

Speaking in Lolcats: What Literacy Means in teh Digital Era

Stephen Downes

November 12, 2009

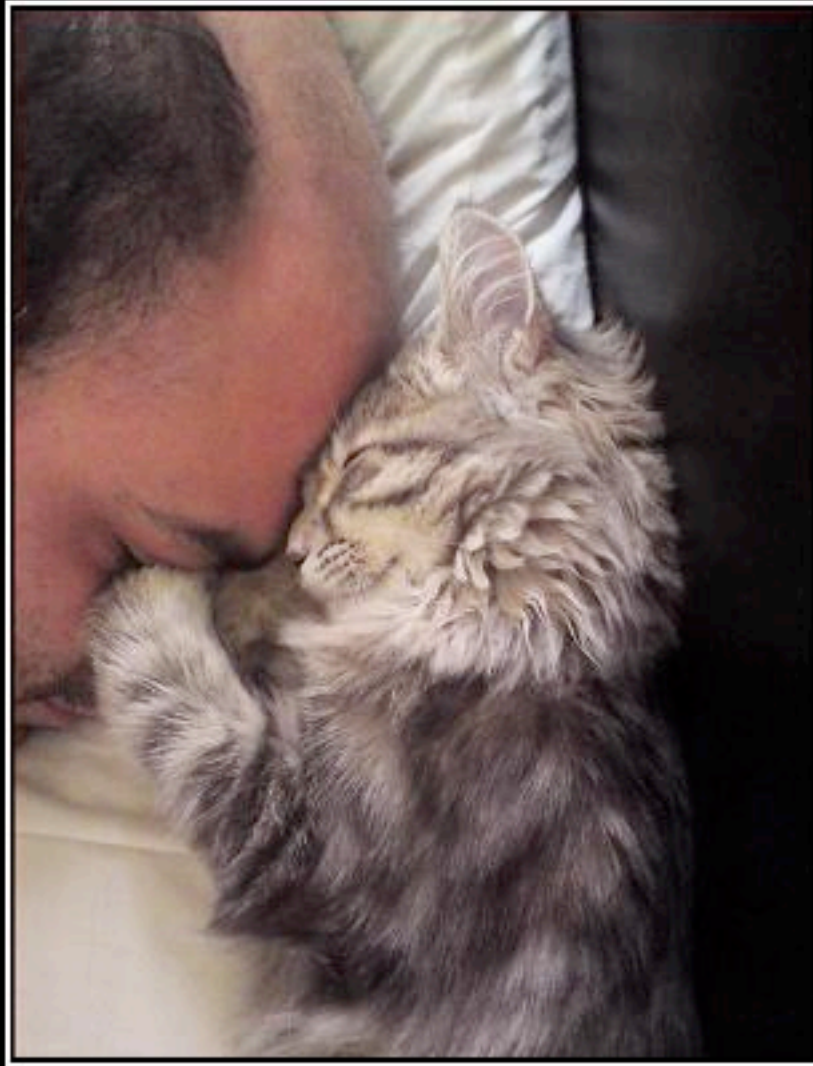


Let's look at some LOLcats



<http://icanhascheezburger.com/2009/11/11/funny-pictures-toes-passing-in-5-4-3/>

LOLCats
combine
familiar
images
with
cultural
context



LOVE

Nothing says "I love you" like a paw in the eye.

[ICANHASCHEEZBURGER.COM](http://icanhascheezburger.com) 🐱 🐱 🐱

<http://icanhascheezburger.com/2009/11/11/funny-pictures-love-2/>

Not so much celebrating
popular culture as mocking it...



i triangulated



Correct spelling - even real words - is optional
(but teh spelling mistakes have to make sense)

<http://icanhascheezburger.com/2009/11/09/funny-pictures-i-triangulated/>

LOLcats
have a
characteristic
spelling and
syntax...

It looks like
txtspeek, it
looks like
l33tspeek, it
mocks both





Above all, LOLCats are commentary on everyday life

<http://icanhascheezburger.com/2009/11/09/funny-pictures-same-since-decaff/>

One thesis:

That new media constitute a vocabulary,
and then when people create artifacts,
they are, literally, “speaking in LOLcats”



It's not just LOLCats, of course...

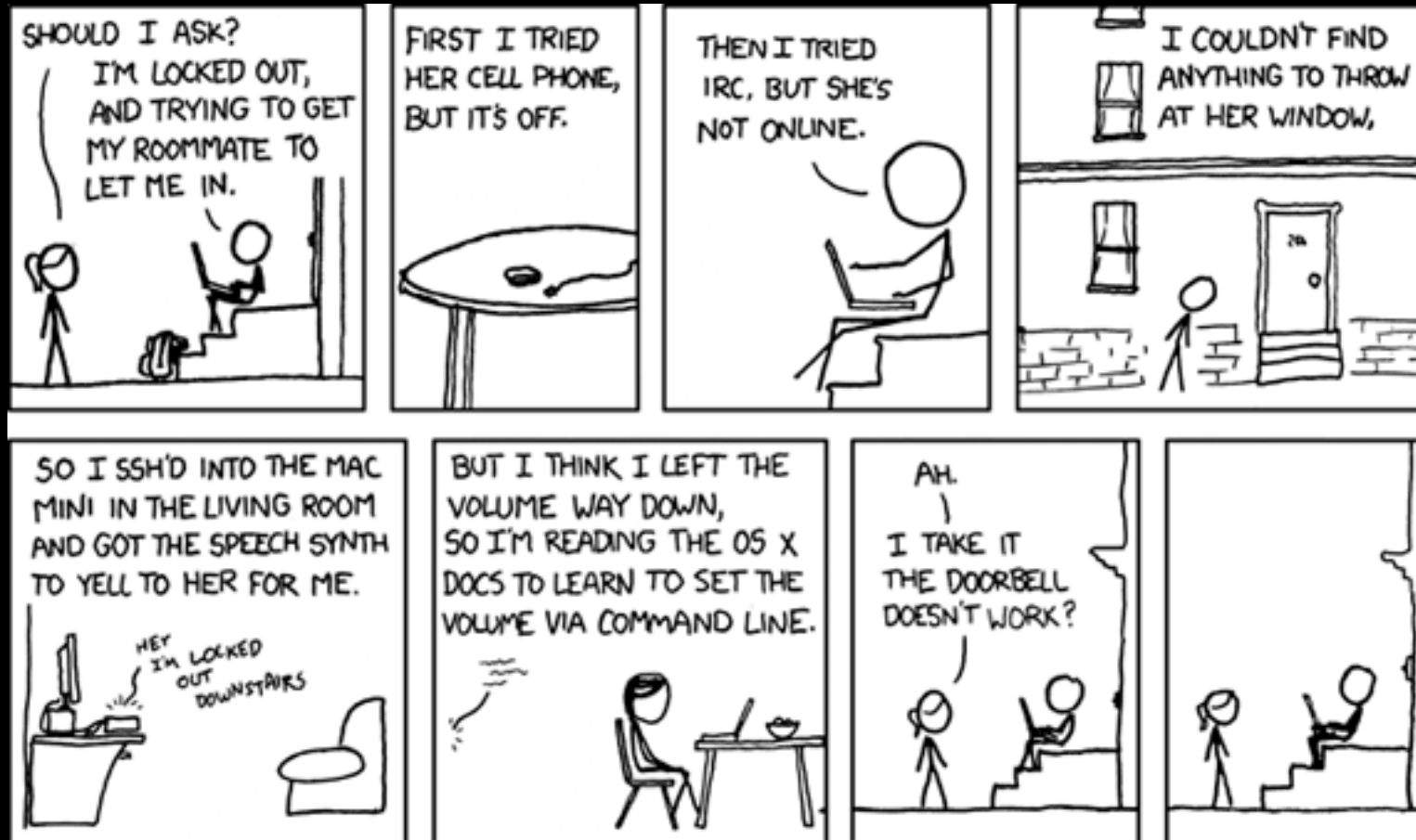
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nobodyssweetheart/40898054>



What do you suppose people are saying when they share this video?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMAtxuCpsMU>

