**The End of Decoding PART 1**

By Scott Simpkins

In her collection of essays, *Anecdotal Theory*, Jane Gallop proposes an alternative to a formal academic rhetoric by using an initiating paragraph *as a theoretical basis for a thesis presentation.* In order to *produce a more lucid theory,* Gallop writes, she *experimented [in the 1990s] with writing in which she would recount an anecdote and then attempt to *read* that account for the theoretical insights it afforded* (2002: 2, emphasis added). *Anecdotal theory would cut through* the *"oppositions" of *"anecdote" and *"theory,"* she adds, *"in order to produce theory with a better sense of humour, theorising which honours the uncanny detail of lived experience.* To apply that principle here, I will begin with a story about John Deely, the contemporary American philosopher and semiotician.

**Rubber Pencil**

About ten years ago, I was editing a volume of conference-proceedings with John, and I visited his office with the camera-ready manuscript I had typeset. John is meticulous about such things and while we were arguing about something on a page that he claimed wasn’t centred, I told him he was wrong that what he perceived as off-centred was just an optical illusion. Then I added: *"You know, like a rubber pencil."* He gave me a strange look of noncomprehension and asked what that was.

To better appreciate this anecdote, know that John was about 55/60 at the time, is well read and arguably smart, a world traveler, produces at least a book a year, is familiar with American culture, and so on. Accordingly, I didn’t think he could have been serious about this – he had to be joking.

But he said he wasn’t.

I walked over to his desk, picked up a pencil, and performed the “rubber-pencil” with it (i.e., holding it like rubber when you do that).

“Did you put that on my desk?” he demanded.

Finally, after several minutes of explanation he understood the phenomenon and we went back to arguing about the book pages. My point here is that, in semiotics, believing in decoding is the same as John Deely believing that he saw me flexing a strip. And, to some extent, he did. It always looks like rubber when you do that.

The same is true for decoding. If a semiotician countenances the illusion of a reality, then decoding is, indeed, possible.

Still, “decoding” is, in fact, nothing but an illusion.

Decoding is not really possible, and its “end,” in the sense of a goal of some kind, is seldom considered in semiotics since it necessarily serves as a strategic “myth” (in Roland Barthes’s sense) for the existence of semiotics as a discipline (or whatever it is). There is undeniably an agenda, a purpose, a remainder behind the concept of “decoding,” as it enables a belief in the “success” of semiotic analysis – the ability, in other words, to “crack” the code of a given signifying entity.

But, nevertheless, decoding is surely nothing more than what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call a “literalization which fixes the differences of a relational system” (1985: 114). Or, perhaps one could modify this to read: which endows us with...

An apt illustration of this is found in the common belief (Peirce, Eco, et al.) that “infinite semiosis” is not truly infinite that a signifier ultimately carries with it “the possibility of fixing a meaning which underlies the flow of differences” (1985: 112). Signs, in effect, don’t refer only to other signs, this argument maintains; some sort of end – understanding or knowledge or even truth – will be the eventual, progressive outcome. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that a signifier ultimately refers to a transcendental signified, despite infinite semiosis. *The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning,* they suggest. *Every relation of representation is founded on a fiction that there is a presence at a certain level of something which, strictly speaking, is absent from it. But because it is at the same time a fiction and a principle organizing actual social relations, representation is* in the terrain of a game whose result is not predetermined from the beginning* (119). This argument is not very compelling, however. (In fact, the same contention is also found in reader-response literary criticism that maintains that the reader can’t do just whatever she wants with a text; that the text, in effect, exerts some control of some kind just by virtue of being a text.) Yet this view of semiotic restriction provides an opening for further consideration of the concept of decoding.

A hyperbolic example of this phenomenon can be found, perhaps, as the attempt to locate the monomous “denotation” (yet another myth) of a word, look up its definition in a dictionary (Ruhl; Simpkins 2002). Then look up the definition of each word in that definition. Et cetera. Rather than leading to an absurdly pointless exercise, eventually some sort of “definition” of that first word will emerge – a sense of what that word means to someone, in effect, through a process of what Gilbert Ryle (1968) and Clifford Geertz (1973) discuss as “thick description.”

For semiotics, acceptance of the viability of “decoding” arguably serves as a rationale to justify itself. If semiotics can provide an outcome for decoding a sign vehicle, leading to the equivalent of a sum or remainder, then something it has an end purpose. But, as numerous examples can show, it appears that nothing of any certainty or finally can ultimately be “gained” from decoding texts without accepting that these results are manufactured (or to use Nietzsche’s term, “invented” [1873] by the apparatus employed. Ultimately, then, any decoding would simply be a new encoding even further “away” from the truth of a signifying entity. And the process of semiotics carries on, endlessly.

