



**Human *Umwelten***  
**at the crossroads:**

**A biosemiotic and biopolitical appraisal**

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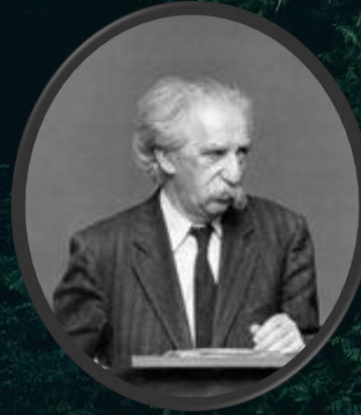
Conclusion

# 1. PROBLEMATICS



Hoffmeyer

Self-consciousness of  
alienation and loneliness;  
Resort to empathizing  
with others.



Lotman

Proper names →  
isolation, uniqueness  
The unified act of self-  
consciousness has two  
sides; and one is impossible  
without the other.”

## A HYPOTHESIS:

Human *Umwelten* is by nature always in an interacting status  
**at different levels.**



## To connecting biosemiotics with biopolitics

- Conceptualization of biopolitics through a re-interpretation in the veins of *Umwelt*-theory;
- It's possible that biopolitics could contribute to a reconceptualization of *Umwelt*-theory.



The concept of **“population”** inspires us to envision the human *Umwelten* that might take form from this specific aggregation of human.

## 2. CORE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN INDIVIDUALIZED HUMAN UMWELT

### Lotman-proper names

- A boundary in the consciousness between “one’s own world” and “the world of the others”



### Hoffmeyer-personal pronouns

- The ability to grasp subjective consciousness in the shift of personal pronouns is based on a sense of self that is capable of empathizing with the other.

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### • Jakobson- personal pronouns as “indexical symbol”

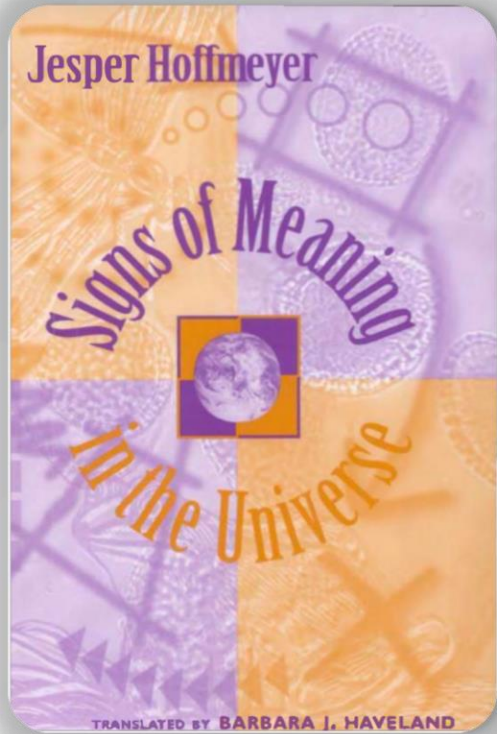
- a transition from individualized Umwelt to a human Umwelt that open to a social and semiotic interactions with other *Umwelten*.



### 3. INTERACTIVE HUMAN UMWELTEN

- Core constructive process of one's own Umwelt
  - A sign of cultural evolution at the individual level
  - The guarantee to make human Umwelten a meta-description with an ethical awareness
- a dynamically-evolving  
and ever-developing  
**SELF**

# Hoffmeyer's three layered schema of interactive human *Umwelten*



as unique individuals;  
determined by DNA



as human species, with a  
self-consciousness and in  
need of horizontal  
communication with  
others; —→ **emphasizing  
with other people**



as human species,  
with a conscious  
transgression of  
its own species and  
cultural limits to  
interact with other  
lives; —→  
**emphasizing with all  
other lives**



- Umwelt is not a solipsistic world, and every Umwelt need interactions with others to make itself complete.

