

Ranulph Glanville

## **Triads**

I had not thought of the pairings you suggested or even the context in which you work. This is not surprising. Firstly, I am interested in the individual. For me society is a secondary matter. (This is one of the biggest differences between me and Luhmann: the other, I believe, is that I tend to be much more extreme: if my argument leads me to a place previous knowledge says is impossible, I'm inclined to say so be it, tough luck, be radical: Niklas is inclined to try to overcome the difference.) My PhD, from which most of the work you mention somehow comes, is based on the supposition that we all see differently and can never know we see the same: so what do we need to postulate as a structure we can believe can support all these differences (of view) and yet be taken to be the same "thing". (Thing not meaning physical item: it is the concept of Object that I tried to introduce.) It is interesting to me that I went to a Froebel kindergarten (yes, the original thing!).

This does not mean that I don't think the pairings are interesting or valuable, but they are almost a surprise to me, and so I am especially grateful to you for sending them to me. The reason I've gone on a little above is to try to mark the difference before I begin with any comments.

One further point. According to me, the great advantage of English, as a language for thinking in, is that while it can be used with precision (though perhaps not the precision of German), it is also a very slippery, oily, plastic language. I find that much of what I do needs this fluidity. So I use terms loosely and without definition to get through the "keyholes" I need to. When I've got through them, I can try to be clear and precise, and to talk about what went before and what is now. If I were so exacting while trying to slip through the keyhole, I'd never manage it!

START!

I think what I'll try to do is address the matter of 3's, and then go to some particular points in what you wrote.

In his work under the general heading of Conversation Theory, Gordon Pask (my professor) makes a requirement for the generation of new knowledge (topic) from old (even when that knowledge is already known at large). He demands that to make a topic, you must have at least 2 other topics. Call these A, B and C. C entails A and B acting together. Compare this with the more usual notion, C is implicit in, for instance, B. In this second example, there is the topic "is implicit in", which, therefore, is Pask's topic A. We may have come to consider logic, for instance, as being a given and as existing as a field of its own: but if its operation is assumed or required within the field we are interested in, it is (also) within our field and therefore its topics are topics also within our field.

Put another way, the reason that we need 3 topics, not 2, is that unless there are 3 (or more) there is no topic to make the difference. If C were to come from B, without there being A to make a difference, C would only be B (again).

Pask also insisted that, if C entails A and B, then B entails A and C and A entails B and C. Put words to A, B and C (eg compass, rotation and circle) and you will be able to see what I mean.

In most of the accounts I've seen of Spencer Brown, and in the Laws of Form, what I see is a confusion. In spite of several long arguments, I continue to be unable to see how the mark and the value can, in themselves, be separate. If they are, this is a cognitive event that the external observer produces. In my

mind, this comes about from the attempt to talk about what I observe, and what I'd like to observe it of (that is, I observe this, and then I try to give an objective being to what I observe such that I can create a world of reference: this is what I currently understand by those things I invented, called Objects, which are constructions onto which to hang (necessarily different) observations, which I then try to treat as if they had an existence also in themselves, as I treat myself as having. So if I observe me in order to believe I exist, and I observe some "thing", then I assume that "thing" observes itself also so it can have being). I don't want to get into this here, but in all these other accounts I've seen, this matter relates to the notion that the distinction cleaves the space into two. As I look at it, this is to disregard the distinction itself. So I have come to the conclusion that drawing a distinction involves the becoming of a triad: the distinction, the self and the other (as argued in that paper you refer to). And I also argued that there were not absolute parties in this: that the self, the other and the distinction were roles. For me, I give myself as self, and how and what I distinguish myself with and from as the distinction and the other.

In a sense, this is playing on the void. But it is not getting in to it, although I try to reduce to get "nearer".

So I end up with another triad: self, other, distinction. A, B and C.

At the level of what I do, this is both enough and the minimum. Using the Pask notions, if I have 3 topics, I may create a fourth from either any two of them or from all three taken together.  $D \leq A + B$ ; or  $A + C$ ; or  $B + C$ ; or  $A + B + C$  (assuming the ordering is not significant).

So I look at Objects, and I find that if I look at what they offer me in a particular way, there are behaviours that are typical of certain features of memory. Likewise consciousness, etc. (Actually, in recent work I might shift this all a little. I have become very interested in the notion of the space BETWEEN. You can read about this (in German) in the book *Dazwischen* published a couple of months ago by the Museum fuer Gestaltung in Zuerich.)

