

**The Toolbox System (TS):
Thesis on the potential to foster self-awareness
and other-awareness using Semiotics**

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Declaration

I, declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Abstract

Based on the increasing demand for resources to enhance self-esteem, the Toolbox System (TS) is a framework of tools devised to foster the development of self-awareness and other-awareness in its users. This thesis presents my research on and conceptualisation of the TS. It proposes the use of Semiotics and recursion as tools to manage concepts of awareness. The use of Semiotics involves, but is not limited to, the analysis of texts such as photos, videos, artworks, and the like. This creates a context that allows the users to engage in inductive, deductive, and abductive reasoning. The aim is for users to gain clarity about their values and convictions, using tools to evaluate worldviews and establish meaning. This triggers a process of cultivation, which can potentially lead to self-actualisation and the development of empathy. The process of cultivation refers to Simmel's thoughts on culture. For the purposes of the thesis, cultivation is considered key in the development of the individual's sense of identity and purpose, thus impacting culture. The tools that could be included in the TS are not limited. While the TS uses semiotic concepts and techniques, the toolbox may contain other tools from various disciplines. The thesis refers to tool samples drawn from theories and research on individual needs, values and motivation, and self-perception among others. Although referring to various disciplines, the TS is designed to introduce the use of Semiotics in the area of self-development, making a significant contribution to both fields.

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Glossary

meaning:

“A kind of weighted average of the various ‘meanings’ attached to a concept over time” (Van Osselaer 2001, 12). It is connected to *temporal* processes, emerging via a kind of ‘journey’ made by the subject (Tarasti 2000, 18).

According to Minski

What people call ‘meanings’ do not usually correspond to particular and definite structures, but to connections among and across fragments of the great interlocking networks of connections and constraints among our agencies (Cited in Van Osselaer 2001, 3).

Semiotics:

The study of signs, and sign systems. Also known as *Semiology*; as defined by Saussure: “a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life” (1974, 16). Sign systems may include words, pictures, photos, art, drawings, sounds, body language, and objects. In the TS, Semiotics is used as a method for the systematic study of signs and the processes that represent meanings.

text:

For the purposes of the thesis, text refers to re-presentations of life included in books, film, video, audio recordings, photographs, cartoons, art, and the like.

tools:

Refers to the resources and paradigms available to the user. In the TS the tools are classified into formal tools and material tools in reference to Heidegger’s concept of causality (1977, 6). However, the tools are not limited to the

categories expressed in the thesis, but rather the tool and its category are determined in the moment by the user. “Wherever ends are pursued and means are employed, wherever instrumentality reigns, there reigns causality” (Ibid).

The TS recycles existing techniques and methods, such as abstract concepts, theories, social constructions and codes, to be used as tools. The tools that appear in the TS Thesis are samples of the possibilities of the toolbox contents.

TS or Toolbox System:

A system containing tools used to examine scenarios created by the semiotic analysis of re-presentations of life. The system is developed with the final purpose of increasing its user’s self-awareness and other-awareness, in order to foster self-actualisation and empathy.

TS Thesis:

Refers to the proposal, research and sample, provided in this document, to substantiate the design of the TS. The TS Thesis has two versions of the sample: an electronic copy and, a hard copy containing the materials used in the samples.

Preface

The initial research for the Toolbox System (TS) was prompted by the identification of an increasing need to generate resources to enhance self-esteem for young people in Australia (Mission Australia Youth Survey 2011, 2012). However, as the research evolved, it became apparent that the TS could be highly adaptable to its users and thus a wide variety of individuals of all ages could take advantage of it. Therefore, I no longer feel compelled to see it as a program designed exclusively for youth.

The TS was designed to assist its users in the development of self-awareness and other-awareness, in order to foster self-actualization and empathy. For the purposes of the thesis, the use of the term 'self-actualisation' will be understood according to Maslow's treatment of the concept in his works (1943; 1968; 1970). Maslow defines it, in line with Kurt Goldstein, as "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (1943, 382). The scope of this thesis only allows for an outline highlighting the potential of the TS to foster self-awareness and other-awareness. The thesis represents a sketch for the design of the TS, focusing on a description of its purpose, tool selection rationale and methodology. Contained in the TS Thesis are two samples of the TS, which include a handful of tools presented as illustrations of the TS potential. There is no tangible limit to the tools that can be included.