Humans, Nietzsche maintains, have arranged an epistemological “peace treaty” which “brings in its wake something which appears to be the first step toward acquiring that puzzling truth drive; to wit, that which shall count as ‘truth’ from now on is established. That is to say, a universally valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language establishes likewise the first laws of truth” (1873: 889). This is how we “invented knowledge.” “Truth is a natural and a primitive world of metaphor,” Nietzsche concludes, “one can live with any repose, security, and consistency” (893).

Given the unarguably human, impersonal, even fabricated component of what we call decoding, Nietzsche’s perspective actually holds positive consequences for semiotics. It acknowledges that even if decoders don’t just passively decode sign vehicles they make them anew. Otherwise, if semioticians continue to pretend that decoding is a disinterested process with a “stated” or even an “implied” purpose (a common component of the scientific method), they are not being honest or even accurate about what happens in the course of decoding.

This is understandable, after all, for as Stanley Fish notes, the illusion of materiality, or consensus, or reproducibility of results, is undeniably seductive. Fish emphasizes the immense seduction of the materiality of the page in this regard. While he avers that “the objectivity of the text is an illusion,” it nevertheless is “a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing.” Hence, the illusion of sufficiency and completeness. A line of print or a page or a book is so obviously there – it can be handled, photographed, or put away – that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it (1972: 82). The text, along these lines, then, is...
essentially equivalent to the convincing sight of the rubber pencil. Such dishonesty or inaccuracy, however, is accompanied by a characteristic and commendable rational reticence, of course. No longer is decoding a fraudulent enterprise, a hat trick, an act of legendary, a tremendous con job – a rubber pencil. Yet, a practice based on a lie remains unscrupulous and lightly dismissed, he maintains. “To believe that the whole institution of literary interpretation is but a gigantic confidence trick, would strain even a necessary in order to establish a profession or discipline. The claims of schools and universities to offer literary training untainted by a lie is, alas, only too clear that is but a gigantic confidence trick, would strain even a necessary in order to establish a profession or discipline. His case, institutionalized literary interpretation) is accomplished.

compromise that undoes whatever progress is seemingly course. No longer is decoding a fraudulent enterprise, essentially equivalent to the convincing sight of the “anyone” (given a capital “A” now) is a character named of intelligibility that otherwise remains effectively a decoding grid that “naturally” fits as an overlay to the methodological analysis derived from the field of town”). Read in a (hypothetically posited) conventional by e. e. cummings (titled “anyone lived in a pretty how code to endow it with consistency” (1985: 36).

Regarding one of the main characters in Jane Austen’s exercising by the decoder (in a manner similar to “close one more approach to the text. It is clear, however, the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, the passengers in masses, and thought of them in those who walk past him. “At first my observations of the passers-by in the crowds of mid-nineteenth dust the cushions of Mr. Hooper’s pulpit” (38), yet the of “semblance” suggests both resemblance as well his meditative way towards the meeting-house” (37-38). The same situation can be found right now upon the decoder. This raises the question of whether Poe is the ultimate encoder of his stories on this issue, see Foucault, “What is an Author?” (1979). Poe qua author is well-known for having his narratives incorporate languages other than his “base” language of English (the uses Ancient Greek in this story as well, for instance).

A parallel scenario, then, is portrayed in the declaration of the narrator’s conclusion of what the man of crow signifies: that which “does not permit itself to be read” (i.e., the second quote, translated (506). The subject who resists signification, who inhabits an extra-semiotic realm, in other words, indeed, given the quote in German, in other words as well, leaves the text of the story in the upper hand of the narrator, who could only lastly be thought of as the stranger’s un-nameability: “This old man,” I said at length [and to whom he is speaking], “is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the stranger who has nowhere to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is the greatest book that is ever written” (Hornblow). The narrator nevertheless manages to override by virtue of giving a name to that which resists naming.

Veiled Meaning

A useful illustration of this resistance to decodability also appears in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836), a short story which begins when the parishioners of the Reverend Mister Hooper “beheld the semblance of” him “pacing slowly his meditatively towards the meetinghouse” (17). Hawthorne’s diction here, precisely in this stymied by one unusual character who does not resemble him to little end, not unlike when readers recognize that a narrator or reader is being forced to re-formulate a text as it is being read, (515). This closing line harks back to the opening peregrination, which provides a semiotic bombshell of sorts by relating, in that “semblance” suggests both resemblance as well as an entity that is a lesser version of an original. The only entity with which the decoder is forced to deal in the wonder than if some strange minister were coming to dust the cushions of Mister Hooper’s pulpit” (38), yet the reader is not given sufficient information to account for this. Conventionally, extra-semiotic entities are only easily placed this “site” in the category of what Barthes identifies as an “enigma” (5/2). A sign-vehicle rendered all the more problematic as it is encoded as something unusual, something escaping or perhaps even preceding intelligibility.

