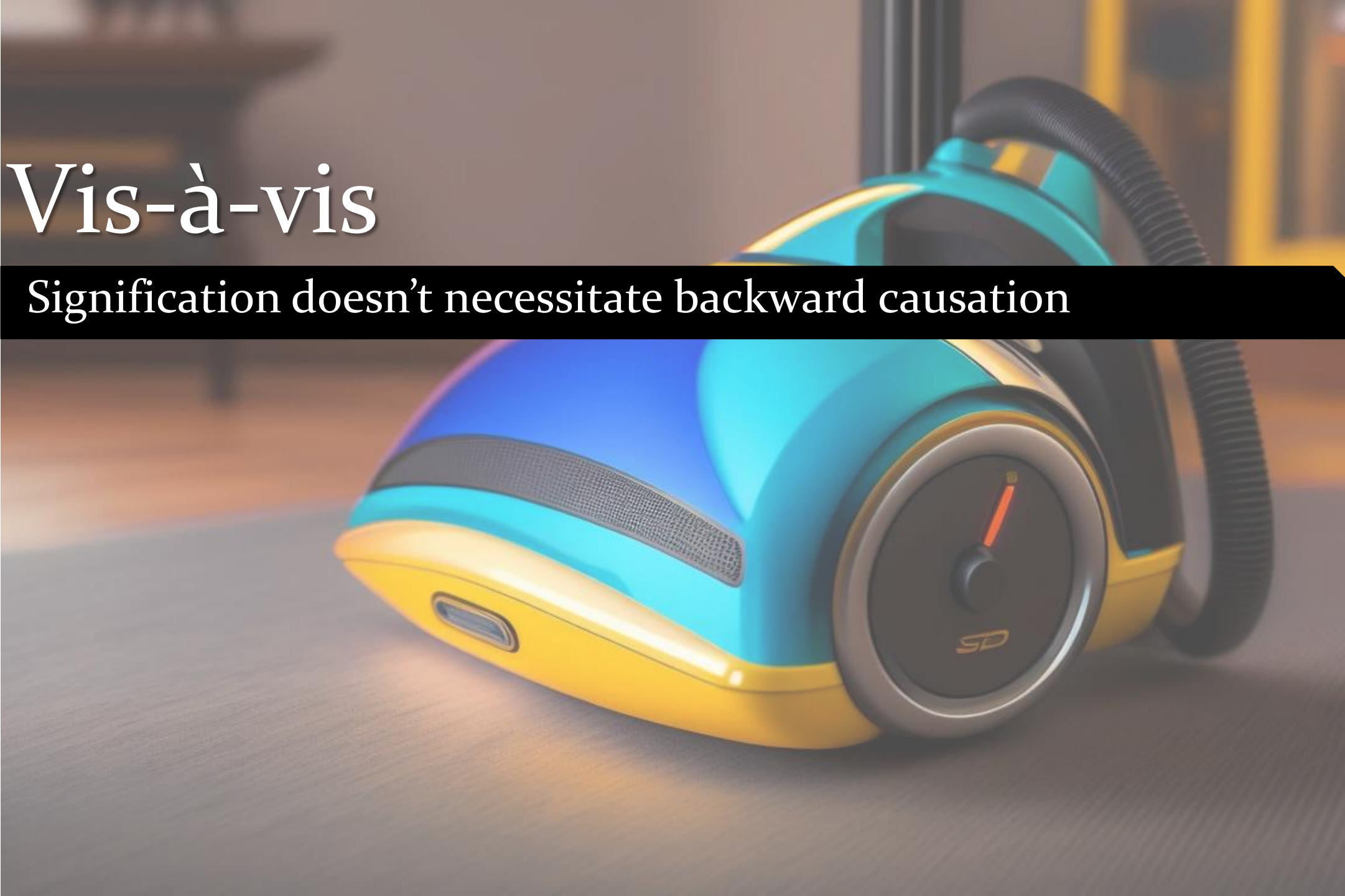




# Vis-à-vis

Signification doesn't necessitate backward causation



claudio  
rodríguez



## In this presentation

- Vacuum cleaners
- Time travel!
- Deflation (!!!)





