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**Dr Sébastien Pesce: *Enacting the concept of
“definition of the situation” in the field. The case of
socioclinics, University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław,
January 31, 2018***

The University of Lower Silesia has been the host of a series of seminars under the title *Humanist Debates: hypotheses, clues and interpretations since 2014*. This initiative is taking place within an informal community of university researchers called *Academia Privata* founded by Prof. dr hab. Maria Reut. On the 31st January 2018, we hosted a lecture by Sébastien Pesce, PhD (University of Tours, Department of Education, member of the research team: Education, Ethics, and Health). The lecture title was: *Enacting the concept of “definition of the situation” in the field. The case of socioclinics*. Pesce’s lecture focused on some ideas of classical pragmatism and late Chicago school, related to understandings of ‘situation’ and their application in the field of counselling studies and educational practice. It was, without any doubt, an important intellectual event in the education studies and philosophy milieus at the University of Lower Silesia.

The first philosopher who tried to define the concept was Charles Sanders Peirce (Peirce, 1997), and later it appeared in various forms in the work of other pragmatists (both philosophers and sociologists) such as James, Dewey, Znaniecki, Thomas, Schütz, Waller, Mead, Bauer, Blumer, Goffman, Garfinkel, Woods, etc.). ‘Defining the situation’ as a concept is very important and has practical significance as very effective action (including support, counselling or education) relates to a specific situation where it is implemented, and so it requires a proper diagnosis and evaluation that will influence the direction of intervention, the choice of means and methods, expected outcomes and the evaluation of the intervention’s results. The pragmatist approach contributed to our understanding of the situation by showing its connection with the “set of values and attitudes”, both objective or external (social, religious, economic, cultural), individual or collective, as well as the approaches that form a subjective concept of a situation in an individual who is in it. Taking action is seen as an act which, in reality, changes the situation (Thomas,

Znanięcki, 1918/1998). Other theories emphasized the activity of the subject and the creation of possibilities which makes it easier to take action (Waller, 1932), as well as the “corporeal” and symbolic aspect of interaction within a given situation, expressed in gestures and body movements (Mead, 1975). Furthermore, the pragmatist approach to situation is in line with some philosophical concepts related to habits (Peirce, 1997), and especially the reflection on its cognitive aspect, which has been elaborated within the French tradition – the so-called concept of intelligent habits (Maine de Biran, 1779/1929; Ravaisson, 1838/2008). According to Pesce, in the construction of a definition there are two more important conceptions: the lived world (Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 1991), and the phenomenological understanding of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 2017).

One of the concepts applied in the context of education states: The teacher defines the situation in terms of his or her own roles and goals, especially as they relate to his or her instructional and disciplinary objectives, and assigns their students roles and goals that are congruent with his or her own. The teacher selectively perceives and interprets pupil behavior in the light of such definition of the situation. Based on further interaction with the pupils and discretionary perceptions of them, the teacher develops conceptions of individual pupils (and the group) who are evaluated, categorized and labelled according to the degree to which they support his definition of the situation (Woods, 1979).

The socioclinical analysis of the situation presented by Pesce is based on the aforementioned conceptions and psychological and sociological research. It tries to take into account manifested feelings, uttered words, the signals and social context in which they occur. In this analysis, it is important to understand the hidden goals of particular actors, as well as the steps leading to these goals, within their social and cultural context, which serves as the dynamic framework for the action under review. By now, research has been limited to an analysis of interpersonal relations, and it mainly focused on the dual aspects of educational, counselling, therapeutic, and support situations. The “clinical” approach presented by Pesce constitutes a more holistic take on how we construe situation, helping us to better understand the situation construing process itself.

Finally, when we apply this approach, the educational, counselling or therapeutic situation takes on the form of semiosis (Peirce, 1997), or, more precisely, of edusemiosis, in which the signs and gestures manifested in a given situation are being interpreted. The situation thus represents a semiotic environment in itself. Developing the semiotic awareness of the teacher, therapist or counsellor should be among the priorities of training and support. Signs, in the sense mentioned above, play an important part in the teaching and learning process, as well as in the counselling process (from both sides) or in the support process. Semiotic processes can help the teachers, counsellors, therapists and social workers to find solutions to difficult situations, because a proper re-definition of the situation can bring about new habits, new educational, counselling and therapeutic “gestures”, which in turn will

be closer to the semiotic “community” of students and teachers, of counsellors and counselees, of therapists and patients, of persons offering support and those who receive it.

The concept presented by Pesce is very fruitful as a heuristic device. Through categories taken from pragmatism, it allows us to understand the support and educational process as semiosis through which a given situation is being defined. This perspective calls for further study and elaboration of specific applications in educational, teaching and counselling practice.

Translated from Polish by Aneta Słowik

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