“Are you sure it is our parson?” one of the crowd asks the sexton, who functions apparently as the subject who is supposed to know (1836: 30). Again, Hawthorne draws attention to the process of decoding by virtue of this display of inter-observer agreement. When the sexton asserts that “Oh a certainty it is good Mr. Hooper,” on the other hand, the decoder has to wonder how the sexton knows this or anything in the semantic universe, for that matter, with “certainty.” It returns to the narrator’s identification of Hooper’s “semblance,” the decoder cannot assert definitely that this figure is Hooper himself. This is an issue that Hawthorne further troubles by having the minister blank facial signification by way of some sort of

While finally offering an explanation for the catharsis and the narrator begins to provide a decoding framework which, while on the surface (as was the case with Poe’s story) seemingly reduces the significance potentially to the reader, this structure actually serves to open an increasingly larger array of decodings. The narrator remarks that “the cause of so much amazement appear sufficiently slight,” but in the course of elaborating on the veiling phenomenon, provides a semiotic bombshell of sorts by relating, seemingly offhandedly, that this is indeed “Mr.
Hooper” (1836: 38). The “one thing remarkable in his appearance,” the narrator adds, is “Swarthed about his cheeks and hands, and his veins never seem to be shaken by his breath, Mr. Hooper had on a black veil.”

As is found in film, the narrator appears capable of zooming in on the minister for “closer” inspection of earmarks. Such a standpoint is lacking, or concealing possibility, all this does is increase the semantic distortion of the sign vehicle, rather than clarifying it. Without detailing how this performatory shift is accomplished, the narrator declares that “on a closer view,” the veil “seemed to consist of two folds of crepe, which entirely concealed his features, except the mouth and chin, but, to no one other than a very patient, this was further than to give a darkened aspect to all living and inanimable things.” The emphasis on conjecture is clear here, as the narrator refers to these readings as actions of “seemingly subjective and private judgements.”

The narrator continues to heighten his description of Mr. Hooper with connotative accretions, noting that he is walking “with this gloomy shade before him—at a slow and quiet pace, stooping somewhat in his walking on the ground, as is customary with abstracted men” (1836: 38). So, now the register here is one of gloom and abstraction, the latter of which appears to refer rather to distance. Either the narrator is engaging in the common technique of reflecting the consciousness of the onlookers instead of providing the reader with straightforward, omniscient perspective. The narrator is merely perceiving Mr. Hooper negatively.

In either case, though, the impression signified by Mr. Hooper is increasingly steered away from a positive, or even neutral, perspective. Although Mr. Hooper is described as “dashing his eyes kindly to those of his parishioners who still waited on the meeting-house steps,” “so wonder-struck were they that his greeting heartily met with a return,” we are told (1836: 38). Here, of course, the interpretive operation vacillates in the other direction, since “wonder-struck” is clearly at least in the neutral decoding zone, and even could have been, for the dreadful hour that should snatch the veil, almost believing that a stranger’s visage would be discovered, though the form, gesture, and voice were those of Mr. Hooper. The parishioners found themselves experiencing “inconceivable confusion” and even “amazement,” noting to themselves as well feeling “considerable emotion,” and possibly the moment they lost sight of the black veil. The veil, it could be said, again heightened attention to the opacity – not genuine transience, and certainly not transparency – characteristic of any signifying vehicle in the act of signification. Every sign when “manhandled” (Barthes) by the decoder is treated in this manner, in other words, as an elision of significance rather than significance itself.

This challenge to the parishioners’ decoding expertise diminishes as they offer interpretive frameworks that gain purchase. “A few of them” “shook” in their spotters, and “one or two affirmed that there was no mystery at all, but that Mr. Hooper’s eyes were merely ‘weakened by the midnight lamp,’ as to require a shade” (1836: 40/41). This “naturalization” of the veil’s (also in Barthes’s sense) clarity alters its register, rendering it no longer an imposing thing in the social-semantic system. Narrativization rescues the veil from the realm of the unintelligible, in other words, transferring it into one that safely harbours the practice of storytelling. To the narrator, Hooper becomes visible as someone “with a veiled face,” with this synecdoche apparently responsible for the “strange and bewildered looks” with which his parishioners “repair’d” him as he engages in his usual ministrations (41). The narrator registers an enigmatic response from the parishioners by framing the minister’s departure from the scene in a semiotically opaque manner, “nearing the parsonage, and at the moment of closing the door, was observed to look back upon the people, all of whom had their eyes fix’d upon the minister,” a sad smile gleaming faintly from beneath the black veil, the looker flinched in his mouth, glimmering as he disappeared.

Yet the response from the group is much more decisively negative, as indicated by the remarks of “a lady” who says to her companion “that a simple black veil, such as any women might wear on her bonnet, should come to cause such a terrible thing on Mr. Hooper’s face!” (emphasis added). The reply of her husband, the local physician, is even more telling. “Yet perhaps the displeased congregation was almost as fearful a sight to the minister, as his black veil to them” (1836: 39). This becomes an increasingly prominent issue as the story progresses, drawing attention as it does to the encoder’s perspective on those to whom he disseminates messages.

