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A Deeper Picture: A Realist Semiotics of Non-Fiction Film

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A 'Philosophy of Put Togethers'

(Collage is) an important mode of theorizing and model building as well as art-making (Perloff, 1998)

...not just a physical technique (...) but rather as a philosophical attitude, an aesthetic position that can suffuse virtually any expressive medium (Hopkin, 1997)

...giving shareable form to our experiences of being-in-relation with the natural necessity of the world (Wilson, 2021)

Realism and Non-Fiction Film

Many of the confusions and aporia that have plagued documentary studies, particularly with reference to truth, objectivity, and realism, have either been solved or at least substantially clarified within the paradigm of critical realism (MacLennan, 1999)

Direct capture of reality
Objectivist

Creative mediation of reality
Subjectivist



Montage and Causal Inference



Ken Loach, 11'09"01 September 11, 2002

Montage and Causal Inference

Shot 1



(Wayne, 2020)

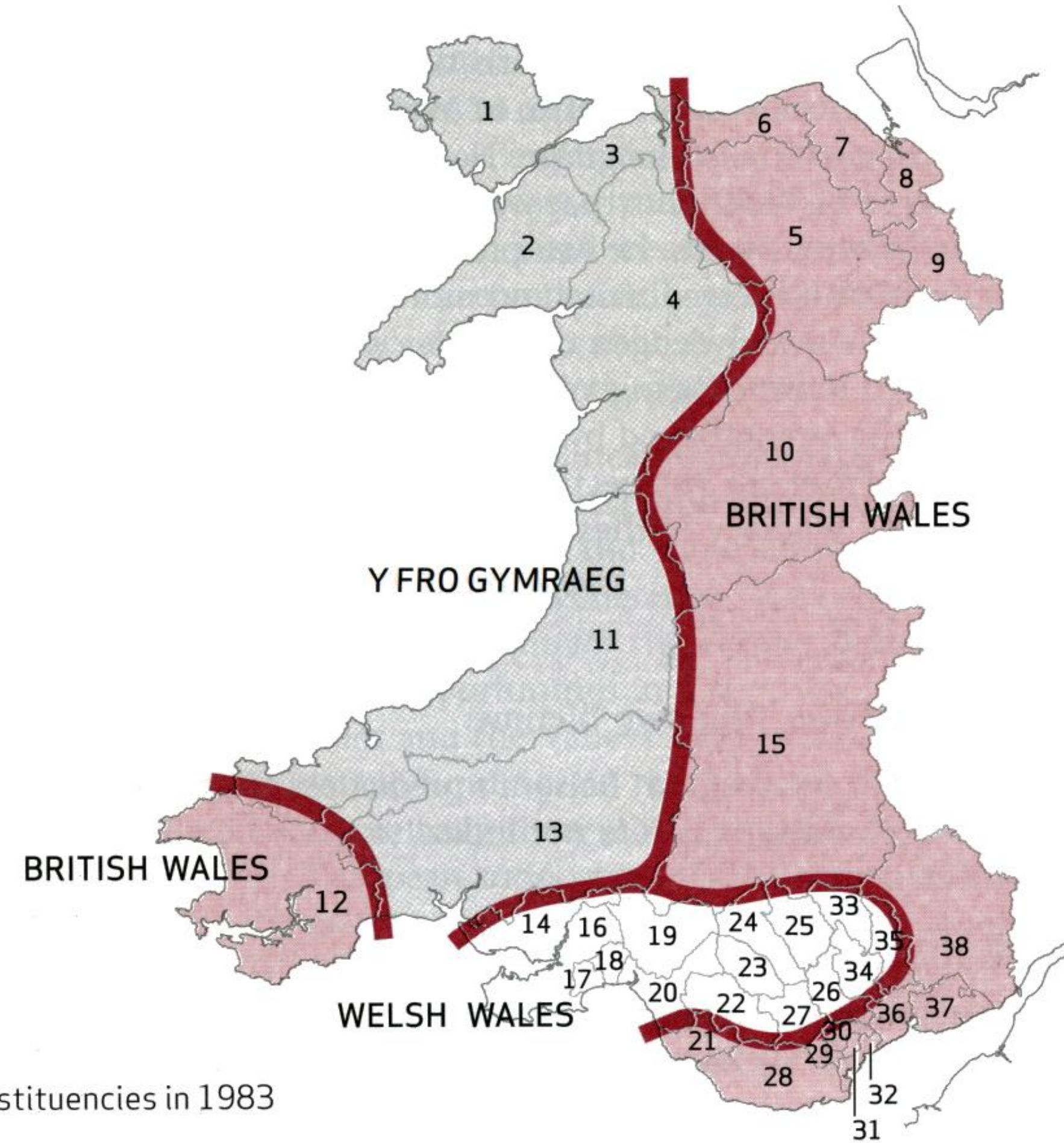