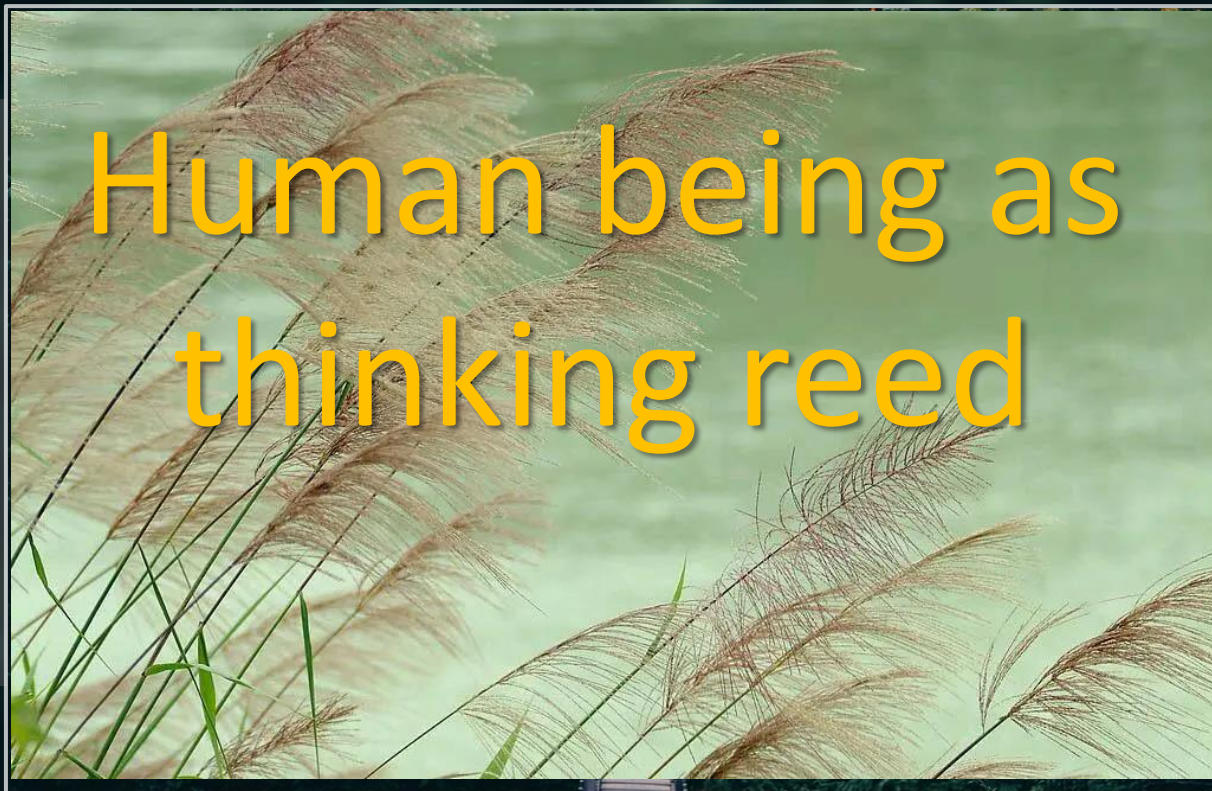


- Hereditary life message is transmitted through DNA and passed to next generation.

- Human Umwelten prefers interacting with each other horizontally.