The primary consideration remains on the impact on the decoder who finds Mr. Hooper’s transmissions “muffled” by the veil. Even though he is delivering his usual, “mild” sermon: there was something, either in the sentiment of the discourse itself, or in the imagination of the auditors, which made him so perfectly at ease, that he had never been heard from their pastor’s lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of his usual ministrations (39). The subject had reference to secret sins, and those sad mysteries which we hide from our holy neighbours. The minister and his congregation would find conceal from our own consciousness, even forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them. (1836: 40)

The narrator maintains that through the veil as a semiotic act, “sight was breathed into his words,” turning what is ostensibly a generic sign-vehicle into one that is seemingly targeted toward each individual decoder (admittedly, an already common response among such audiences for this “speech genre” [Bakhtin]). “Each member of the congregation, the most innocent girl, and the man of hardened heart, felt as if the preacher had creep’d upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded insidious or dead thoughts” (Barthes). This leads to further extrapolation into the realm of symbolism: “Did he seek to hide it from us?” yet this is equally problematic, as he read the Scriptures; and would fain conceal from our own consciousness, this leads to further extrapolation into the realm of symbolism: “Did he seek to hide it from us?” yet this is equally problematic, as he read the Scriptures; and would fain conceal from our own consciousness, even forgetting that the Omniscient can detect them. (1836: 40)

While Mr. Hooper’s performance at a funeral service later that afternoon provides further opportunities for supernatural decoding of the veil (does the corpse resemble the face that looked over the body in the casket? Did the body shudder at the sight?), it also provides the audience with a type of “anthropological encounter” which offers a fuller rendering of the meaning in his benediction: “The people trembled, though they but darkly understood when he had prayed that they, and himself, and all of mortal race, might be ready, as it were, still, before the veil had been, for the dreadful hour that should unάthe veil from their faces” (1836: 42). Of course, although he could be referring to the more common practice of facing veiling, the crowd assumes that he is turning his literal veil into a metaphorical reference, one with semiotic implications insofar as it asserts that everyone is “faceless” by facing himself, turning his own veil into a signvehicle instead of a transparent (or even just translucent) signifier.

The subsequent supernatural associations of some citizens imagining that they see the minister “walking hand in hand with his duplicate,” following this scene (something corroborated by inter-observer agreement), along with a similar development pertaining to a young couple he marries, suggest that, indeed, the veil is imbuing Mr. Hooper with extraordinary signifying capabilities (1836: 43). After performing the ceremony, Mr. Hooper raised a glass of wine to his lips, wishing happiness to his bride; apparently the veil had an embalming effect, for it was not only transmuted into un-tasted wine upon the carpet, and rushed forth into the darkness. For the Earth, too, had on her Black Veil. (44)

In order for the townfolk to satisfactorily decode this resistant signifier, a group was charged with the task to “put to death” the “mystery” (the veil by virtue of wearing it). This could furtherly reflect an anxiety about the horror of confronting the transcendental signified in all its semiotic finitude. Would this be akin, then, to the dividing line between the signifier and signified; the final elision of significative differential in which a sign ends its oscillation! In Notes from Underground, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s narrator comments that when “people were given an opportunity to live unfettered by impediments, they would immediately want them restored (or new ones created) in order to have something to cause a friction they need in order to have something to complain about. The same would be true if we somehow achieve “final” semiosis: we would immediately want semiosis to begin oscillating again.

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it was but a double fold of crepe, hanging down from dreadful gloom that had so overawed the multitude: more accurate decoding, “she fixed her eyes steadfastly” issue of decoder “privilege” arises with the attendant to know what the black veil concealed.” Again, this is that “as his plighted wife, it should be her privilege based “community of interpreters” (Fish 1980) that the village, unappalled by the awe with which the black decoder who should be able to share in the encoder’s initiated by wearing the veil. The tenacity of this the already existing layers of resistance to meaning impediment to signification, further imbricating “melancholy” and happy), it could be said to provide a deep flight of significance, at least in some way (“By persons who claimed a superiority to popular prejudice, it was reckoned merely an eccentric whim, such as often묵된구나 to “‘Take away the veil from them, at least’.” Clearly, thought, words can no more be stripped of transparent/ opaque metaphorichity than any other sign-vehicle can (including the presumed class of signs deemed transparently “iconic”).

Mr. Hooper nevertheless endeavours to engage in this very procedure, but the impact of infinite semiosis cannot be reduced to a “universal” type of the theological quest, motivated by the relative certainty of this operation in particular, arguably human motivation that fuels the desire for a type of theological quest, motivated by the apparent awareness that this is nevertheless a constructed, “deliberate behalf,” as Joseph Conrad’s Marlowe calls it in Heart of Darkness. This, perhaps, accounts for the other seeming inexplicable confidence of interpretation seen in Charles Baxter’s short story, “The Next Building I Plan to Bomb,” in which the main character finds a piece of gray paper with an apparently related drawing and a related linguistic utterance written on it in purple ink, and shows it to other people for their opinion of what it signifies, or what it might mean in a larger context (evidence of a terrorist plot, etc.).