Shot 2



The Cut

Ontological Depth

‘Welsh Wales’ in Balsom’s ‘3 Wales’ Model



The Constituencies in 1983

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Ynys Mon | 14 Llanelli | 27 Pontypridd |
| 2 Caernarfon | 15 Brecon and Radnor | 28 Vale of Glamorgan |
| 3 Conway | 16 Gower | 29 Cardiff West |
| 4 Meirionnydd Nant Conwy | 17 Swansea West | 30 Cardiff North |
| 5 Clwyd South-West | 18 Swansea East | 31 Cardiff Central |
| 6 Clwyd North-West | 19 Neath | 32 Cardiff South and Penarth |
| 7 Delyn | 20 Aberavon | 33 Blaenau Gwent |
| 8 Alyn and Deeside | 21 Bridgend | 34 Islwyn |
| 9 Wrexham | 22 Ogmore | 35 Torfaen |
| 10 Montgomery | 23 Rhondda | 36 Newport West |
| 11 Ceredigion and Pembroke North | 24 Cynon Valley | 37 Newport East |
| 12 Pembroke | 25 Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney | 38 Monmouth |
| 13 Carmarthen | 26 Caerphilly | |

The Identity and History of ‘Welsh Wales’

Identity should be seen as complex, plural, contingent and socially reproduced.

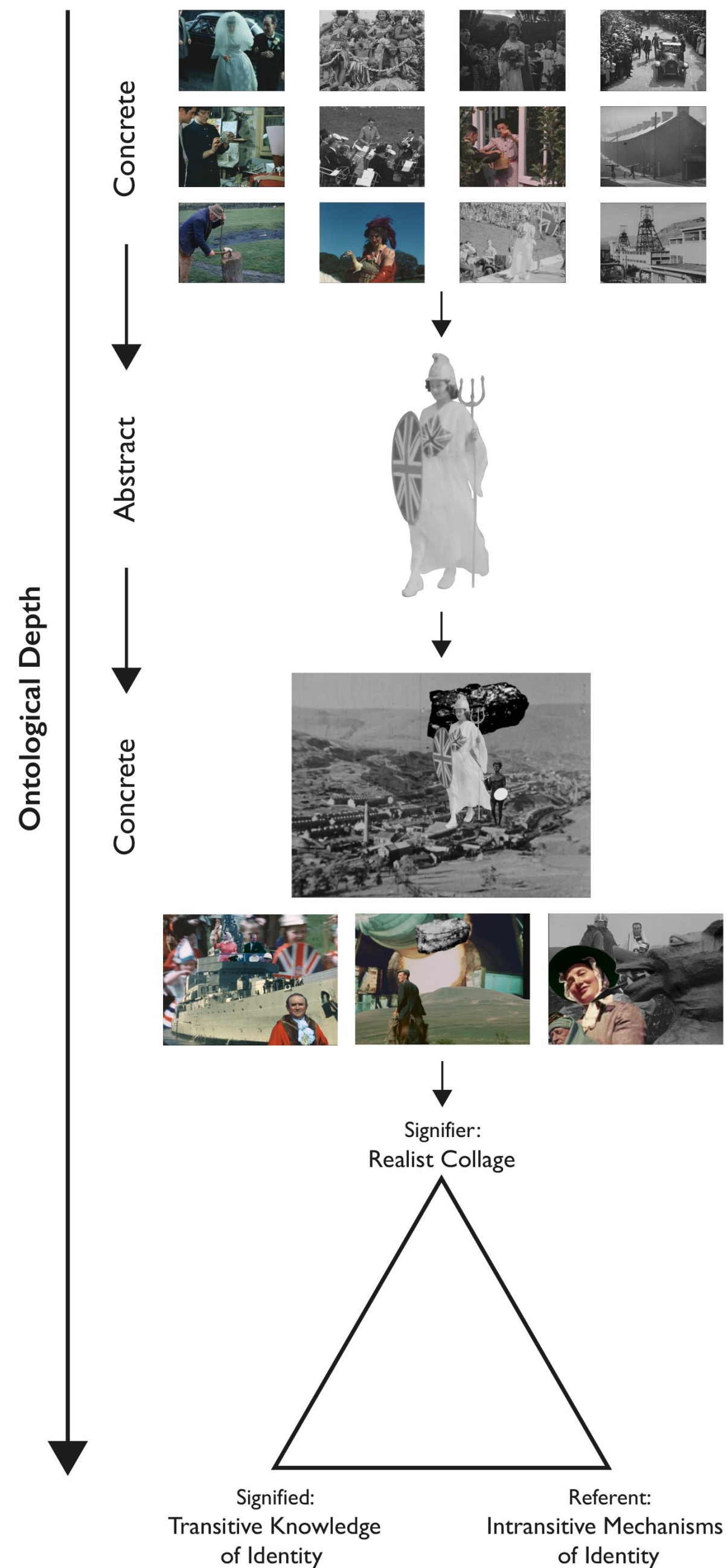
This can be predicated on the critical realist questions:

What must exist for the ‘Welsh Wales’ identity to be what it is?

What causal mechanisms have produced the ‘Welsh Welsh’ identity?

Critical engagement works towards unmasking and unpacking the changing, relatively enduring ‘structured but composite formations’ (Wayne, 2018) that point to the causal forces ‘underneath’ identity, to render a ‘complex prismatic account’ (Wayne, 2018) of Welshness.





Stage 1 - Abduction

- * Observation and thematic analysis conducted in response to theories of Welsh history and identity
- * Theoretical reinterpretation and re-description
- * Division and sorting in response to themes

Stage 2 - Abstraction

- * The production of metonymic fragments through spatial extraction and abstraction

Stage 3 - Retroduction

- * Spatial decontextualisation and juxtaposition
- * Exploration of metaphor in retroducting casual mechanisms and structures

The Research Process

Hermeneutics

...it is the characteristic error of hermeneutics to dissolve intransitivity (Bhaskar, 1979)

...does not follow that language and ways of thinking are unconstrained by the world (Fairclough et al., 2002)

Interpretation is both motivated and determined by socio-historical (transitive) and existential (intransitive) factors. Therefore, clearly, interpretation cannot be regarded as irreducibly subjective or relativistic in nature (Cashell, 2009)

Film artefacts present a materialisation of the abstractions of race, class, gender, and nation as they are lived and a part of everyday life (Zimmerman, 2007)

Abduction

...demands a theoretical language that penetrates the empirical surface and forges contact with the reality that exists beneath the level of events (Blom & Morén, 2011)

Individual phenomena are understood as embedded in, and an outcome of, social structures (Danermark et al., 2019)

Abduction and Thematic Analysis

- *Experiential themes - observed events in the empirical domain*

Experiential themes relate to what can be seen in the recorded events.

- *Inferential themes - unobserved but occurring events in the actual domain*


Inferential themes relate to what is not directly recorded and observable, but we can reasonably infer exists or has existed.

- *Dispositional themes - unobservable causal powers and potential mechanisms in the real domain*

This assigns themes that indicate the cause of the events recorded. Referring to theories about the properties and powers that must exist in order to produce the identity of 'Welsh Wales'.

(Adapted from Ronkainen and Wiltshire, 2021)

