

Process attunement as a condition for learning in sensemaking: Insights from phenomenology

Haridimos Tsoukas

**University of Cyprus, Cyprus &
University of Warwick, UK**

Sensemaking is suffused with learning: updating perceived experience implies the ongoing revision of one's sense of a dynamic situation

The temptation is to treat the sense made as definitive (an outcome) – Sensemaking freezes

Ongoing learning is possible in sensemaking in so far as, inter alia, the sensemaker remains attuned to process

***First-order learning:* focusing on the content of one's sensing of unfolding experience**

***Second-order learning:* focusing on how the sensing of events is being accomplished**

**Colville, I., Pye, A. and Carter, M. (2013),
Organizing counter terrorism: Sensemaking
amidst dynamic complexity, *Human Relations*,
66(9): 1201-1223**

**Focus: understanding how an innocent man, Jean
Charles de Menezes, was shot dead by specialist
firearms officers from the Metropolitan Police
Service (MPS) on 22/7/2005**

**Context: terrorist attacks on: 11/9/2001 (New
York), 11/3/2004 (Madrid), 7/7/2005 (London),
21/7/2005 (London)**

Approach: Sensemaking – connecting *frames* and *cues* to generate an account of 'what is going on'

Claim: the coming together of three different forms of novelty (novel routines, novel situations, novel identities) compromised sensemaking



Frames shape what aspects of the stream of experience will be noticed (*cues*) and the meaning that will be ascribed to them

“The MPS Counter Terrorism unit created a novel routine to deal with a novel situation which was adjudged beyond the scope and flexibility of extant organizational routines. However, [...] rather than reducing equivocality of clarifying the situation, the presence of two possible routines to handle the circumstances leads to an increase in equivocality. This equivocality is generated not because of the elusiveness of shared or plausible meanings [...].



The problem was not a lack of plausible meanings but the *presence of a number of plausible meanings*. As a result, the answer to the questions, *what's going on here* and *what should I do*, are tragically different, although they all make sense in terms of their own routine or frame.

[...] In the 33 minutes between the suspect leaving the house of Scotia Road and being shot, *a number of possibilities were becoming*, depending on what routine was understood to be salient”

(Colville et al, 2013:1217-1218, emphasis added)

Meaning comes into being as the happening of understanding: Meaning is actualized only when the text is understood

Self-difference: Something can become different from itself while remaining itself instead of becoming something else – “it becomes other without becoming another” (Bortoft, 2012:71) The differences in the meaning of a work, which appear on the different occasions of its actualization, belong to the work itself – are its own possibilities of being

The differences in meaning are self-differences of the meaning of the work itself: self-differences constitute the dynamic unity of the work itself

What is said can never include its meaning totally within itself – what is said always carries the ‘unsaid’

Possibilities are not pre-formed events waiting to be actualized (actualities-in-waiting)

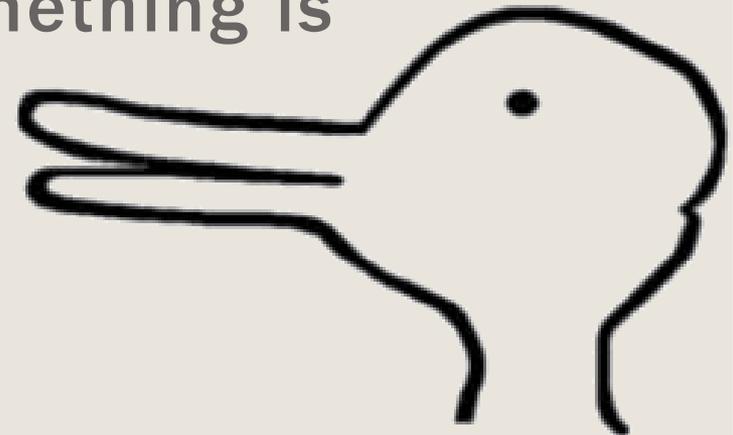
In any particular situation, the dynamical possibility of meaning of the work is evoked in accordance with the conditions of that situation

The unity of coming-into-being = dynamic unity of self-differencing (difference is intrinsic to unity)