In an email exchange, Baxter responded to my query regarding a bibliographical code explanation of this specificity of the paper, ink, etc. of the “near hairy patch,” along the lines of...

Mr. Hooper’s smiling status transfers into the realm of “table,” we are told, which in turn leads him to begin to believe in the possibility of decoder semiotic competence (the starts to align himself with the community of interpreters, i.e., “the multitude” – who believe the veil signified his dreadful secret”).

Their instinctive dread caused him to fear, more strongly than any aught else, that a prescriptive treatment would be imposed by his friends, with the threads of the black crape. In truth, his own antipathy to the veil was known to be so great, that he never willingly passed before a mirror, nor stooped to drink at a still fountain, lest, in its peaceful bloom, he should be affrighted by himself. This was what gave Mr. Hooper’s conscience tortured him for some great crime, too horrible to be entirely concealed, or otherwise so obscured intimated. The bare “reason” for a mystical veil, there rolled a cloud into the sunshine, an ambiguity of sin or sorrow, which enveloped the poor minister, so that or lose any soul.

Consistent with Susan Sontag’s assertion in Illness as Metaphor that figurative language gains greater power in direct relation to the decoder’s increased ignorance, the veil actually makes Mr. Hooper an even more powerful encoder. Among all its ill influences, the black veil had the one desirable effect, of making its wearer a very efficient clergyman,” the narrator remarks. “By the side of other mystics, no other apparent cause – he became a man of awful power over souls that were in agony for sin” (49).

Up to his death scene, Mr. Hooper maintains the opacity of the veil, using only speech and his extra-linguistic signifier of the veil: “I cover it for secret sin,” and, as the decoder encounters necessarily project their own signifieds onto it. In fact, right after this assertion, the narrator relates that Elizabeth does this very thing: “a new feeling took the place of sorrow, her eyes were fixed insensibly on the black veil, when, like a sudden twilight in the air, it terror fell around her. She arose, and stood trembling before him” (1836: 47). The minister pleads for an empathic decoding by Elizabeth at this point, providing a linguistic supplement to the non-linguist signifier of the veil: “Have patience with me, Elizabeth...Do not think too much about this veil. It is kept between us here on earth. Be mine, and hereafter there shall be no veil over my face, no darkness between our souls! It is but a mortal, I seem to have forgotten whether or not I am of the equation. Lo! do you know not how lonely I am, and how frightened to be alone behind my black veil. Do you have any love in this miserable obscurity forever?”

What the minister learns here, something that frustrates so many sign users, is that the encoder truly has no leverage over the decoder’s practices. Ironically, when the ministereggies emissaries Elizabeth’s request to see beneath the veil for one last time, she leaves, and his response is not insignificant: “Mr. Hooper smiled to think that only a material emblem had separated him from the expected signification that lay there, of course is that Elizabeth is confusing the materiality of the signifier (like those who get upset over the purely symbolic gesture of flag burning) with the signified one, moreover, associated with an important facet of speech construction (as witnessed by the colloquial expression made famous by George H. W. Bush: “Read my lips: no new taxes.”).” Clearly, thought, words can no more be stripped of transparent/ opaque metaphorichity than any other sign-vehicle

Points of Principle

On this point consider, for example, the

endings of Ernest Hemingway’s short story, “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” and Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour,” in which the narrators specifically describe events that take place and thereby immediately implicate the reader in decoding by a given (narrative) agent. A similar situation appears at the conclusion of James Thurber’s “The Carbide Seat,” in which the only plausible decoding is based on character history and is assigned via free indirect speech (Stimpson 2001). Or, again, see the refused decoding following the vision given to the main character in Flannery O’Connor’s story, “Revelation,” in which Ruby Torpin doesn’t want to accept a message from God, apparently. Or, finally, see the ways in which a non-response (silence) leads to a nevertheless transparent decoding by others. Or, given its oxymoronic register (both (e.g., an infant learning to smile back at its mother

ambiguous signifier insofar as it delimits no real field meaning. Yet it, too, stands as an inscrutably (1836: 45). As a paratextual supplement, Mr. Hooper’s opaque metaphorichity than any other sign-vehicle transfers into the realm of “table,” we are told, which
On the upper lefthand corner someone had scraped the phrase “THE NEXT BUILDING I PLAN TO BOMB.” Harry unfolded the paper and saw an inked drawing of what appeared to be a sizable train station or some other public structure, perhaps an airport terminal. In the drawing were arched windows and front pillars but very little other supporting detail. The building looked solid, monumental, and difficult to destroy. (1997: 65)

Harry then shows it to other people. The office receptionist says: “You’ve got to take it to the police...This is dangerous. This is the work of a maniac. That’s La Guardia there, the airport! In the picture! I was there last month. I’m sure it’s La Guardia, Mr. Edmonds. No kidding. Definitely La Guardia.” (1997: 66)

Harry’s girlfriend: “Lucia examined the soiled paper, her thumb and finger at its corner, and said, ‘What are you planning to do with this? Some nut case did this, right?’.” (1997: 66)

At the police station: Sergeant Bursk asked, “Mr. Edmonds, you got any kids?”