Thematic Analysis and Causal Mechanisms

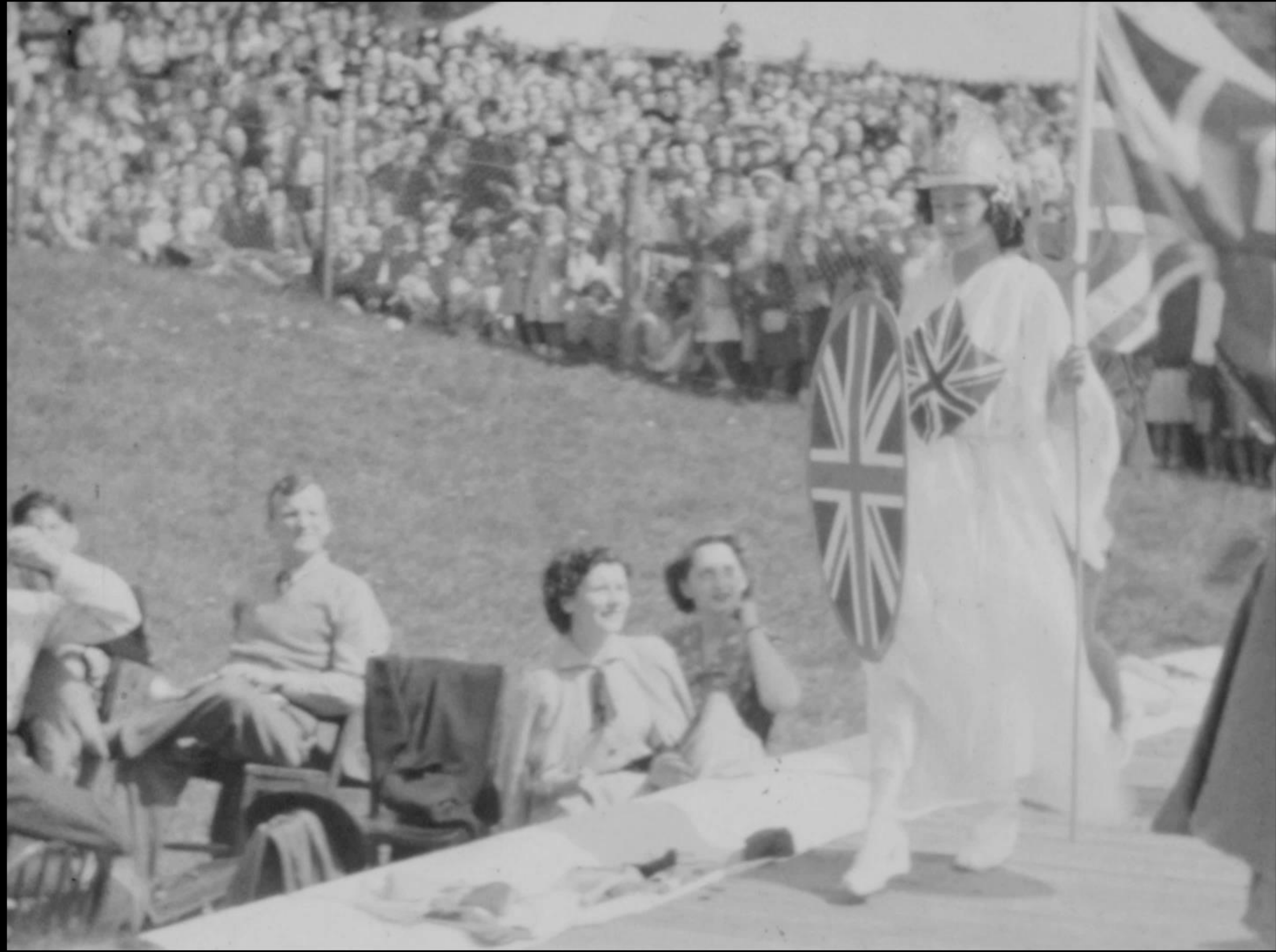
Still	File	Timecode	<i>Experiential</i>	<i>Inferential</i>	<i>Dispositional</i>
	<p><u>50 years of ITV</u> <u>Roll 1599879943</u> <u>602419 AT1641</u></p>	<p>00:00 – 00:36</p>	<p>Talking head interview in street about the morality of gambling. Aberfan circa mid 60s Question in reference to gambling during the depression ‘To expect anything for nothing is immoral, in the bingo hall or the stock exchange.’ ‘It was very natural for a man drawing very little on the dole to spend a tenner and hope to get 5 bob in those days of depression’ Question in reference to social aspects of gambling ‘This is a sociological problem – we are moving very rapidly into an automation age – where people work less and have more leisure. I enjoy my leisure – I am comparably educated. I can find pleasure in everything but gambling. We have to produce a democracy that can do that – find its leisure in everything but gambling’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hostility to gambling • The inferred connection between gambling and financial market • Hostility to capitalism • A puritan attitude to social ‘immorality’ • The roots of immorality in the depression era • Pride in education and knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialist political consciousness • Deprivation, unemployment and poverty • The emergence of the working-class culture from nonconformist radicalism

Abstraction and Metonym

Reality may be in one piece when lived, but to be thought about and communicated it must be parcelled out. Our minds can no more swallow the world whole at one sitting than can our stomachs (Ollman, 2001)

Even where we are interested in wholes we must select and abstract their constituents (Sayer, 1992)