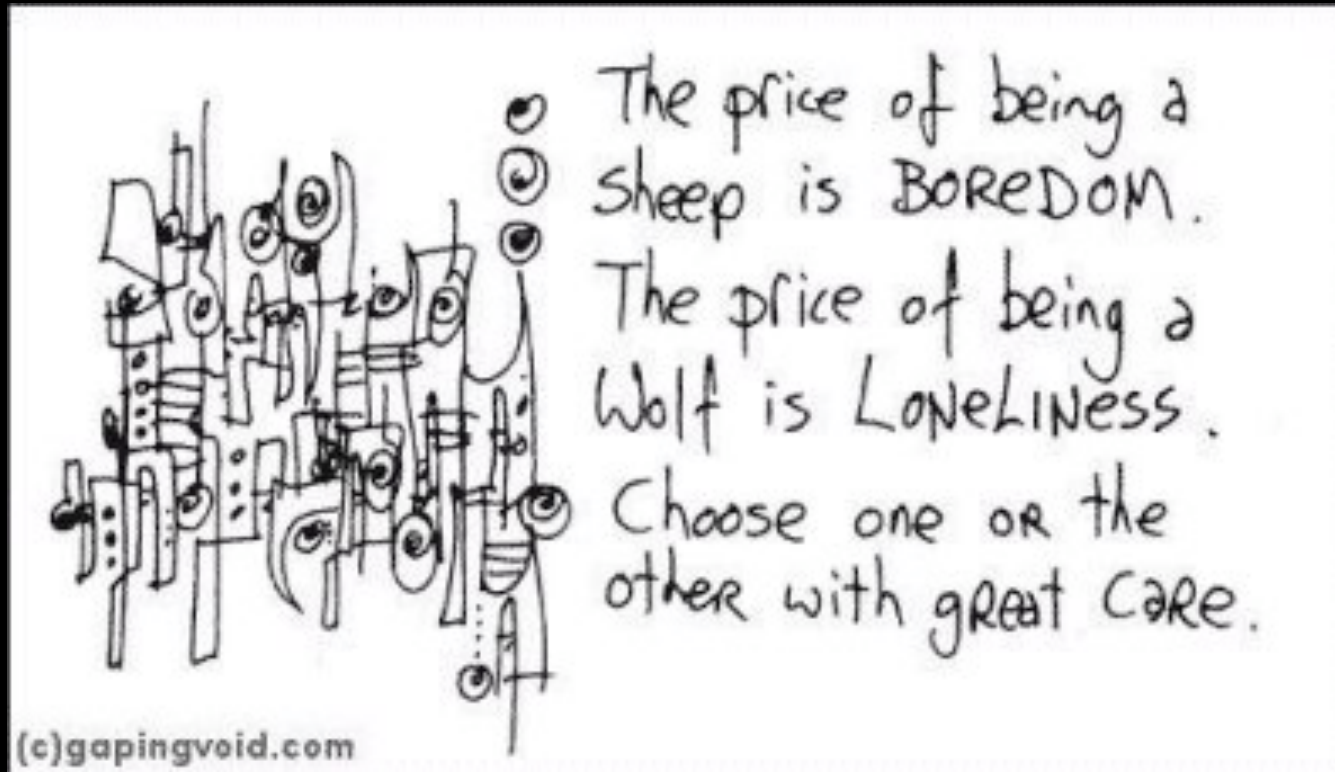
XKCD



What do you suppose the artist is saying?

<http://xkcd.com/530/>

Gaping Void



What do you suppose this artist is saying?

<http://www.gapingvoid.com/>

<http://thefuturebuzz.com/2009/01/26/50-viral-images-part-two/>

9-11 Tourist Guy



The Accidental Tourist...

<http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/blphoto-wtc.htm>

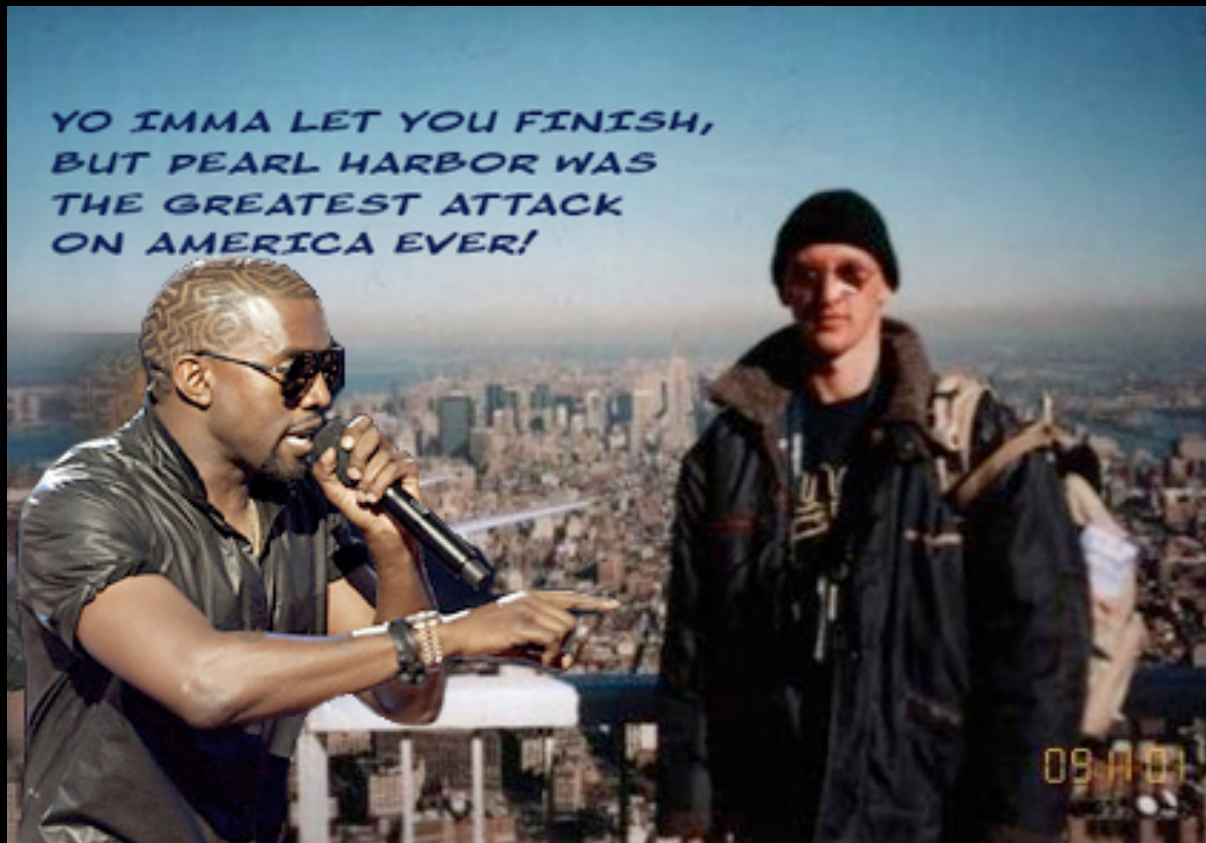
Hindenberg Tourist Guy



Iconic...

<http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/blphoto-wtc.htm>

Kanye Interrupts Tourist Guy



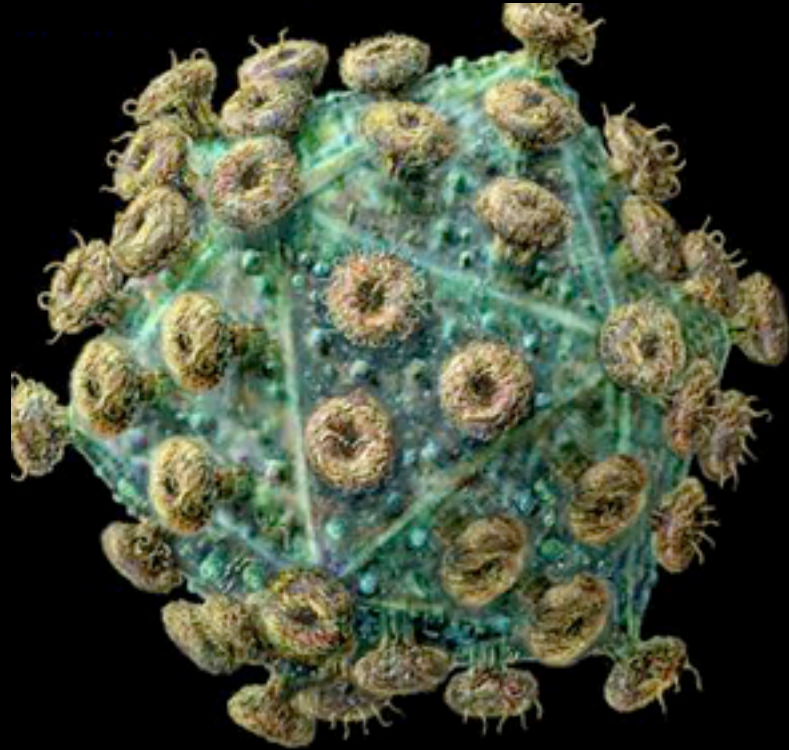
Ironic...

<http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/blphoto-wtc.htm>

The first thesis is to be taken literally

New media is a language

The artifacts are *words*



There are other languages...

<http://img166.imageshack.us/img166/3827/virusbignl0.jpg>



Body language, for example...