“Kids? No, I don’t have kids. Why?”

“Kids did this,” Sergeant Bursk told him, waving the paper in front of him as if he were drying it off. “My kids could’ve done this. Kids do this. Boys do this. They draw torture chambers and they make threats and write what-ho-sou. That’s what they do. It’s the youth. But they’re kids. They don’t mean it...That’s Grand Central. In New York, on Forty-second Street, I think. I was there once. You can tell by the clock. See this clock here?” He pointed at a vague circle, “That’s Grand Central, and this is the big clock that they’ve got there on the front.” (1997: 67:68)

The “kid” Harry meets in a bar:

“I know this fucking place—I’ve, like, traveled, you know, all over Europe. This is in Europe, this place, this is fucking Deutschland we’re talking about here...Oh, yeah, I remember this place. I was there, two summers ago! Hamburg! This is the Dammtor Bahnhof.”

“Never heard of it,” Harry Edmonds said.

“You never heard of it ‘cause you’ve never been there, man. You have to fuckin’ be there to know about it.”

The kid squinted his eyebrows together like a professor making a difficult point. “A bahnhof, man, is a train station, and the Dammtor Bahnhof is, like, one of the stations there, and this is the one that the Nazis rounded up the Jews to. And, like, sent them off from this. Place, man. Absolutely. It’s still standing. This one, it fucking deserves to be bombed. Just blow it totally the fuck away, off the face of the earth. That’s just my opinion. It’s evil, man.” (1997: 68:69)

And, finally, Harry’s therapist: “This building!...Oh, it’s the Field Museum, in Chicago. And that’s not a theory. It is the Field Museum” (1997: 70).

The decoding convinctions in these semiotic assessments of the text is implicit in all but the last, in which the therapist’s follow-up comment draws attention to that feature of the previous ones, and employs the “lastword” technique to draw out this implication in the others.

Significantly, Harry never offers his own interpretation of the found text except to make his own drawing—and this is clearly anticipated by the process of semiotic deferral characterized by some semioticians: “The last word of paper and no. 2 pencil. At the top of the pad, Harry writes, ‘The next place I plan to bomb,’ and then very slowly, and with great care, begins to draw his own face, its smooth clear shaven contours, in courteous halfsmile” (1997: 71).

It is revealing, too, that Harry reconfigures the original drawing and recaptures his own drawing emphasizing the personal, contributive, constructed nature of decoding by substituting himself for the building in the original drawing and alternately titling his own drawing as “This Building...To Plan To Bomb,” thereby turning the unspecified link between the original’s drawing and linguistic text into, in this case, a personal-decoding rendition signified by “selling” (Simpkins 1980). This is exactly what happens in decoding as well.

Harry is the only respondent, however, who acknowledges this reality of the process of decoding while the other characters seem to (or explicitly say) “objectively” draw upon their personal experience to determine what the drawing represents, injecting biographical frames into the process without acknowledging this. The whorl of presumably similar texts that are blowing about haphazardly at the end of the story (just as they were at the beginning) virtually parodies the endless referral slippage of semiotics in which one of them may again attach itself to yet another decoder, setting off the operation of semiotic interpretation yet again. Additionally, Baxter’s narrator has only limited omniscience, as is suggested by the drawing description, and more importantly the open conjecture about Harry’s subsequent actions at the end where the narrator suggests several possibilities of his next step.

One way that the “communal” decoding standards that Fish discussed can be realized is through public rule dissemination based on the presumption that all institutionally sanctioned decoders agree to act in accordance with these rules. Nevertheless, this is only an artificial distinction and in no way consistent with reality, as Harry discovers when no two decoders offer the same decoding of the text he shows them. As Harry’s actions reveal, it is only when boundaries are constructed and agreed upon that they have any sort of real force. Callier used as an illustration of this in a graduate course on semiotics, the airport security signs that at one time (pre-9/11 in the US) declared that even any apparent jokes about having a bomb, etc. would be decoded as serious utterances. This creates an institutionally constructed and regimented form of what Hodges and Kress call a “reception regime” (1988) which, among other things, delegates the ability to decide whether something is considered offensive to the decoder but not the encoder.