...an abstract referent more concrete (Chandler, 2007)





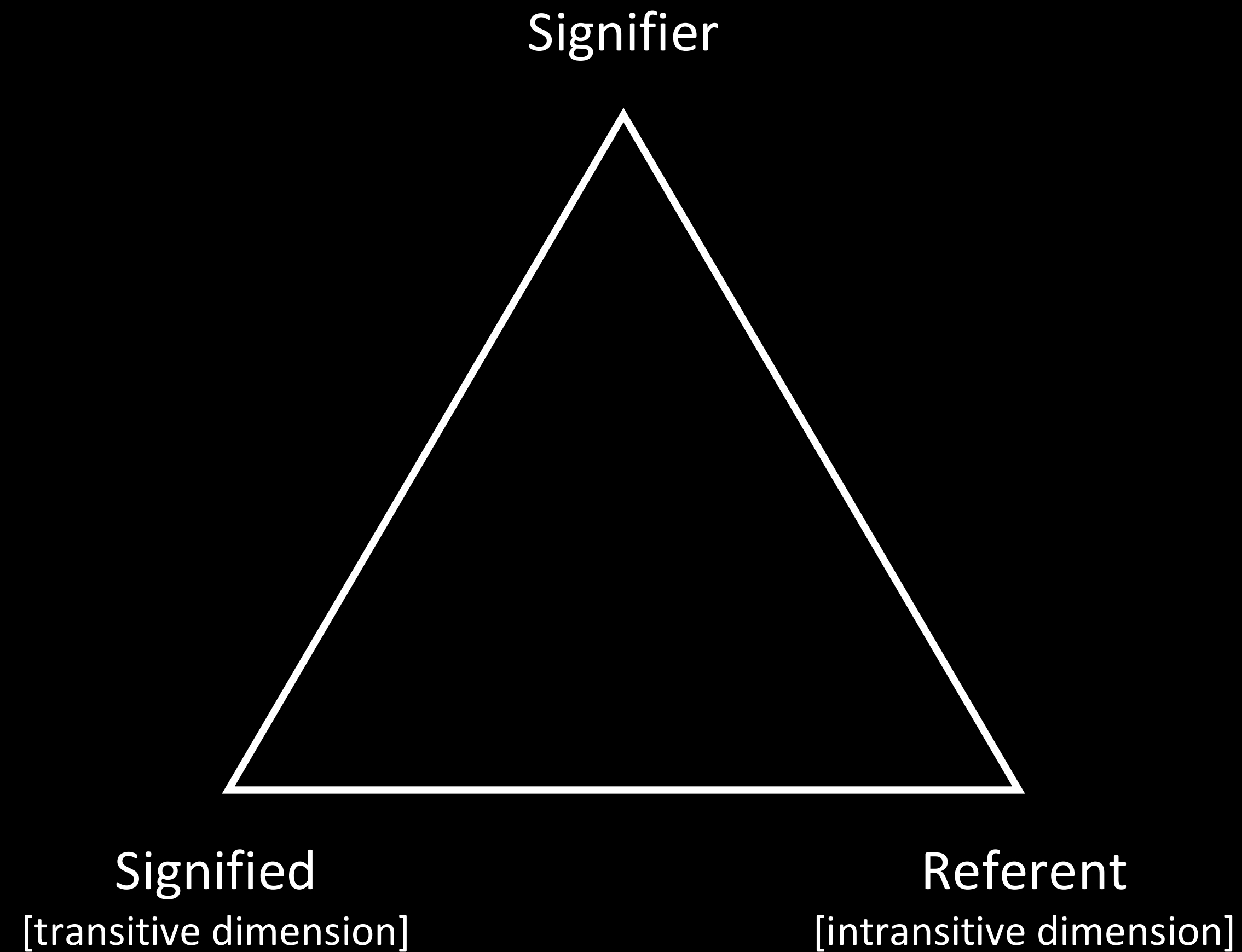
Semiotics and Signs

Signifier \longleftrightarrow Signified