# The future in the past

Causes for confusion



# Semiotic causality—conceptually?

- bringing about effects through interpretation (Hoffmeyer 2007: 152)
- The action of signs [...] is the way signs influence the world, including the world of experience and knowledge, but extending even to the physical world of nature beyond the living (Deely 2008: 437)





## What causes causes?

Thirdness, in the teleological view

*How can signs cause anything? Do they exist as *entities* capable of causing something? Hoffmeyerian biosemiotics is partly **built** upon the notion that signs are sustainable entities that modify behavior which, in turn, modifies the environment. But it's the part where these entities do something that needs a theoretical background to be posited as viable.*



# Completing the metaphysical picture

## Subjectivity

- “everything separates us from the universe” [148]{deelyPost}
- A subject is something the ‘essence’ of whatever exists--the being as an individual subject
- Individual *existences*

## Objectivity

- what “obtains in consciousness” (subjective objectivity)
- *quid/Res and objectum*
- What happens in the object is significant of something.
- ... when we put ... into our ...

**SUPRASUBJECTIVITY!**



# Types of causes

## Vis a tergo

- Force from behind
- Some  $x$  at *time  $n$*  causes  $y$  at *time  $n+1$*

## Vis a prospecto

- Force from the view ahead
- some  $y$  at *time  $n$*  causes  $x$  at *time  $n-1$*

can we bilk it?



the mark of the presence of  
semiosis is the influence of  
the future upon the present