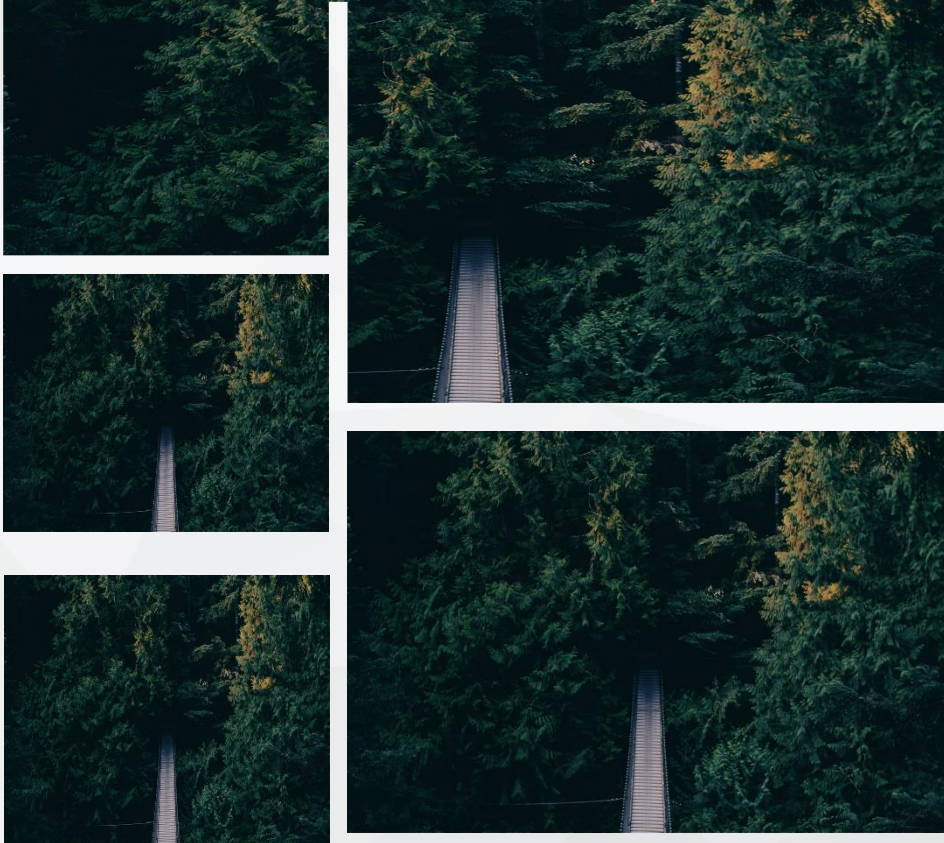


- Human Umwelten has a higher degree of flexibility of coding transposition and freedom of interpretation, which is at the root of human evolution in terms of culture.



- Humans may have very variable, diversified, and unpredictable ethical undertakings through their interactions with other (un)living and (un)thinking communities.

# Human *Umwelten* may as:



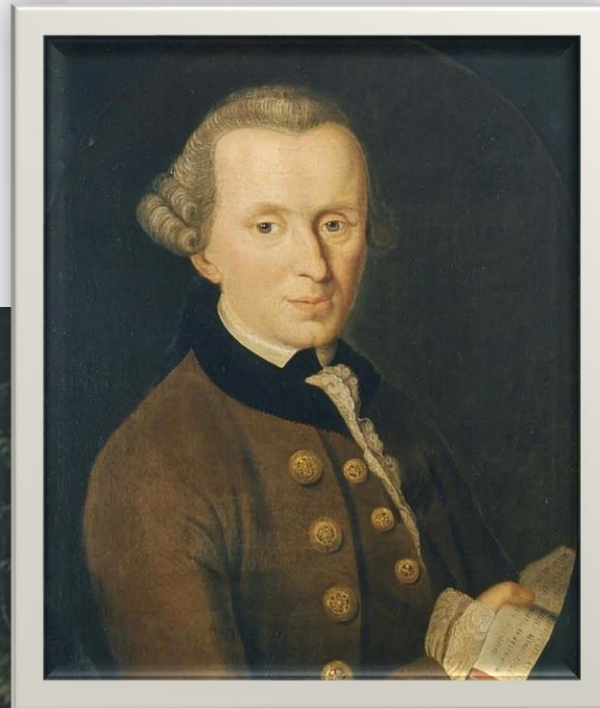
- A The aggregation of individual human's Umwelt
- B The Umwelten of human beings as a species
- C The Umwelten of specific form of aggregation of human, for example, as different communities, or as population
- D A totalized as well as concrete world of meaning of human subjects
- E An ethical and meta-description of human subjects' meaning world



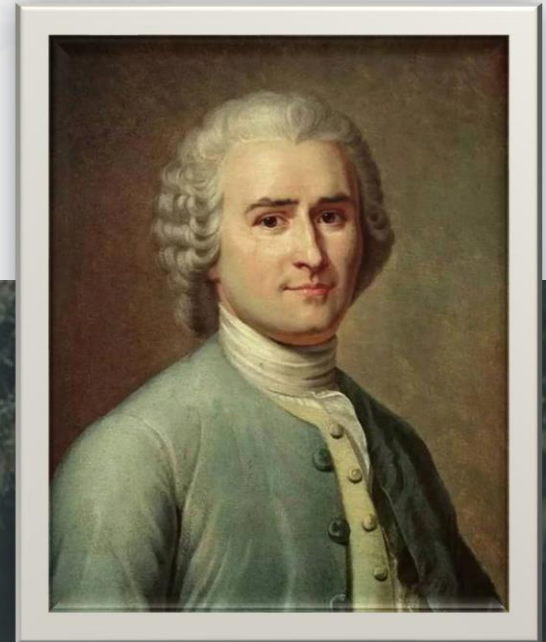
To extend our discussions of human *Umwelten*  
on the communal level: taking a cue from  
“common sense”



Third Earl of Shaftesbury



Kant



Rousseau

# Uexküll and Foucault on knowledge

I'm the  
center of my  
universe!



We're living  
in the solar  
system!