Now you ask about 3 valued logics. The original criticism of Spencer Brown's Algebra was that it was "just another multi-valued logic". It may work in the same manner, but, of course, epistemologically it was quite different, for it talked about bringing into being rather than describing what is. Thinking about it in the terms you ask about 3valued logics, perhaps Varela and Goguen's work on Spencer Brown does become 3valued with the self-reference being the distinction drawing itself? I don't remember and am not currently inclined to check this out, though I'd be interested in any comment sothers might offer. Anyway, I suppose that what I refer to in the Self and Other paper is, ineffect, that distinction must be tripartite, and that, if distinction is taken as the base for a logic, then that logic will be tripartite. So, if what I argue there makes sense, then, if we want logic and it is to be based on such foundations, that logic must be tripartite, too. (And, by the way, the hydraulic computers that were developed alongside electronic ones, and which originally were built to control aeroplane hydraulics, were all 3valued.)

Then you bring up the matter of symmetry. I suppose (and I'd not thought about this before) that what I discovered about distinctions and so on does imply a symmetry. There is the symmetry of organisation (best seen when Pask's topics A, B and C are arranged in a triangle such that, at any instant in any one form of organisation one implicitly "comes from" the other two). The symmetry in the Self and Other is both around the flucrum of the distinction, and is seen in the symmetry of assumption (my law of reciprocity or of equal generosity): for instance, if I assume X for me, and my existing depends equally on your existence, then I must assume X (is a possibility) for you. I think the same sort of assumption is made in the Theory of Objects. So yes, I do think that symmetry is unavoidable, really.

(I'm not sure if, looking from above, you were to place the triangle so its base was not horizontal but vertical, what this would mean to me, how I would interpret it.)

Now to complexity emerging. Emergence is a term I don't like, because it assumes a prior and independent existence. Never mind! You ask about taking the 3 terms in the Memory paper and complexity automatically appearing. All I want to say about this is that this is a property of the particular

system I propose, and is not a property of the world. I have set it us to do this, and it surprises me. But, then, whenever I attribute the concept of autonomy, of selfness, to anything, I must immediately allow it is no longer in my power. Saying something is autonomous, distinct, separate, other, different is saying there is something about it I don't control (it's hidden from me, private) and therefore I cannot foresee. In other words, the moment I accept that anything is separate, in its own right, I accept that there is something that is private to it and therefore strange to me.

## COMMENTS

Now I'll move to particular points in your text.

To start with, I believe you need to look at Pask's Conversation Theory. This is difficult stuff (because he wrote in a massively all-inclusive way). Gordon produced what is, I think, the only theory of communication that successfully allows communication without coding, and for meaning to remain internal to the participants in the conversation. I suggest you look at my piece under the heading "luminaries" on the web site [www.sysval.org/issss.lumPask.html](http://www.sysval.org/issss.lumPask.html). This also has a list of publications that may help. I wrote a paper in Modern Language Journal (German Issue) a couple of years ago called "Communication without Coding: Cybernetics, Meaning and Language (How Language, becoming a System, Betrays itself)", Invited paper in Modern Language Notes, Vol 111, no 3 (ed Wellbery, D), which deals with Pask and also my work, in amore philosophical way. It also introduces my notion of a social factor (awaiting a paperto be published in Dirk Baecker's Journal).

Second, in talking about communication and the need to be more precise about it, I'd just suggest you remember that it's origin is the same as the origin of the word communion. There is a sense of being together, being one or at one. That may be very important (not that I'm a great believer in dictionaries). This is in sharp contradistinction to the Shannon-Weaver notion of communication, for instance. It may be important to keep this in mind, especially since the Shannon-Weaver version holds such way.

I agree with the notion that there has been change in the systems paradigm. The new version is known, in the English speaking world, as second order cybernetics (von Foerster etc, since, say, 1975). If you are interested in this, have a look in the last issue of Cybernetics and Human Knowing, where I write a column. There I wrote about my relationship with it. If You don't already subscribe to that journal, perhaps you should.

I'm very glad to see Guenther getting propler recognition. He is terribly hard work in English, but I find many German speakers slowly getting into his work. I have the feeling it is very good stuff. Wish I had the German.

Ok, that's it.

Best Wishes,

Ranulph Glanville

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