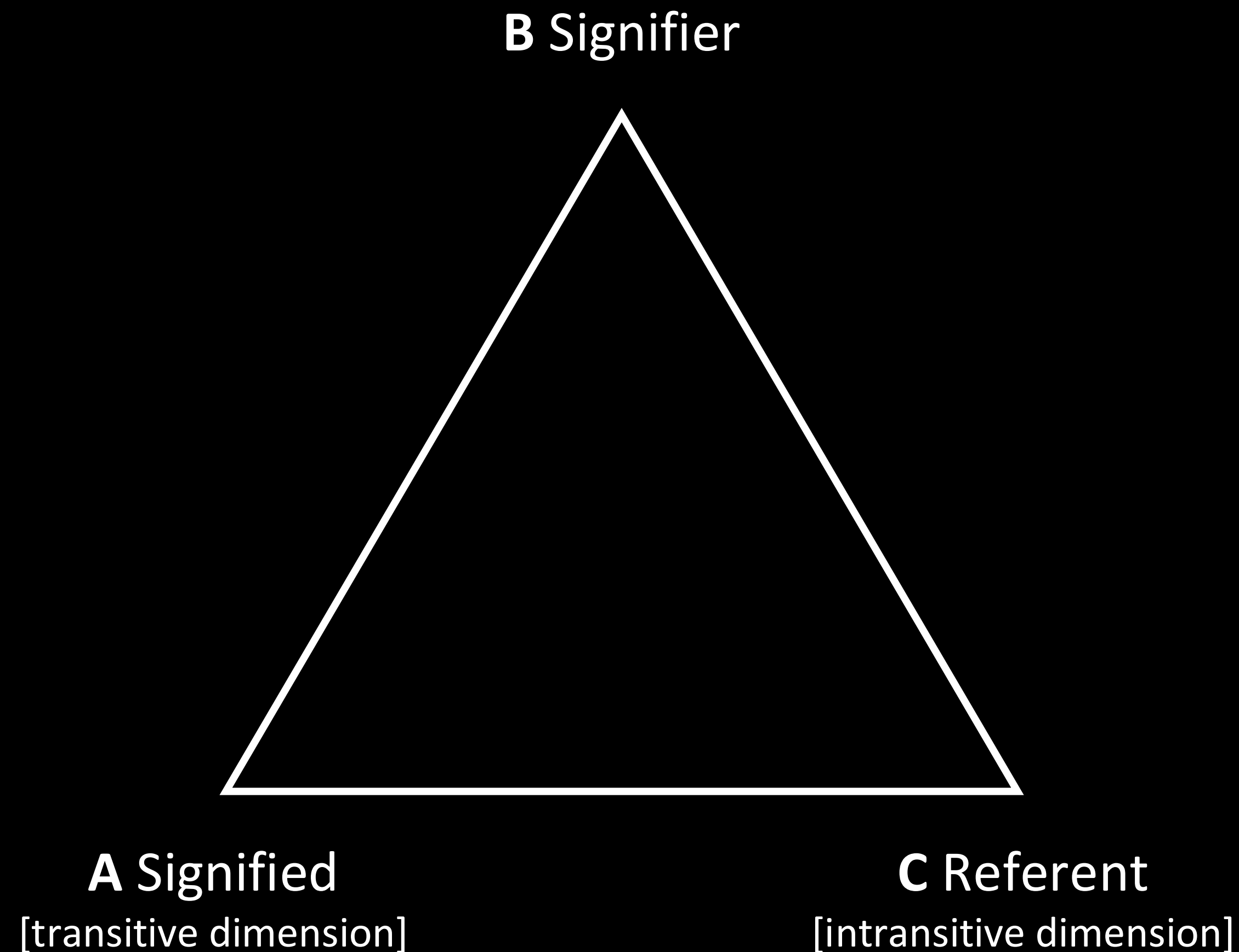
The Intransitive

...it cannot be incorporated into critical realism (Nelhaus, 1998)



(Source: Nellhaus, 1998)

