through the body and to culture through its semiotic productions and, at least in some cases, its cognitive or actional productions; but the body itself is not entirely natural, sincecultural constructs play a role even in the most basic sensory perceptions (e.g.,a baby in the womb already recognizes and learns the intonations of the language being spoken around it). Groupe μ (2015) have attempted to relativize the nature/culture opposition by demonstrating the continuity of semiosis between perception (a process involving "short semiosis") and interpretation (a process involving "long semiosis"), but they thus seem to imply that the natural underlies the cultural, and is therefore primary.

However, we should recall here Rastier's (2003) advice — with reference to the sign (which is elementary) and the text (which is fundamental), but we can generalize this point, or at least apply it to a tripartite model — to avoid "confusing the fundamental with the elementary: although, for example, the linguistic sign (morpheme) is a minimal unit, this does not make it fundamental". Consequently, if someone agrees that short semiosis is elementary, this does not necessarily mean that they will agree that it is also fundamental.

For us to arrive at the typology set out below, starting from Rastier's typology, we must first carry out the following steps: (1) we must generalize the representational level to become the cognitive level, and subdivide this level into as many autonomous levelsas there are to be found; (2) we must distinguish a major immanent level, a major transcendent level (I am referring here to spiritual transcendence and not, at least in principle,to non-spiritual transcendencessuch as the Nation, Brotherhood, the Human, Beauty, etc.), and an intermediate immano-transcendent level; (3) we mustintroduce the biological as an intermediary between the physical and the cognitive;

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1. The individual opposition at the basis of the content of any semiotic product, according to Greimas, is life/death.

and (4) we must distinguish a noumenal modality (relating to objects in themselves) and a phenomenal modality (relating to objects as they are perceived by a given observer) for each level or major level. It should be noted that the semiotician must describe, first, not only what is, but also what is possible or only conceivable (even trying to approach the unthinkable or the uncharacterizable), and, secondly, not only what he or she believes in, but alsowhat others — or even only a single person — believe in. This is the case with spiritual transcendence, which, for many humans, not only exists, but is also often considered to be important or even primordial. Finally, it should be noted that the noumenon is often considered as being either inaccessible (except under special conditions, such as after death) or non-existent, in which case everything would then, in practice or in fact, be only a phenomenon (or indeed, for Buddhists, ultimately beyond noumenon and phenomenon). Here, then, is the typology of anthropic levels:

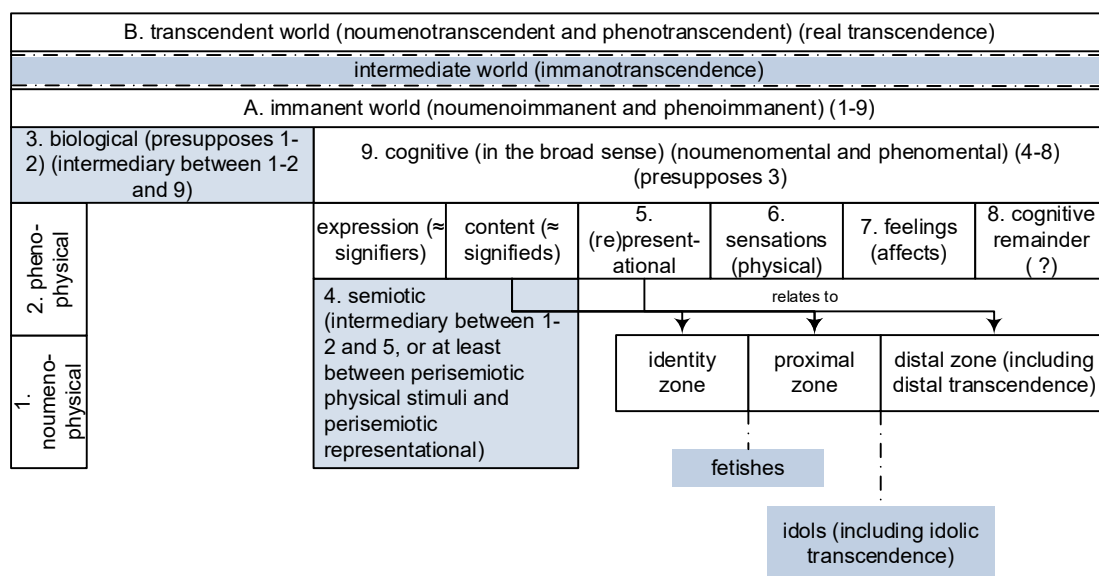### A. MAJOR LEVEL OF IMMANENCE: noumeno-/pheno-immanent

1. physical level: noumenophysical and phenophysical (the physical world as we perceive it).

2. biological level: noumenobiological and phenobiological.

3. cognitive level (broad sense): noumenomental and phenomental (as perceived by the mind itself through its filters)

    3.1 semiotic sub-level (texts, images, etc.)

    3.2 sub-level of representations ("mental images", concepts, propositions? reasoning? mental operations? etc.?).