<http://forum.xcitefun.net/body-language-actions-do-speak-louder-than-words-t13371.html>

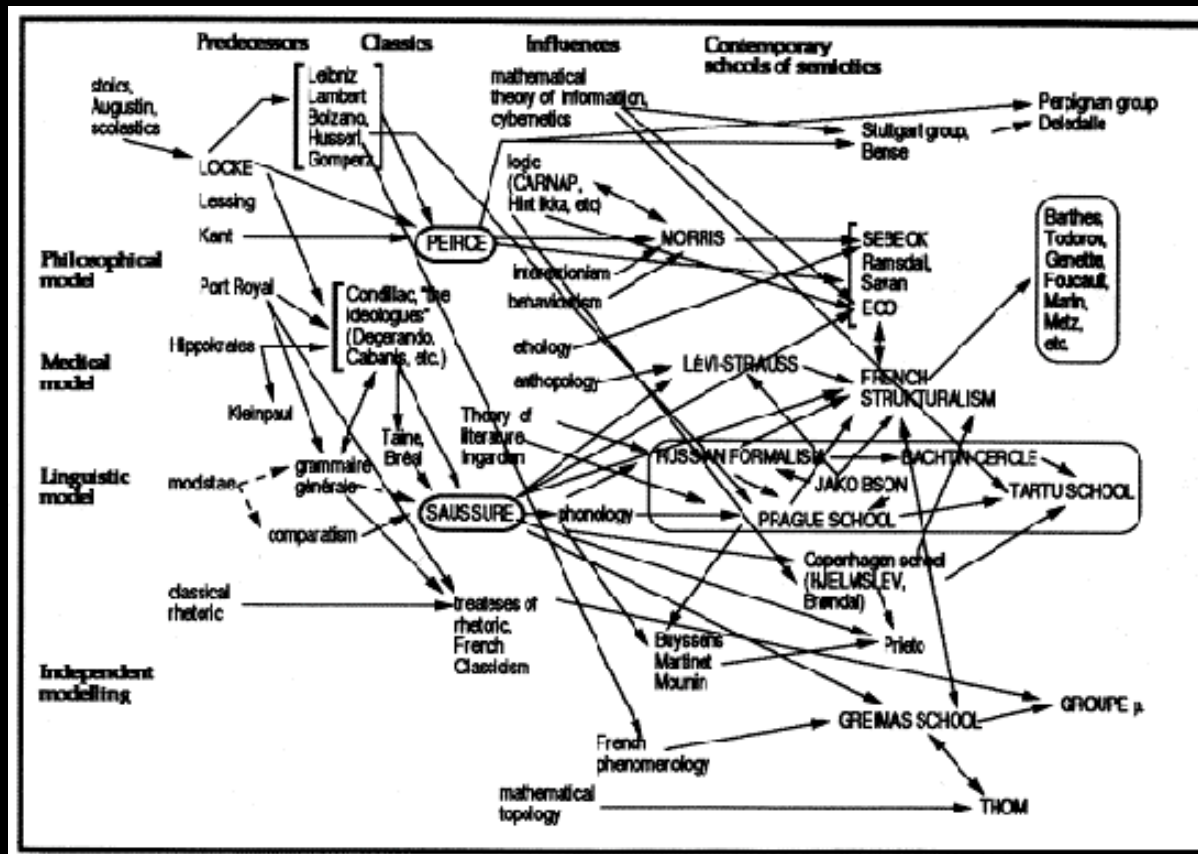


Clothing, uniforms, flags, drapes...

<http://www.armystrongstories.com/blogAssets/wayne-wall/12%20JUN%20Arab%20Clothing.jpg>

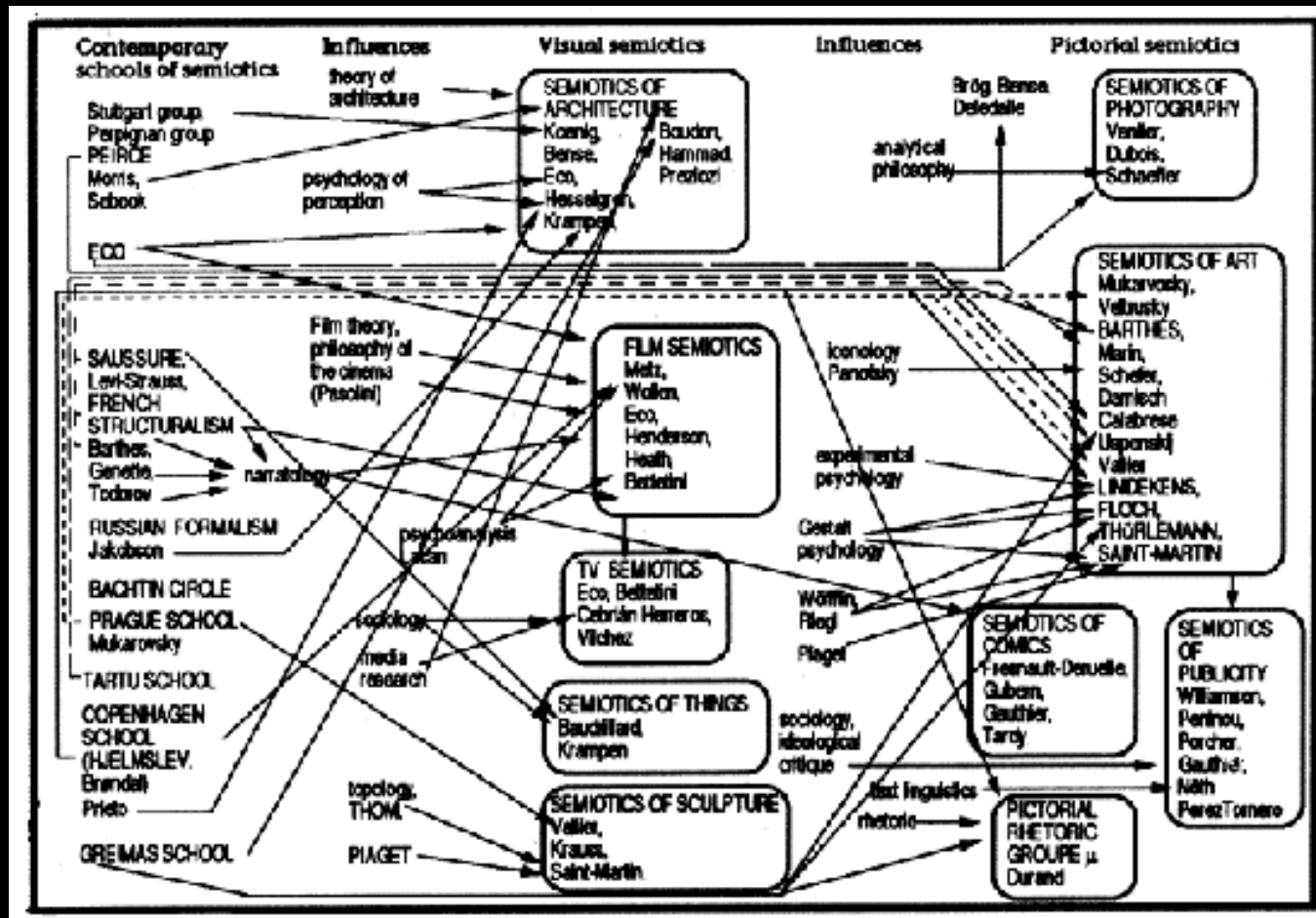
A second thesis:

We can understand these languages within a logical/semiotic framework



<http://filserver.arthist.lu.se/kultsem/sonesson/ImatraCourseTx1.html>

ACK!!!! A What?

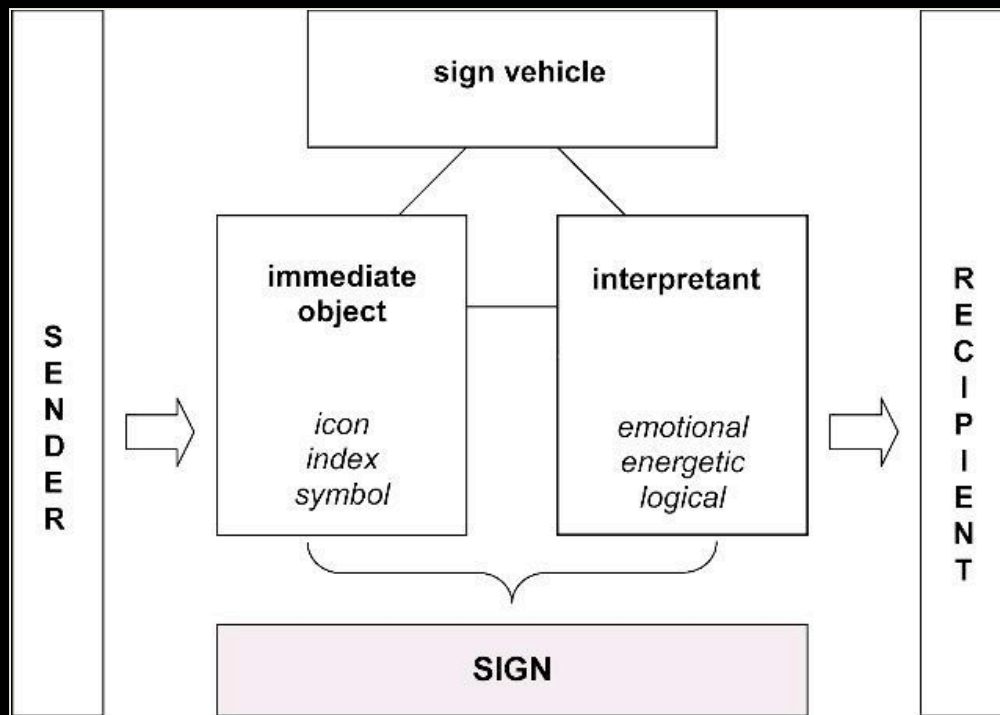


The semiotic function and the genesis of pictorial meaning, Göran Sonesson

<http://filserver.arthist.lu.se/kultsem/sonesson/ImatraCourseTx1.html>

A framework that describes:

- what we are saying
- how we are saying it

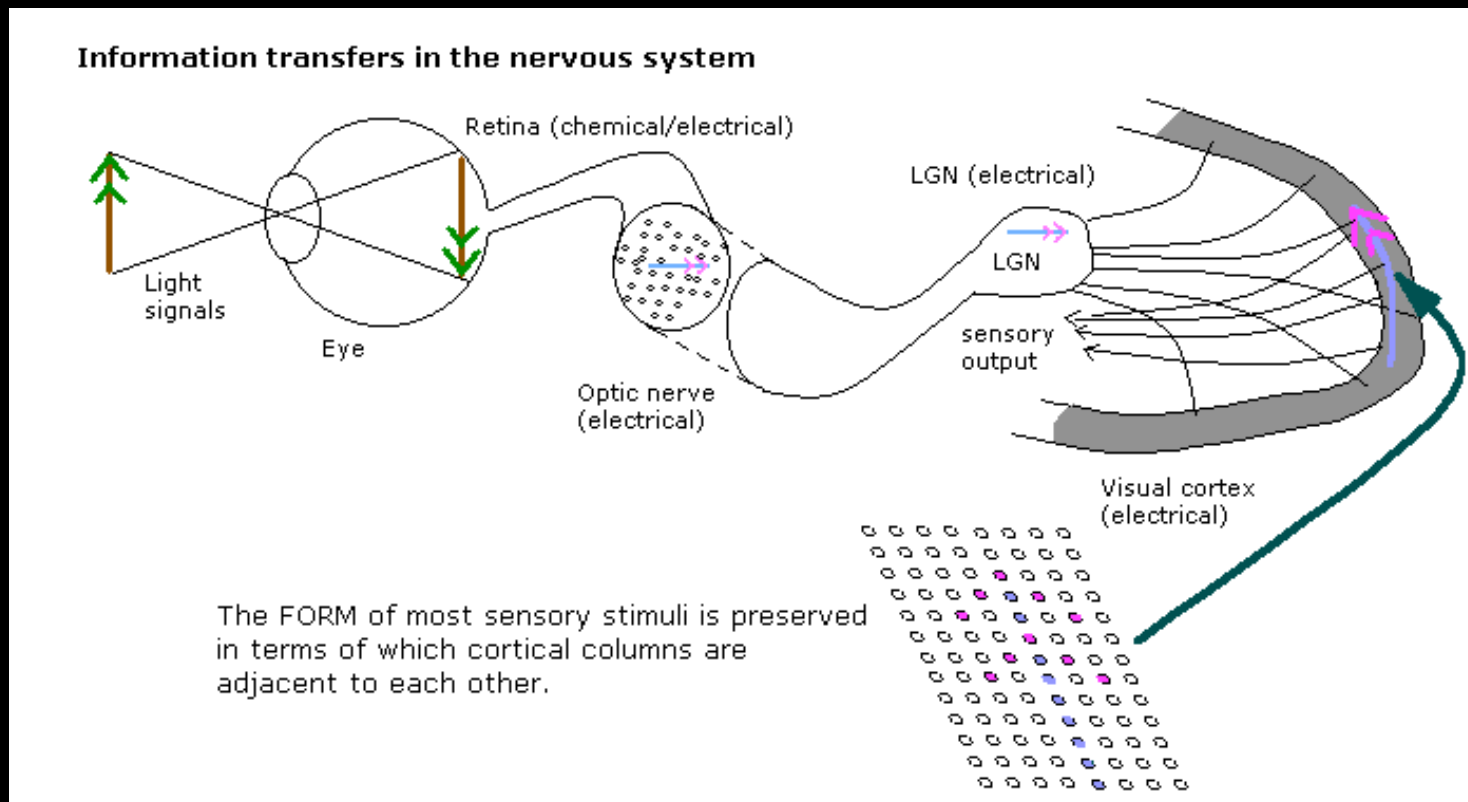


Charles Sanders Peirce

<http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id=IJP.085.1423A>

http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jzeman/peirces_theory_of_signs.htm

The same *sort* of thing underlies information theory...



Knowledge and the Flow of Information

http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Consciousness_Studies/The_Philosophical_Problem/Machine_Consciousness

<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/presssite/metadata/epl?mode=synopsis&bookkey=3642299>

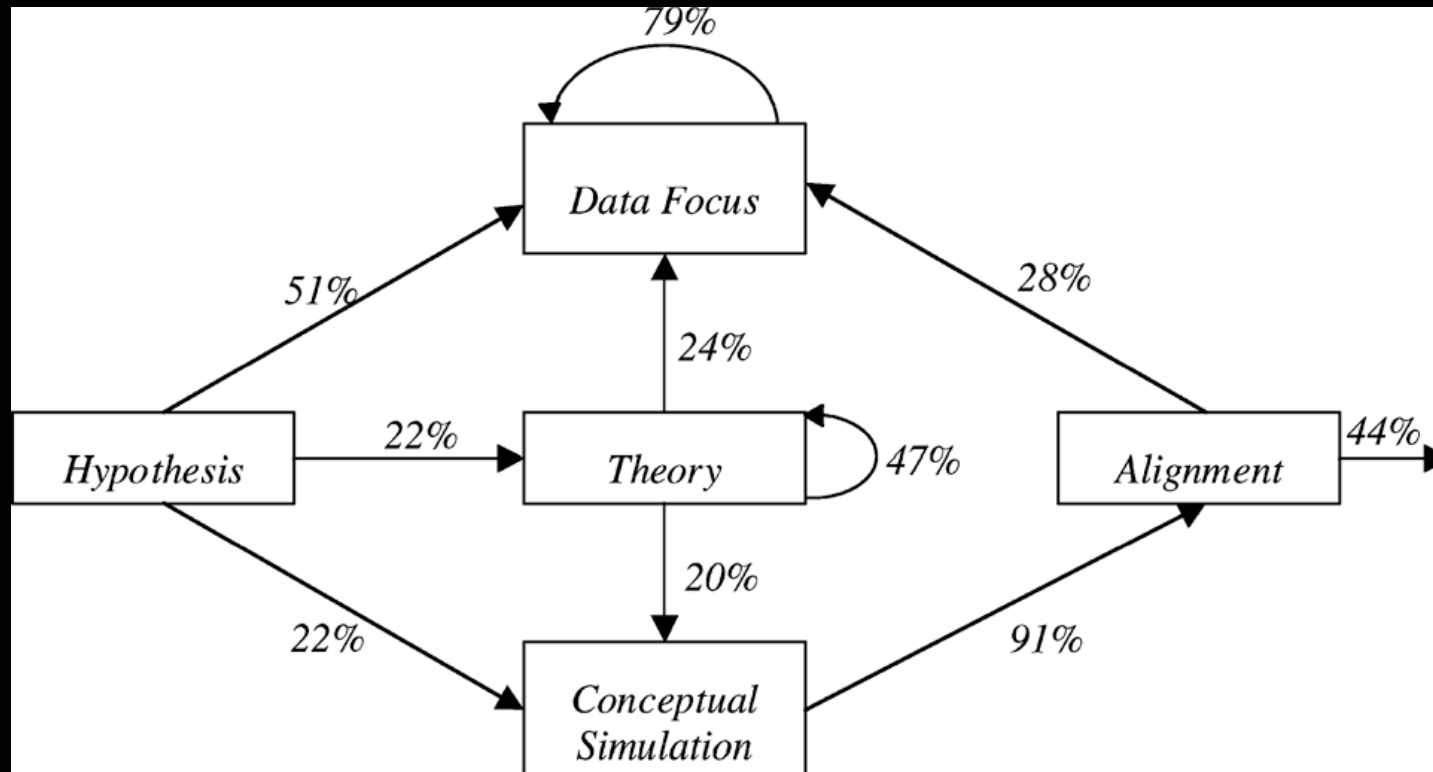
But more...