the smoking gun: [165]{deelyPurelyObjectiveReality2009}



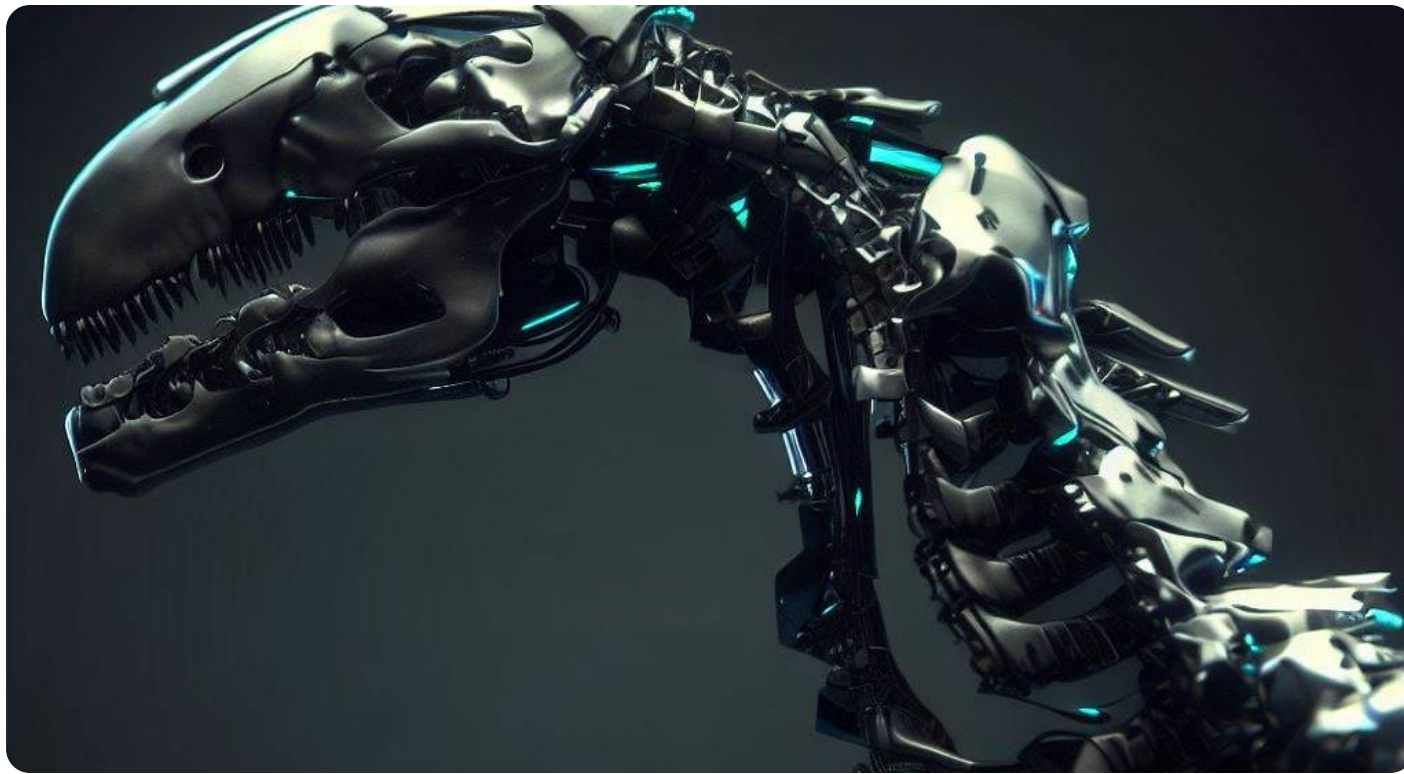


## Two argumental possibilities

(1) At the epistemological level, backwards causation happens when we resignify the past

(2) At the ontological level, the existence of individualities in the past is contingent on sign relations uniting these individualities *qua* objects of a sign and thus necessarily connected to a representamen and an interpretant, even traversing time

# The dinosaur bone argument



- At some point in *time n* a dinosaur dies
- The body of the dinosaur rots away and its bones petrify
- The petrified bones are found at a *time n+z*
- A future observer understands that the petrified bones belonged to what they understand as a dinosaur, despite there not being a dinosaur at all at *time n+z*

**Addendum: while the petrified bones are not observed, they are still part of a sign relation in virtuality**



Does the future *change* the  
past?

(1) Vs (2)!



## No modal acceptance

No modality because:

Since we have sign relations there couldn't be another universe in which we wouldn't have had those sign relations, and that because we have metarelations (i.e., metacognition, or what Deely calls metasemiosis), we have a physical environment that is the way it is because it addresses future states (479)

- Deely's semiotic causality and vis a prospecto do not accept modal analyses. (Is there a possible world in which there was no cognition?)
- (2) [what I take to be Deely's proper sense of semiotic causality] needs end-directedness

Following Peirce, a thought exists because it addresses a more developed thought in the future; thoughts are signs; thoughts pertain to semiosis; if semiosis is involved in physical actions, then the physical is what it is because it addresses future physical states



## Big ifs!

- Even if Peirce suggests that thought (qua consciousness) exists in virtue of its usefulness, this is appended by an appeal to the existence of a community, and so its interpretation is pragmatic (maybe)—dictum!
- Deely conflates the effects of a cause with the cause itself: If signs have indeed caused something physical to happen, then the physical thing that has been caused addresses some future physical states. But we would need to accept that the physical thing (or fact) that has happened is identical with the sign that has caused it.

## Back to vacuum cleaners

$T_2(S_2) \rightarrow T_1(S_1) \rightarrow T_1(Th_1)$

- Have vacuum cleaners changed past dinosaurs into plastic-bearing entities?
- Yes, but only in a trivial sense
- If we want to preserve any sense of realism about facts and identities, this type of sign causality is out, except trivially





## A positive/parsimonious view

Pointers:

- Sign causality is an emergent class
- Realism about relations in a less strict sense
- Refusal of relations as identities with properties
- Types of relations for basal cognition: nomologic and non-nomological?