A related illustration of this type of decoding strategy is found in Roland Barthes’s apparent assertion that some sign vehicles can only be decoded as signifiers without a signified. Essentially, though, he breaks the magicians’ code of maintaining professional secrecy where he explains the illusion behind decoding by revealing how something that appears to be nonsignifying can be hardly transported into the realm of the intelligible through the process of artifical decoding. Barthes’s paired decodings offer a striking example, however, i.e., as the concluding punctuation does not establish an either/or opposition (e.g., a case of this or that), but rather, an oscillation among mutually inclusive possibilities, with only two among many other decoding options. Additionally, the placement of this example at the end of Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes can with no apparent ligature is also puzzling. What exactly is the reader supposed to make of this paratext (if that is what it is)? Is it like the abrupt coda with Herman Melville’s “Barbelle the Scrivener” in which the narrator offers a satisfactory although conventional, but not best, decoding of Barbelle’s malady? Or, is it like Poe’s narrator (discussed earlier) when he finally comes up with a reading that crystallizes a decoding, yielding a sharp focus that renders intelligible the otherwise inscrutable stranger?

This article will be continued in the next issue of the SRB 20.1 (2013).
Welby defined in comprehensive terms significance for conveying meaning to any word (or in broader sense, any sign), and at stake throughout these writings, As Pettiti (1941) writes:

Welby underlines the need to critique language, to distinguish between the positive use of words and expressions, and to better define their meanings in light of the context of discourse which they somehow share. In the terms "person," "self," "religion" are signalled as examples. Reference to the larger text indicates that for the purpose of minimizing the negative effects of misunderstanding and improving the work of conceptualization.

In connection with Welby's semiotic approach she wanted, on the one hand, to criticize what she thought was the reductive side of the term 'common sense' ('Simple' meaning), and on the other, as something a priori to language. Welby theorized the latter (already present in Lois and Chaos from 1881) Welby within the frames of her conception "mother-sensor," or "primal sense" (142).

Another substantial contribution to the field was the "Welby Prize" her husband had endowed. For the purpose of minimizing the negative effects of misunderstanding and improving the work of conceptualization.

In 1896 in the essay "Sense, Meaning and Interpretation," Welby introduced the term 'Significs' alongside "Sea", and "Mountain" as a possible alternative. Pettiti (251) writes:

"Significs" echoes the verb 'to signify', which suggests the idea of meaning as a process of mentally combining the elements of a sentence or clause in a manner that is meaningful within the context of discourse. The term 'Significs', according to Welby, is a broad category that includes all forms of communication and expression, whether verbal or non-verbal. It involves the creation of meaning through the use of words, images, and other symbols.

This concept was developed further in the 1899 book "Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Peirce, published in "importance for the research field before us is Welby's contribution to the semiotic perspective (146). Welby's understanding of the concept of 'Significs' was so rich and comprehensive that it included a wide range of interests, and many important names within contemporary philosophy such as Charles Sanders Peirce, Henri Bergson, Michel Bréhat, and many others.

Welby's research areas were involved, apart from philosophy, religion, theology, linguistics, mathematics, semiotics, sociology, anthropology and education, to mention the main. She studied on her own through, among other things, the works of Ferdinand C. S. Schiller, George Bernard Shaw, William James, Charles K. Ogden, Bertrand Russell, and many others. She was a member of distinguished academic bodies like the Aristotelian Society, Anthropological Institute, and the Sociological Society. Pettiti has mentioned the importance of Welby's contributions, which deal with issues related to mental evolution and cognition, and are thus important for the history of modern semiotics, as well as for the history of modern semantics.

Welby anticipated a specific field of modern semiotics, namely biosemiotics, or "global semiotics" (the latter paper contains references to Darwin, among others), with "her studies on the relation between signs and life, signs and evolution" (129), and she anticipated the branches of 'semiotics' of the Bari school, introduced by Pettiti and Antonio Punzo.

Welby was the 'Welby Prize' for the best essay in the journal "Links and Clues". Another genre important for Welby's mode of expression was the pamphlet (examples included in Pettiti's volume). They were short and privately printed. Apart from the major monographs mentioned earlier, Welby wrote two books on reflection (enquiries published in Pettiti's volume), "Mind, which Welby announced in 1896" and "Mental Evolution?" (Sept. 1890) and "An Apparent Paradox in Mental Evolution?" (Dec. 1890). Welby also anticipated a specific field of modern semiotics, namely biosemiotics, or "global semiotics" (the latter paper contains references to Darwin, among others), with "her studies on the relation between signs and life, signs and evolution" (129), and she anticipated the branches of 'semiotics' of the Bari school, introduced by Pettiti and Antonio Punzo.