The same sort of thing underlies
inference and belief



We understand the future in the same way we understand the
past, by studying the signs - S. Downes <http://www.downes.ca/post/20>

Science as language, learning as conversation, knowledge as inference



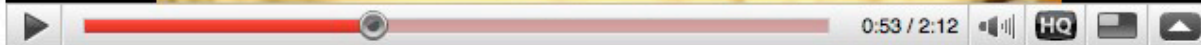
“What if...”: The Use of Conceptual Simulations in Scientific Reasoning

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/1925728116-26233474/ftinterface~db=all~content=a788101161~fulltext=713240928>

The Second Thesis, Part B

This means getting beyond narrow text-based conceptions we have of media

LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!



★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆ 202,225 ratings

25,558,086 views

♥ Favorite ➔ Share + Playlists 🚩 Flag

MySpace

Facebook

Send Video

(more share options)

Conceptions Like:

- messages have a sender and a receiver
- words get meaning from what they represent
- truth is based on the real world
- events have a cause, and causes can be known
- science is based on forming and testing hypotheses

These, taken together, constitute, a static, linear, coherent picture of the world

The world, as though it were a book, or a library

Not everyone sees it that way

A frame for understanding new media

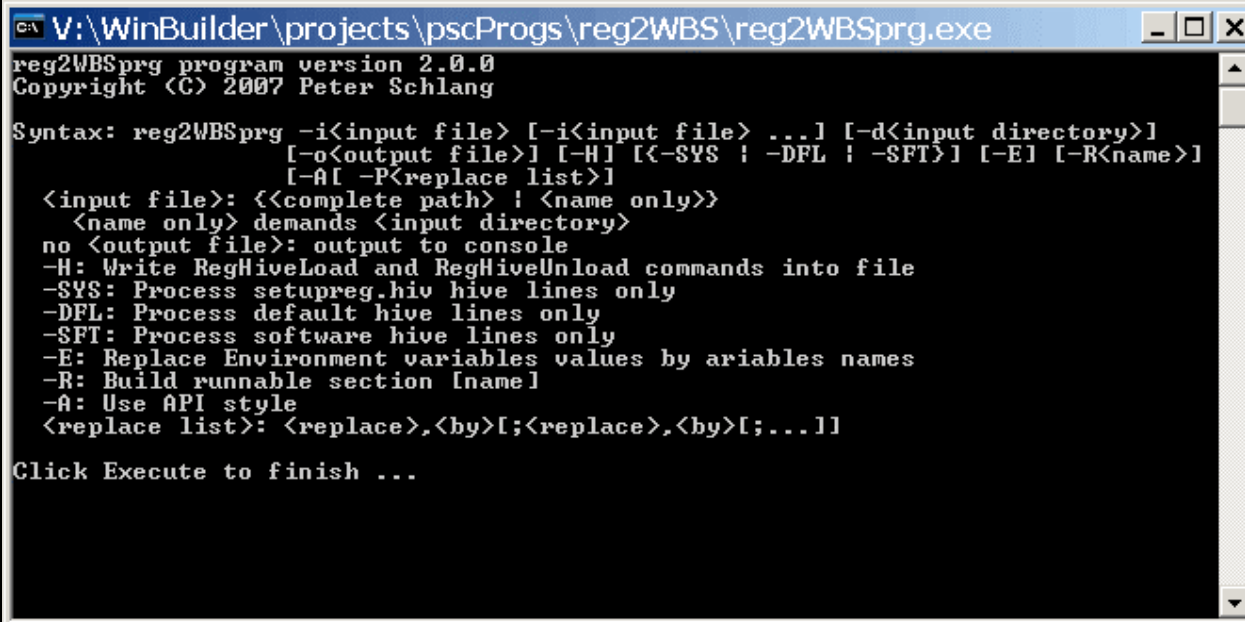
Morris, Derrida and a little Lao Tzu

Syntax	Cognition
Semantics	Context
Pragmatics	Change

We need this frame because (as Jukes said) if we aren't looking for these things, we just won't see them.

Syntax

Not just rules and grammar



```
V:\WinBuilder\projects\pscProgs\reg2WBS\reg2WBSprg.exe
reg2WBSprg program version 2.0.0
Copyright (C) 2007 Peter Schlang

Syntax: reg2WBSprg -i<input file> [-i<input file> ...] [-d<input directory>]
        [-o<output file>] [-H] [-SYS | -DFL | -SFT] [-E] [-R<name>]
        [-A] [-P<replace list>]
<input file>: <<complete path> | <name only>>
<name only> demands <input directory>
no <output file>: output to console
-H: Write RegHiveLoad and RegHiveUnload commands into file
-SYS: Process setupreg.hiv hive lines only
-DFL: Process default hive lines only
-SFT: Process software hive lines only
-E: Replace Environment variables values by ariables names
-R: Build runnable section [name]
-A: Use API style
<replace list>: <replace>,<by>[;<replace>,<by>[;...]]

Click Execute to finish ...
```

Forms: archetypes? Platonic ideals?

Rules: grammar = logical syntax

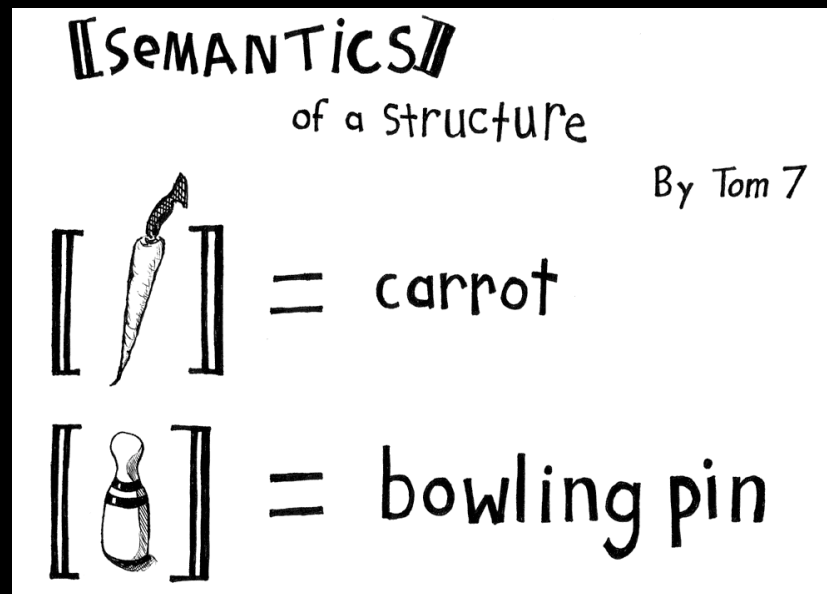
Operations: procedures, motor skills

Patterns: regularities, substitutivity (eggcorns, tropes)

Similarities: Tversky - properties, etc

Semantics

theories of truth / meaning / purpose / goal



<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~tom7/csnotes/fall02/semantics.gif>

- Sense and reference (connotation and denotation)
- Interpretation (Eg. In probability, Carnap - logical space; Reichenbach - frequency; Ramsey - wagering / strength of belief)
- Forms of association: Hebbian, contiguity, back-prop, Boltzmann
- Decisions and decision theory: voting / consensus / emergence

Pragmatics

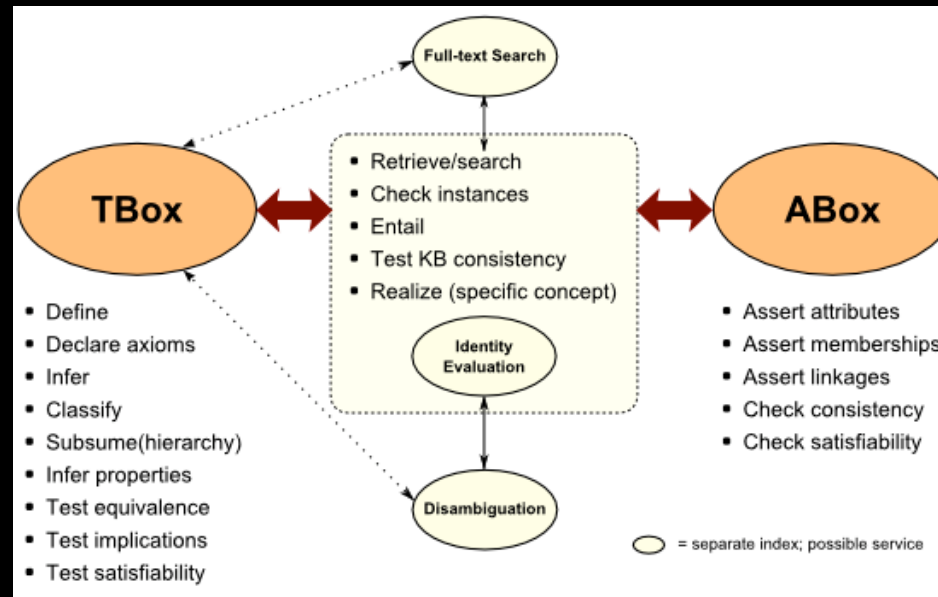
use, actions, impact



- Speech acts (J.L. Austin, Searle) assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations (but also - harmful acts, harassment, etc)
- Interrogation (Heidegger) and presupposition
- Meaning (Wittgenstein - meaning is use)

