

**István DANKA**

***Pictorial Meaning: Abstract Symbols vs. Moving Pictures***

The thesis of my presentation is, paraphrasing Quine, that the unit of pictorial meaning is the whole of a *movie*. Following Kristóf Nyíri, I argue that pictorial meaning is more direct than verbal but with the restriction that meanings of static pictures is derived from those of moving pictures. Static pictures, not interlinked with other pictures, lose their *context* which is a constituent part of their meaning.

There is an important distinction between abstract pictures (symbols, signs, icons, etc) and living ones (photos, realistic paintings). The previous ones play a role very similar to abstract words, i.e, they are abbreviations or indications. Their meaning are fixed by conventions. The latter kind, due to their concreteness, directly represent pictorial meanings. They do not label ('refer to') what they mean but they directly *stand for* their meanings. Concrete, finally, means itself. Therefore no problem of its meaning occurs. That is why, as Nyíri put it, they are more direct meaning bearers than words.

Abstraction is a method of disregarding some particularities to grasp the essence. Pictures, even photos, are at a certain level of abstraction since by taking a photo we focus on one certain segment of reality, cut out of its milieu which contextualises that picture. By decontextualisation, some possibility (sometimes *necessity*) of interpretation occurs. The smaller (spatio-temporal) segment is cut out of reality, the higher is the need of interpretation. Icons are more concrete than words, photos are more concrete than icons, and the most concrete meaning bearers are probably movies or talkies. Cut out of reality, they are also abstractions, but they also bear a *context* which makes them more immune to different interpretations. That is my main reason to claim that if we worked on a theory of pictorial meaning, we should be 'pictorial meaning holists'.

**István DANKA** is a PhD student in philosophy at the University of Leeds, supported by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, Higher Education Academy. A former junior fellow of the Institute for Philosophical Research, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, he studied and researched philosophy at the universities of Pécs, Munich, Vienna, and at the Wittgenstein Archives (Bergen). His main research interests focus on some conceptual changes in the structure of knowledge in the Information Age and their consequences for the role of philosophy in our society, and for teaching philosophy. He has presented and published several papers on the philosophy of communication, language, and knowledge, as well as on Wittgenstein.  
E-mail: [danka.istvan@gmail.com](mailto:danka.istvan@gmail.com).