    3.3 sub-level of sensations (physical; visual, auditory, etc.)

    3.4 sub-level of feelings (affects: emotions, sentiments, etc.)

    3.5 cognitive sub-level (in the narrow sense) other (?)

B. MAJOR LEVEL OF IMMANOTRANSCENDENCE: noumeno-/pheno-immanotranscendent

C. MAJOR LEVEL OF TRANSCENDENCE: noumeno-/pheno-transcendent

The diagram below presents my proposed model, together with some additional details, including the integration of anthropic zones. Note that perisemiotic physical stimuli (e.g., phones) are associated with their corresponding signifier (e.g., phonemes), and that perisemiotic representations are mental images that are elicited and constrained by the semiotic. Compare, in this example used byRastier, the different mental images of afish elicited by these two phrases: first, "the canary and the fish" (small and domestic), and secondly, "the cormorant and the fish" (large and wild).

Anthropic levels and zones

B. transcendent world (noumenotranscendent and phenotranscendent) (real transcendence)							
intermediate world (immanotranscendence)							
A. immanent world (noumenoimmanent and phenoimmanent) (1-9)							
3. biological (presupposes 1-2) (intermediary between 1-2 and 9)		9. cognitive (in the broad sense) (noumenomental and phenomental) (4-8) (presupposes 3)					
2. pheno-physical		expression (≈ signifiers)	content (≈ signifieds)	5. (re)present-ational	6. sensations (physical)	7. feelings (affects)	8. cognitive remainder (?)
		4. semiotic (intermediary between 1-2 and 5, or at least between perisemiotic physical stimuli and perisemiotic representational)			relates to		
1. noumeno-physical				identity zone	proximal zone	distal zone (including distal transcendence)	

fetishes

idols (including idolic transcendence)

In order to complete the typology of anthropic levels, it would be necessary to subdivide the levels of the transcendent world and the intermediate world, just as the level of the immanent world has been subdivided here.

This typology is intended to be fundamental, and is therefore of interest and use in itself, if only as a way of situating the semiotic (and the other parts of the typology) and thus ascertaining its "value" by interdefinition with other parts of the whole, by virtue of the structuralist principle of "difference". But what does it contribute to the work of analysis? Let us take the example of those myths that represent transcendence (in some senses of the word, "myths" may also represent things that are not directly transcendent, such as Hamlet or Snow White). Since we can distinguish five kinds of transcendence, using anthropic levels and zones, we can also distinguish five kinds of myths: (1) semiotic idolic transcendence; (2) representational idolic transcendence; (3) transcendence in the distal zone (and not, like idols, at its boundary); (4) immanotranscendence; and (5) transcendence. For example, if we consider that God is the object of myths, He can be viewed (1) as a thematic concept (e.g., as the object of a religious theory), and (2) as a representational concept (e.g., as the object of a religious belief), thus inhabiting the transcendental boundary. In this case, a "concept" means a signified or a stabilized mental image. There is also (3) a thematized God, represented as a character and not a concept, which necessarily inhabits the distal zone (especially if He is conceived as uncharacterizable, unutterable, and, more generally, unsemiotizable and mentally unrepresentable). In the immanotranscendent world or boundary, we can place, for example, (4) intermediaries between God the Father and the immanent world, that is, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Another solution would be to place them as being less "distant" in the idolic boundary and in the transcendent zone than God the Father is; in effect, we are faced here with the choice between treating zones and boundaries categorically (without gradations) or gradually (with gradations or degrees). Finally, (5) the real God (if He exists) inhabits the level of real transcendence (if it exists).

Various reductions are possible between the terms of our typology. One reduction — whether it is applied rightly or wrongly — consists in considering that an object A is ultimately

an object B, which therefore implies that B is more true, fundamental, or important than A. Let us look at some of the possible reductions.

The reduction can occur between major levels. For example, materialism reduces the transcendent to the immanent. The opposite is possible, just as generalized pantheism considers that all phenomena, whether natural or cultural, are (first of all) God, and therefore transcendent. God may thenbe considered greater than this sum or only coextensive with it.

The reduction can occur between levels of a lower order. For example, in the case of the semiotic, signifiers are reduced to the physical when they are considered to be physical stimuli; signifieds are reduced to the cognitive — and signifiers too — when they are considered to be representations, in the sense of mental objects that are not recognized as part of an autonomized level, that is, the semiotic level. The semiotic can be reduced to the cognitive and then the cognitive to the physical, such as in the monism of physicalism, which considers that the mind emerges from the biological, or even from the brain alone, and that the biological emerges from matter. Conversely, the physical (and the biological) can be reduced to the cognitive, such as in the monism of idealisms, for example, that of the Buddhist mind-only (*cittamātra*) school or Berkeley's solipsism. The physical (and biological) can be reduced to the semiotic, such as in Greimas's theory of the semiotics of the natural world, in which the physical (and,I suppose, the biological) world is seen as a plane of expression (therefore made of signifiers) or as comprising both semiotic planes, that of expression and that of content (made of signifieds); but in this theory, the physical (and biological) would not be just semiotic. The cognitive can be reduced to the semiotic. Greimas did not envisage or intend this possible reduction, but we come closer to it with the cognitive semiotics of Groupe μ (2015). Everything could be reduced to the semiotic, if everything, the human, the universe, etc., were only signs. In fact, Peirce says that everything can be *seen* as a sign — thanks to what Klinkenberg calls the "semiotic decision" — but cannot be limited to this nature (unless they are "pure" signs).