Cognition

reasoning, inference and explanation



<http://www.mkbergman.com/category/description-logics/>

- **description** - X (definite description, allegory, metaphor)
- **definition** - X is Y (ostensive, lexical, logical (necess. & suff conds), family resemblance - but also, identity, personal identity, etc)
- **argument** - X therefore Y - inductive, deductive, abductive (but also: modal, probability (Bayesian), deontic (obligations), doxastic (belief), etc.)
- **explanation** - X because of Y (causal, statistical, chaotic/emergent)

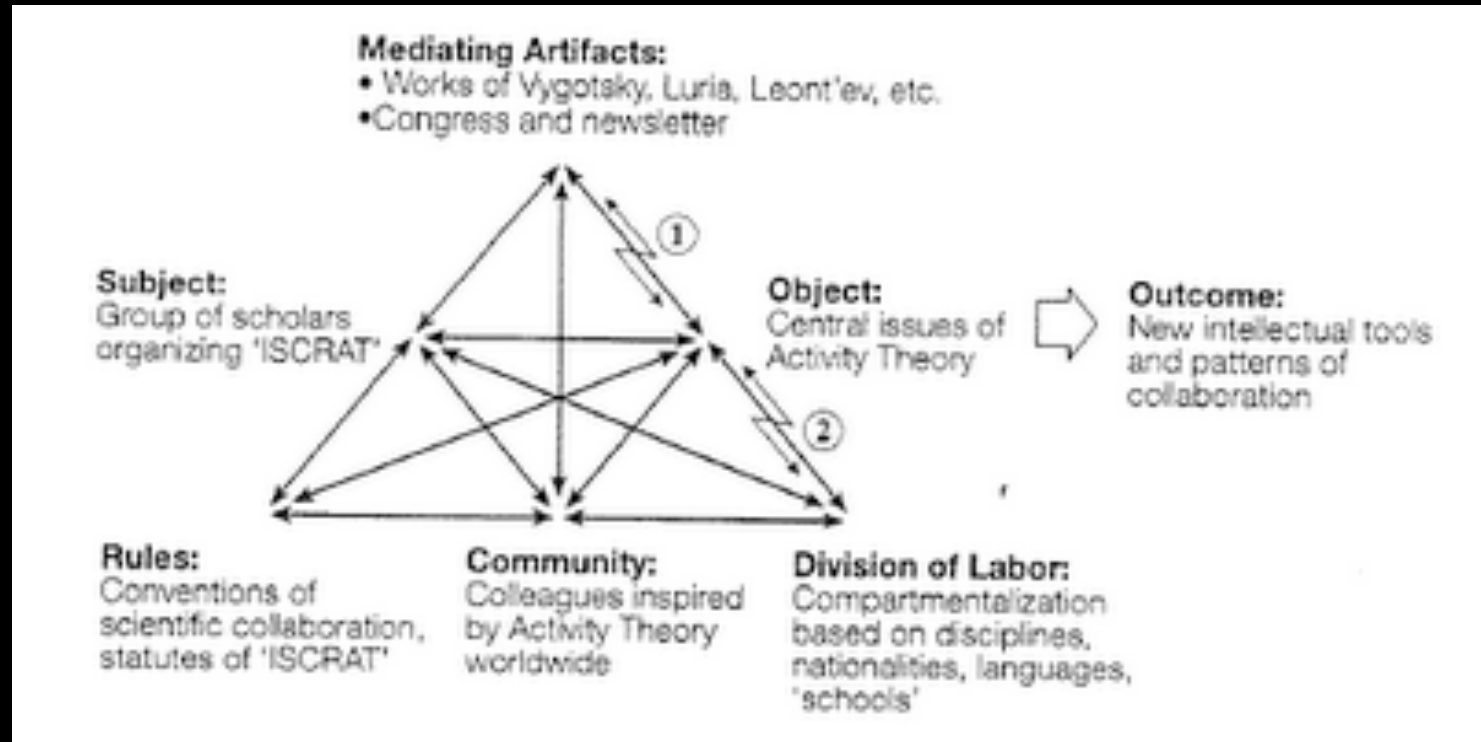
Context placement, environment



<http://www.occasionbasedmarketing.com/what-it-is>

- explanation (Hanson, van Fraassen, Heidegger)
- meaning (Quine); tense - range of possibilities
- vocabulary (Derrida); ontologies, logical space
- Frames (Lakoff) and worldviews

Change



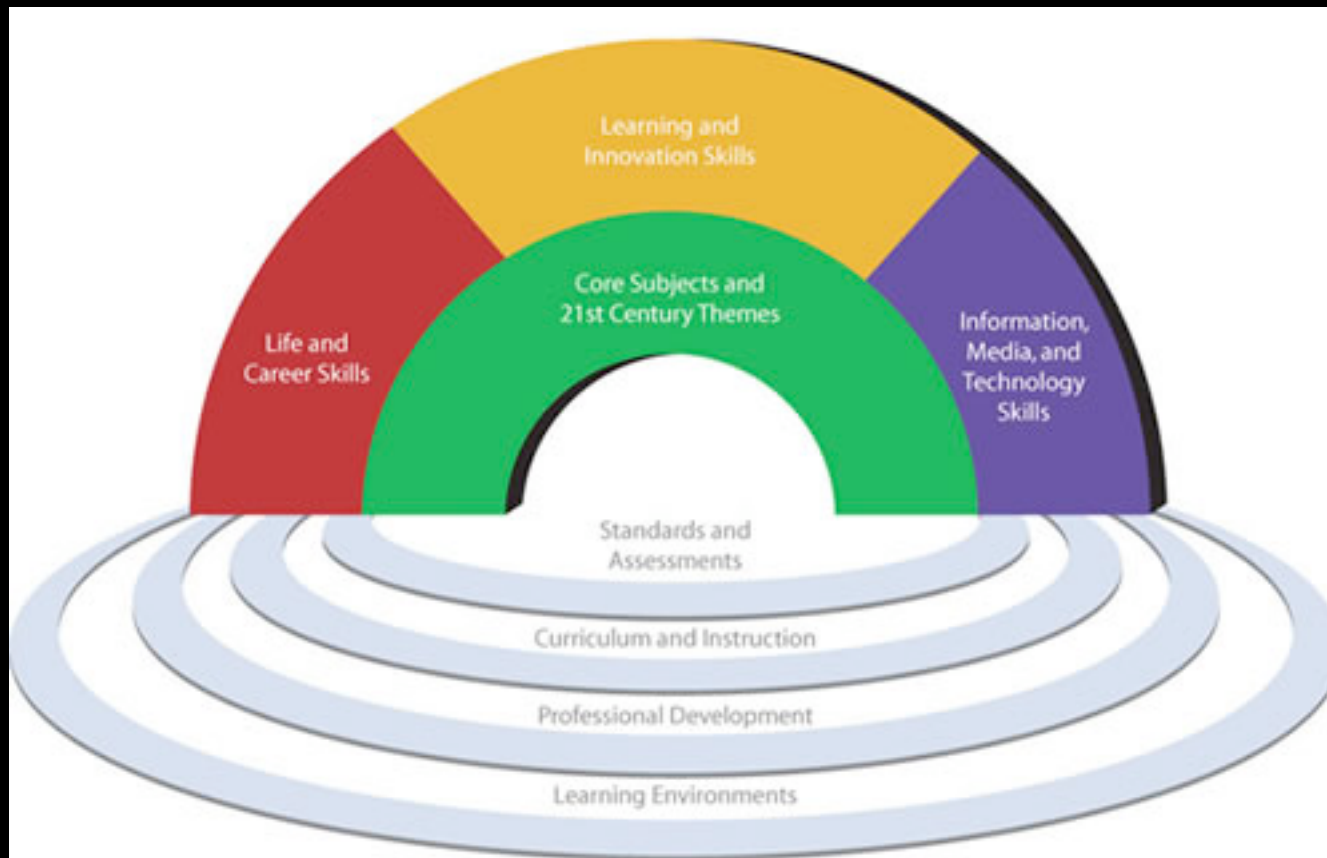
- relation and connection: I Ching, logical relation
- flow: Hegel - historicity, directionality; McLuhan - 4 things
- progression / logic -- games, for example: quiz&points, branch-and-tree, database
- scheduling - timetabling - events; activity theory / LaaN

A third thesis:
Fluency in these languages constitutes
“21st century learning”



Describing “21st century learning”...