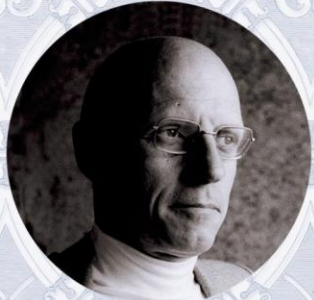


**“There is nothing by nature is political, but everything can be politicalized”;**

**Common sense and knowledge, are two of the means that ties closely a political penetration with human Umwelt's construction.**



# MICHEL FOUCAULT



SECURITY, TERRITORY,  
POPULATION

LECTURES AT THE COLLÈGE DE FRANCE  
1977-1978

EDITED BY MICHEL SENELLART; TRANSLATED BY GRAHAM BURCHELL  
GENERAL EDITORS: FRANÇOIS EWALD & ALESSANDRO FONTANA  
ENGLISH SERIES EDITOR: ARNOLD J. DAVIDSON

PICADOR

## Two formation processes of “population”

- human species
- public

### Definition :

- “The population is therefore everything that extends from biological rootedness through the species up to the surface that gives one a hold provided by the public.” (Foucault 2009: 75)

# A reading of Uexküll's dewdrop metaphor

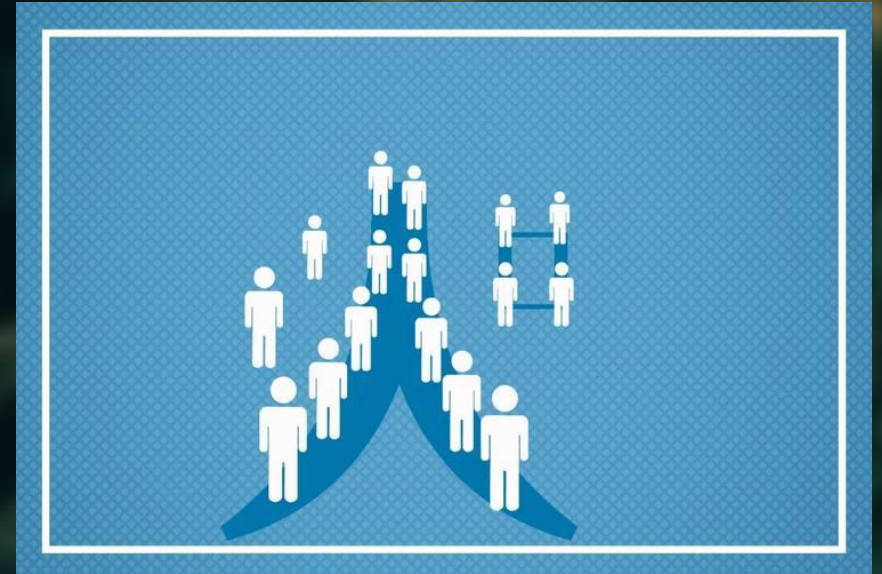
“Each of these myriads of drops mirrors all the world with the sun, the mountain, the forests and the shrubs, a magical world within itself. Imagine for a moment, in his mind, that each one of these innumerable drops does not only shine in the diversity of the shimmering colors, but also possesses its own subjective tone, the one that distinguishes all living beings, then you will understand that the theory of environment has nothing to do with the silly solipsism.” (von Uexküll 1938: 47-48' qtd., Brentari 167)



**A supersensible factor guarantees “agreement among the different images reflected in subjects .” (Brentati 167)**



Through the lens of “population”,  
and to regard a population as a  
subject:



A population has its own Umwelt, constantly interacts with itself and other populations' Umwelts.

The Uexkullian supersensible factor falls into the interaction between “dispositifs de sécurité” as milieu and “population”, the former conducts the latter, and the latter contributes to the adjusting of the former.

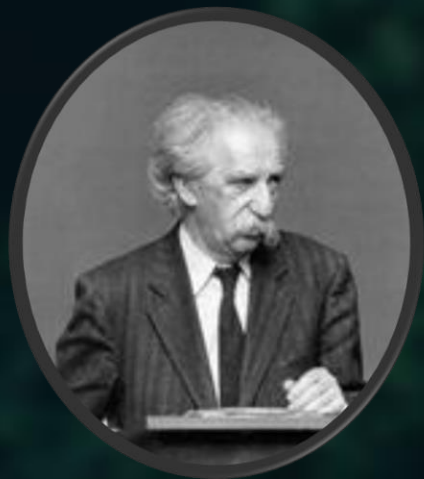
Through the lens of “population”, and to regard a population as a subject:



“Hence the theme of man, and the ‘human sciences’\* that analyze him as a living being, working individual, and speaking subject, should be understood on the basis of the emergence of population as the correlate of power and the object of knowledge. After all, man..., is nothing other than a figure of population.” (Foucault 2009: 79)