9.   The noumenon

In conclusion, let us propose some broad questions about the noumenal aspect and the phenomenalaspect, both of which can be seen as modalities that are attached to all anthropic levels. The first question is whether a noumenon exists or whether the supposed noumena are ultimately only "deeper" phenomena. If a noumenon exists, does it have characteristics, other than hypocharacteristics such as the fact of existing, being associated with phenomena, etc.? The question may seem strange, but at least for Buddhist philosophies, from the point of view of absolute reality (and not relative, ordinary reality), nothing — this is clearer in the case of the Buddha-nature in every being, its pure consciousness, the nature of mind — has characteristics, for everything is beyond any opposition, such as having or not having characteristics. Although being "beyond" seems ultimately to be a characteristic in itself, everything is in fact beyond the opposition between "beyond" and "not beyond," and furthermore beyond any opposition. If characteristics of the noumenon exist, are they knowable and/or experienceable? If they are knowable — that is, graspable by ordinary, conceptual, dual, opposition-based thinking — they are, I would say, necessarily semiotizable, (e.g., in words), and can therefore be constituted as mental representations. If they are knowable, are they also experienceable? If they are not knowable, might they still be experienceable? For example, spiritual theories often consider transcendence to

be unknowable, but still experienceable (e.g., as mysticisms believe). I am assuming that ordinary experience, let alone the experience of transcendence, is ultimately beyond the knowable and therefore beyond the describable (even though figurative language may approximate its object, e.g., when God is conceived as "luminous darkness"). If the noumenon exists and is knowable/unknowable (and thus semiotizable/unsemiotizable) and/or experienceable/non-experienceable, under what conditions, and by whom? Is it knowable and/or experienceable in whole/in part, in whole/in approximation, occasionally before death (e.g., in mystical experiences), after death (if anything survives) and then forever, by the human, the scholar, the philosopher, the artist, by God, the saints, the Buddhas, etc.? Does the transcendent consist only of the noumenal, or of the sum of the noumenal and the phenomenal? Buddhists would of course answer that, from the point of view of absolute reality, it is beyond the noumenal/phenomenal opposition, as well as any other opposition, and that although it is experienceable, it is an "experience" beyond the subject/object opposition, and therefore not an "experience" in the ordinary sense.

10.   Author bibliography

Louis Hébert is Professor of literature at the University of Quebec at Rimouski. His research fields include semiotics, literary theory, methodologies for literary analysis, Magritte, onomastics, Buddhism, and spirituality. In addition to more than eighty papers and book chapters, he has published the following works: (1) *Introduction to Literary Analysis* (Routledge); (2) *An Introduction to Applied Semiotics* (Routledge); (3) *Cours de sémiotique* [A Course in Semiotics] (Classiques Garnier); (4) *Théories et méthodes pour l'analyse des noms propres:Onomastique textuelle:* [Theory and Methodology for the Analysis of Proper Names:Textual Onomastics:] (accepted by Classiques Garnier); (5) *Introduction à l'analyse des texteslittéraires* [Introduction to Literary Analysis] (accepted by Classiques Garnier); (6) *L'analyse des textes littéraires: Une méthodologie complète* [Analysis of Literary Texts: A Complete Methodology] (Classiques Garnier); (7) *Dispositifs pour l'analyse des textes et des images: Introduction à la sémiotique appliquée* [Tools for Text and Image Analysis: An Introduction to Applied Semiotics] (Presses de l'Université de Limoges); and (8) *Introduction à la sémantique des textes* [An Introduction to Text Semantics] (Honoré Champion). He is editor or coeditor of several books, including: (9) *Sens de la transcendance: Études sur la spiritualité* [Meaning and Transcendence: Studies on Spirituality] (with Étienne Pouliot, Éric Trudel, and George Vasilakis, Classiques Garnier); and (10) *Magritte: Perspectives nouvelles, nouveaux regards* [Magritte: New Perspectives, New Outlooks] (with Pascal Michelucci and Éric Trudel, Nota Bene). He has also published online (11) *Dictionnaire de sémiotique* [A Dictionary of Semiotics] (www.semiotique.org). Professor Hébert is also the director of (12) Signo, a bilingual website on semiotic theories (www.signosemio.com), and (13) an online database of the vast majority of the works and themes of Magritte (www.magrittedb.com).Email: **louis_hebert@uqar.ca**. Orcid.org/0000-0002-8991-5316

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