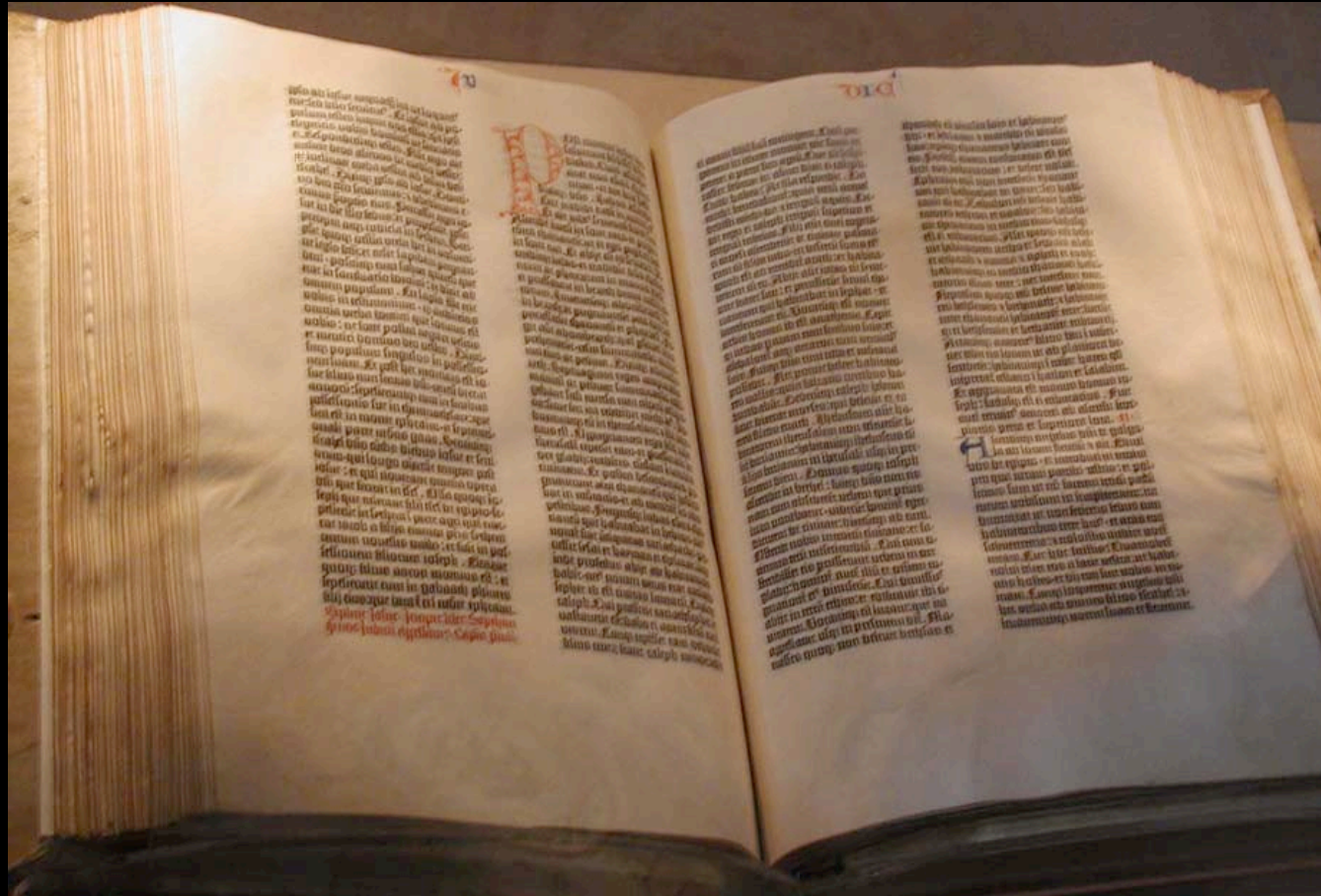
(using the language of 20th century teaching)



... as content and skills...

http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/MILE_Guide_091101.pdf

Focusing on tools...



... is like focusing on pens, pencils, the printing press, instead of the Magna Carta, the Gutenberg Bible

Focusing on content...



http://www.parliament.uk/actofunion/01_01_revolution.html

... is like focusing on what Magna Carta, the Gutenberg Bible said instead of what they did, what people did with them

Papert - constructionism



<http://www.tpemagazine.com/2009/index.php/2009-06-23-12-22-23/22-issue03/44-constructionism-lego-education>

when people construct artifacts they are
constructing media with which to think

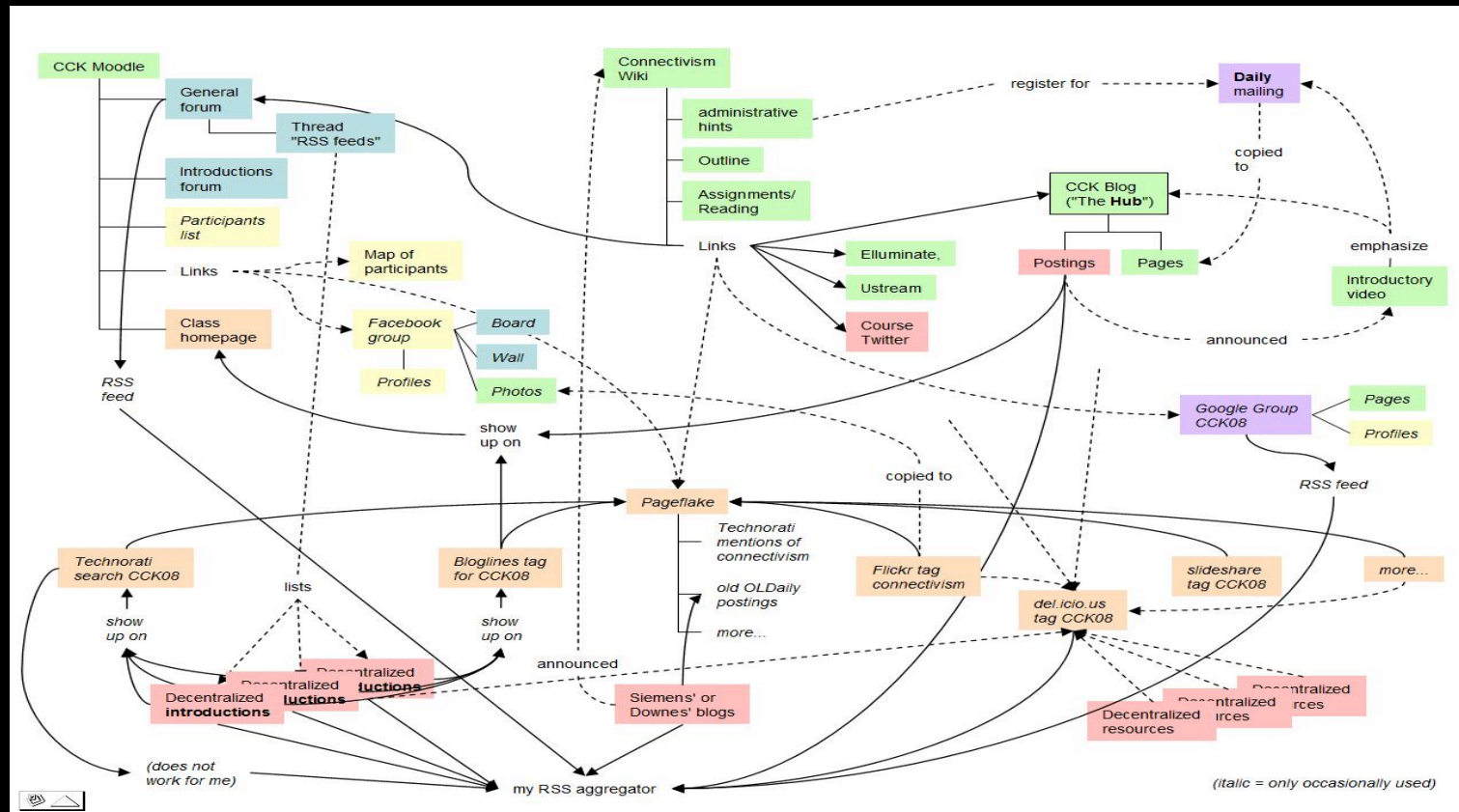
How do we converse?