**An individual’s Umwelt is nothing other than a figure of the population’s Umwelt where s/he belongs to.**





**“population” as a  
perspective/method  
of describing human  
*Umwelten***

“ What in fact is this enormous amount of people who now live on this planet and will maybe live here also in the future? Is it a conglomeration of individuals who live only in order to take over from each other territory and the right to live?**Or is this conglomeration of individuals one method of description and each individual by himself or herself another method of description?** Thus no method of description rules out another method of description. It is as if in their reciprocal tension they create a third viewpoint.” (Torop 2000: 14–15; qotd. Torop 2009: xxx. )



# A discussion of Ott Puumeister's Umwelt-theory influenced conceptualization of biopolitics

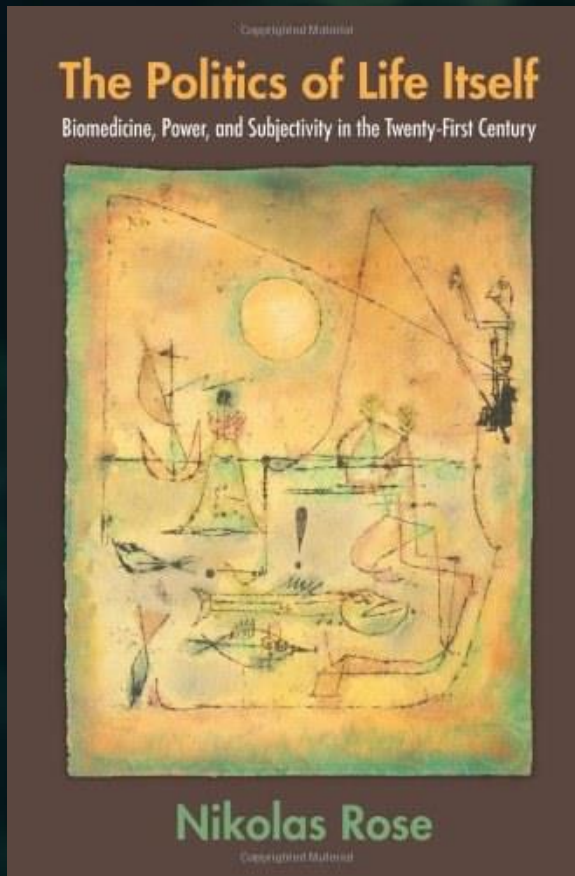
**1. Theoretical Foundation: Uexkull's concept of "Umwelt", Giorgio Agamben's biopolitical concept of "bare life", Canguilhem's concept of "normative"**

- To envision a biopolitics that "does not reduce life to a mere cog in the biopolitical machine", and understand "life as subjectification (the ongoing construction of an umwelt by the organism)" and "the vital process itself in an almost political sense: to live means to constantly individualised and unique experience toward this circumstance to go against the supreme power."  
**2. Presupposition: In the circumstance there are always situations of exception and urgency on a neutral being, as well as the vitality that bursts forth from this living life's individualised and unique experience toward this circumstance to go against the supreme power.**
- interpret and negotiate one's subjectivity in relation to an environment and to other living beings", and "Normalization does not, thus, eliminate freedom of choice..." (Puumeister 2019: 119)





- Foucault also speaks of a kind of practice of non-deprivation of freedom, but it is an ethical praxis, called “**self-technology**”, of which we may understand as a free choice of style of existence.
- Naturally, it uses the body as the basis for the creation of an individualised, stylised existence.
- Style is formed in the constant process of norm creations and the constant challenge to them.
- This is what Foucault sees as the true process of subjectification, the realm of possibility rather than necessity.



- The rising of molecular biopolitics;
- An **“ethos-politics”** was invented to help to face up those realities newly formed by a biological control society;
- Hope was set in the collaborative work of individuals’ self-technology (ethics) with that what good governments must do (responsibility);
- Ethics can be a vital force to form and practice responsibility, as long as individuals are interacting with their biosphere and semiosphere as species and populations.



## Conclusion

### The Approach to Umwelt: “Participatory Observation”

Why Biopolitics?

**“The fundamentals of umwelt theory have passed through significant transformations every time they have entered a new cultural theoretical paradigm.” (Magnus, Kull 659).**

Practice & Self-reflection

The Observed in Umwelt

Biosemiotics

A Third Viewpoint/  
Metadiscipline

the Observation

Ideology

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**Thanks**

For Your Attention!