Unity of finished products = static unity of self-sameness

Extensive difference: when one thing is different from another thing

Intensive difference: when something is different from itself

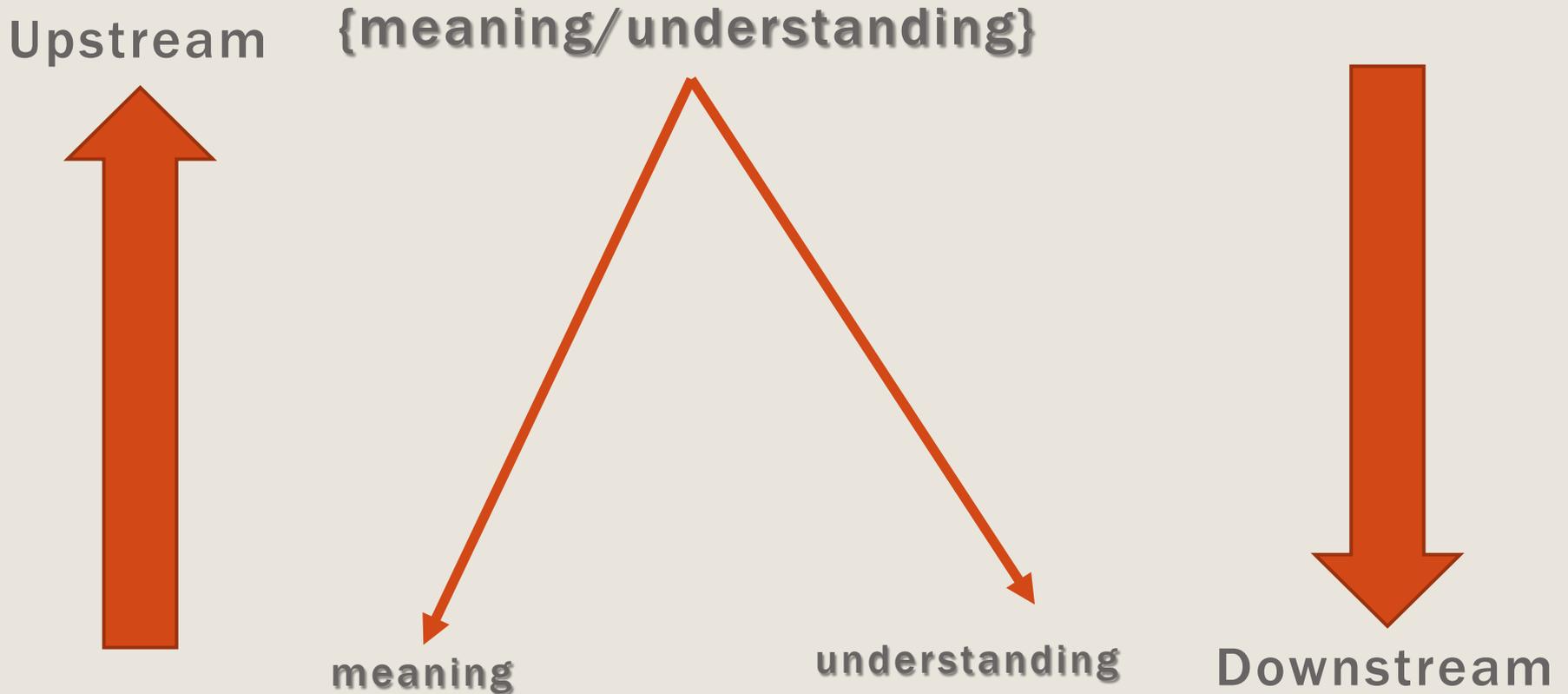


Phenomenology: shift of attention from *what* is experienced to the *experiencing* of what is experienced (e.g. from what is seen into the seeing of what is seen, from what is said to the saying of what is said)

“..we neither discover an objective reality nor invent a subjective reality, but [...] there is is a process of responsive evocation, the world ‘calling forth’ something in me that in turn ‘calls forth’ something in the world”

(McGilchrist, 2009: 133)

From 'Downstream' orientation to 'Upstream' orientation:
moving from outcomes and subject/object separation to
how outcomes are produced while preserving the unitary
phenomenon of interest



Upstream vs. Downstream orientation

Intrinsic direction of experience



{experiencing of
what is experienced}



what is experienced

Second-order learning: from the “natural attitude” to the “phenomenological attitude”

***Natural attitude:* taking the world for granted: a collection of beliefs, theories and judgments about how the world works**

***Phenomenological attitude:* suspending (bracketing) those beliefs, theories, and judgments in order to focus on how the world is experienced**