<http://englishuiabasco.wordpress.com/2009/01/>

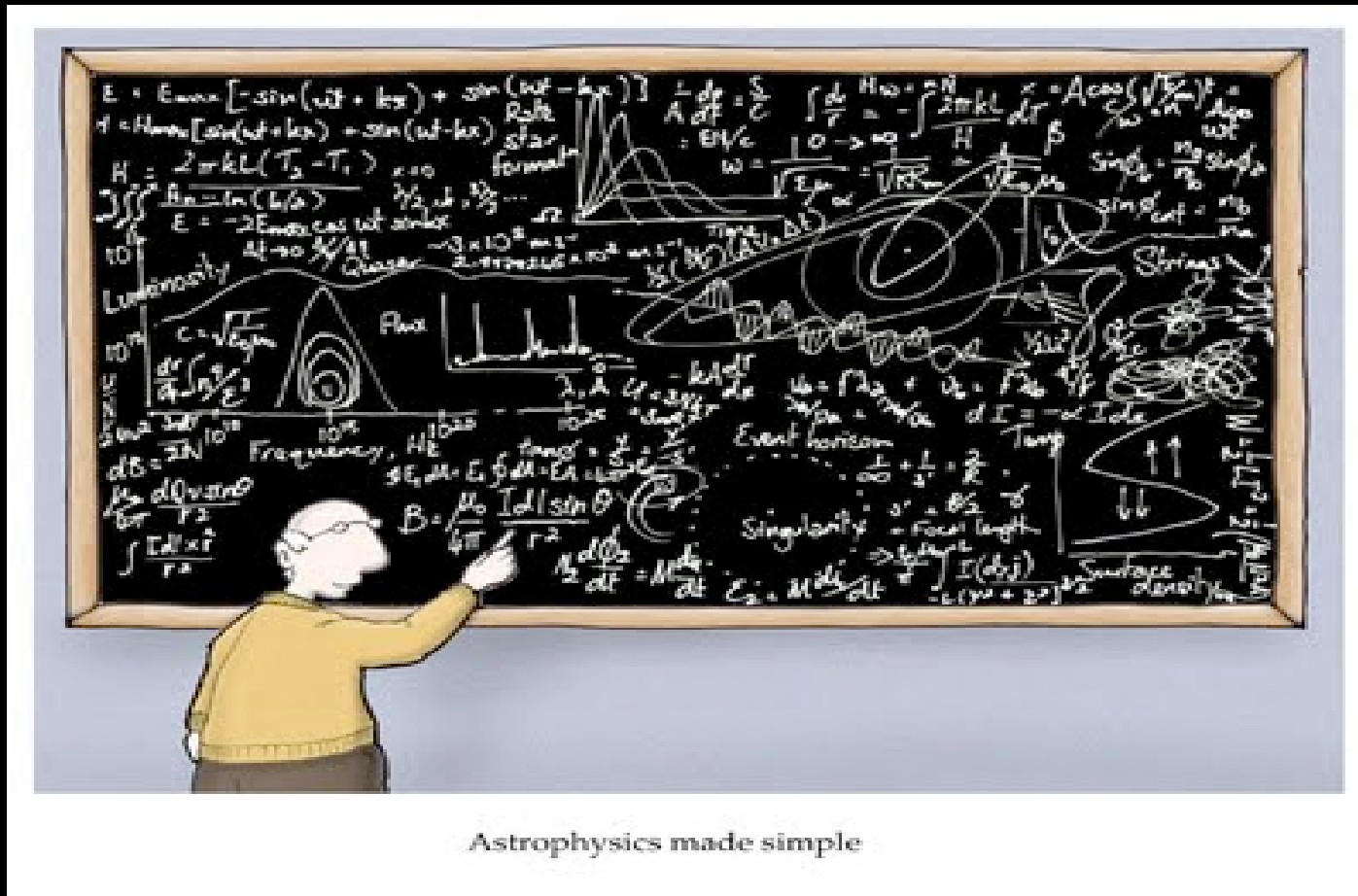
- Who is in charge of that zone, who is in charge of that scaffolding
- What vocabularies are we using in our digital materials? What vocabularies are publishers using? Are students using?
- What languages do we *model*?

The CCK09 Course...



... is about learning as a conversation

Using the language of LOLCats...



<http://ignatiawebs.blogspot.com/>

... to learn how to think
and discover, and learn...

Examples for Discussion...

1. Financial Literacy: language or skill?

PROMPT: Province to teach financial skills in schools...

<http://www.parentcentral.ca/parent/article/719574--province-to-teach-money-skills-in-schools>



If 'financial skills' are a language, who talks, what is being said, and how are meaning and truth expressed? ...

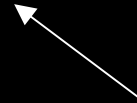
http://blogs.siliconindia.com/itsSHANKARGURU/Wealth_Generation_Management-bid-w4Fkd8Bs78142943.html

Examples for Discussion...

3. Critical Thinking and Text

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=407700&c=1>

- * What is the author's fundamental purpose?
- * What is the author's point of view with respect to the issue?
- * What assumptions is the author making in his or her reasoning?
- * What are the implications of the author's reasoning?
- * What information does the author use in reasoning through this issue?
- * What are the most fundamental inferences or conclusions in the article?
- * What are the most basic concepts used by the author?
- * What is the key question the author is trying to answer?



The teleological theory of meaning

How do we apply the principles of critical thinking to non-text artifacts?

Examples for Discussion...

4. The Farleyfile



Gist: A Farleyfile for the 21st century

<http://www.mcgeesmusings.net/2009/09/24/gist-a-farleyfile-for-the-21st-century/>

How do we keep data? How do we
remember people we have met?

Examples for Discussion...

5. An Operating System for the Mind



<http://positivebutterflies.com>

<http://halfanhour.blogspot.com/2009/09/operating-system-for-mind.html>

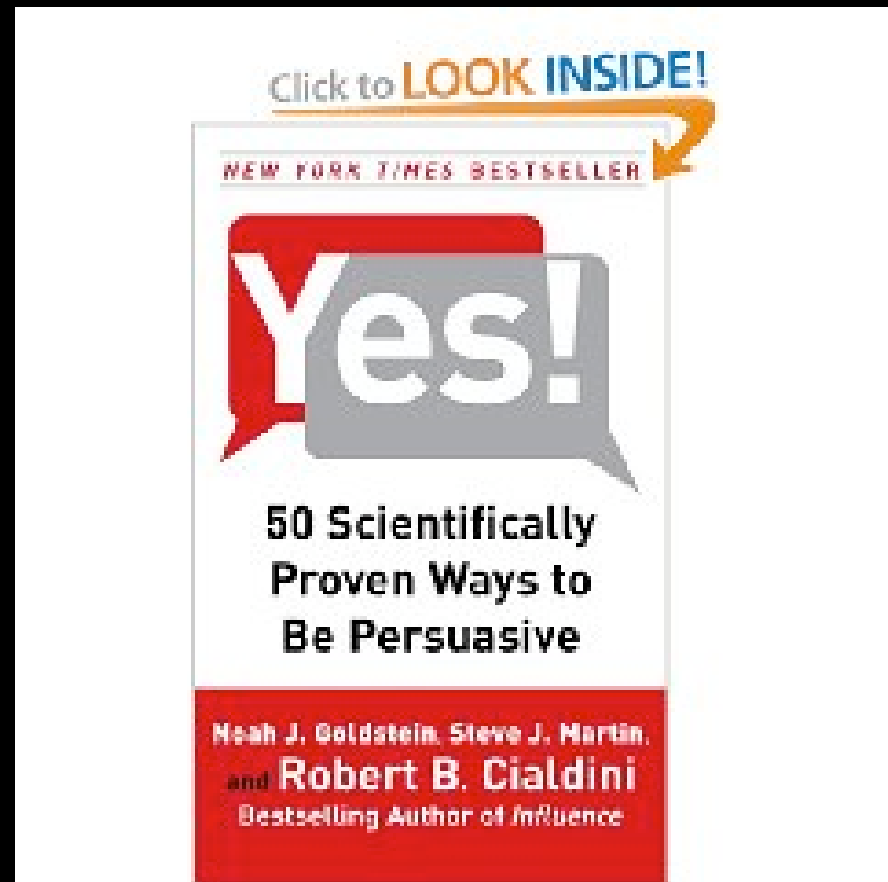
21st century skills constitute the processes and capacities that make it possible for people to navigate a fact-filled landscape, a way to see, understand and acquire those facts in such a way as to be relevant and useful, and in the end, to be self-contained,...

Examples for Discussion...

6. 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be Persuasive

Fallacious tropes

Inconvenience the audience by creating an impression of product scarcity. It's the famous change from "Call now, the operators are standing by" to "If the line is busy, call again", that greatly improved the call volume by creating the impression that everybody else is trying to buy the same product.



<http://www.moskalyuk.com/blog/yes-50-scientifically-proven-ways-to-be-persuasive>

Examples for Discussion...

7. The Eggcorn Database



<http://eggcorns.lascribe.net/>

'guess workers' for 'guest workers' by klakritz

'beta breath' for 'bated breath' by klakritz

'alimoney' for 'alimony' by klakritz