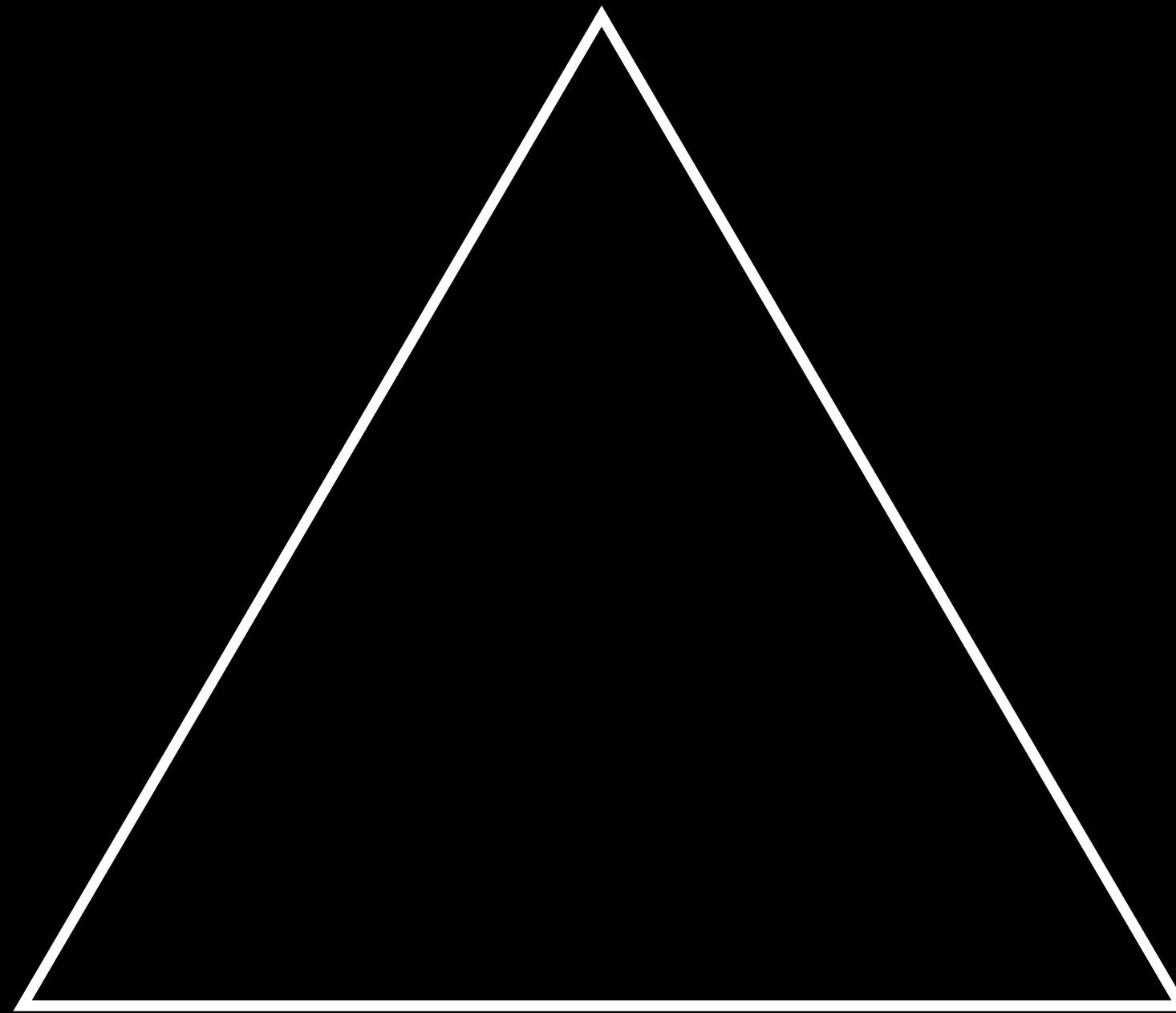
The centrepiece of any adequate theory of meaning must be the semiotic triangle
(Bhaskar, 1993)



(Source: Cashell, 2009)

...if A is the transitive and C the intransitive, then B is the process of representation that mediates their interaction (...) The transitive can therefore be recapitulated as the intransitive mediated through representation (Cashell, 2009)

Signifier:
Realist Collage



Signified:
Transitive Knowledge
of Identity

Referent:
Intransitive Mechanisms
of Identity

Aesthetic experience is an experience of being-in-relation - with our own experience, but, so too, between our “internal” psychic world and the “external” world of objects, events and things (Wilson, 2021)

Retroduction and Generative Metaphor

When each of the abstracted aspects has been examined it is possible to combine the abstractions so as to form concepts which grasp the concreteness of their objects (Sayer, 1992)

Descriptions of retroduction are abstract at best (Fletcher, 2017)

...retroduction and abduction (are) ‘two sides of a coin’. On the one hand, abductive theorizing is epistemological in the sense of directing attention to how we should think in terms of scientific innovation. Retroduction is ontological in the sense of unearthing mechanisms that are part of manifested reality. Creative imagination (abduction) is needed to study mechanisms (retroduction) (Jagosh, 2020)

It is only through (CR) metaphor that such avenues for further exploration come to our attention (Lewis, 1996)