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of ‘significance’ (the third level of her meaning) was to be regarded as a “practical extension” of the ideological dimension of human sign activity in signifying processes (538). There is one of the main branches of geometry, Topics, which alone occupies itself with properties of Space itself, namely, with the order of connecting parts. This has been little studied, and no regular method for treating it is known. In this chapter, I shall try to obtain the precise definitions of temporal relations, little more will be required to furnish me with data on the Spatial relations, and if this is rightly done, it must throw strong light on Topics, while if it is not rightly done it will do nothing for the subsequent the previous is indeterminate (i.e., belonging to the realm of ideas). In contrast, Welby thought that indeterminacy about a Bukhtin/Welby’s deterministic view of ideograms. For Peirce, in a letter to Lady Welby (19 Oct. 1904), he writes:

“What, then, does Peirce suggest? Further along in the discussion on time between Welby and Peirce, Petrilli writes: “and only as the temporal progression grows in volume and does it acquire secondness and thirdness. Thus, Welby’s time concept is expressed as follows in a letter to Welby (12 Oct. 1904, Peirce wrote: “Everything that had happened would happen again in reverse order. These seem to me to be strong arguments to prove that temporal causation [[…] is an action upon ideas and not upon existents. But since our idea of the past is precisely the idea of that which is absolutely determinable, fixed […] as against the future which seems to me to be stronger in expression be due simply to the fact that the time-concept is expressed in language in terms of space that must have been prior in experience! May not the spatial expression be due simply to the greater permanence or fixity of space, not necessarily to any experience!” (in Petrilli, 397)

Welby included the idea of “mother-sense” in her conception of time, expressed as follows in a letter to Peirce (20 Nov. 1904): “To the race-memory there is and can be no difference in existential reality between the past and the future any more than between a mile just left behind and a mile just entered upon” (in Petrilli, 399). These lines suffice to illustrate the divergent views on time of Welby and Peirce. However, Welby was not alone in viewing time as being dependent on space. The French contemporary philosopher Henri Bergson, for instance, held a similar view, as she mentions this in a letter to G. F. Stout (1903–1905). Now, the issue of time was dealt with before her essay of 1907 in her correspondence, and appended excerpts from it may give some idea of how she treated the discussion. For note here are comments on Welby’s papers by W.R. Sorley (also from 1903–1905) which touch upon themes mixed by Welby as to the problem of the connection between language, mind and the state of things in the world. Sorley asks:

“What is the ground of this assertion that time is a derivative from space? Am I right in saying that the only argument is the phlogistic one that time-concepts are obtained from space-concepts in spatial metaphors? I have not elsewhere seen so complete a working out of this idea. But the question remains: does the fact that the time-concept is expressed in language in terms of space prove that it must have been prior in experience? May not the spatial expression be due simply to the greater permanence or fixity of space, not necessarily to any experience!” (in Petrilli, 404)

Welby, in a letter to Sorley (from 1903–1905), continues by saying “that it is change and not time which like space is primaldd” (406). And further on: “Again, he [Prof. Adamson] evidently leans definitely towards my own conclusion that time and space ought never to be coupled as they are, since it seems that Welby, in his essay “Topics” (1902) identified as the ideological dimension of human sign activity in signifying processes (577), but also the connection of the former to “common sense” (Wennerberg 1962: 380). The discussion on time, which is here accounted for, to some extent at least, illustrates Welby’s polyphonic (i.e., multifaceted) approach towards Welby’s ideas, namely by showing (in the form of excerpts and appendices) the context in which they emerged.

In What is Meaning? Welby also introduced the term “translation” by underlining its broad scope; much in line with Roman Jakobson’s (1896–1982) notions of intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translations from the essay “On the Nature of Translation” (1959) which have been further developed by Petrilli elsewhere. In order to elucidate her ideas on translation and anti-translation, Welby presented an important topic that Welby discussed with Peirce in their exchange of letters (notably between 1904 and 1905), initiated by the latter’s review of What is Meaning?, was the issue of time — although her stand on it was different from the point of view of the previous
The connection between Mother-sense and Significs may be put like this: Primal Sense is what takes up and supplies to us the material of immediate awareness, conscious and interpretative. It is thus at once primordial and universal, at all stages of human development [...]. (in Petrilli, 574)

However, as Welby stresses in the same paper, “the greatest of all special gifts, the rationalising Intellect: which has not only to criticise, but also to reason out the contents of consciousness taken in its pristine simplicity, and might be called primisense; although is the consciousness of a directly present other, sustaining us. Malisense is the consciousness of a threens, or medium between primisense and alternisense, leading from the former to the latter. It is the consciousness of a process of bringing to mind. […] Alternisense has two modes, Sensation and Will. Malisense has three modes, Abstraction, Suggestion, Association. (CP 5:55. in Petrilli, 577)

One is tempted to connect Welby’s notions of mother-sense and common meaning through Peirce’s definition of alternisense, and in doing so, establish a link (at least in some respects) between the former term, in its turn, to this triad of Peirce (as mothersense gives rise to the “rationalising Intellect,” also called “father reason,” with which it is in a dialectical relation). Petrilli, on the basis of the correspondence between Welby and Peirce, extends these connections, when writing: “Opening the window with which it is in a dialectical relation). Petrilli, in Colapietro, V (2003) “Translating Signs Otherwise,” in Translation. Translation. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.

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Information Enough
By Inna Semetsky

This review essay is a series of musings inspired by Brier's "Systemic Biosemiotics: Why information is not enough (2008). It is almost ironic how instrumental rationality in the modern world has made the natural and mystical into a pair of binary opposites. While acknowledging what the pure reason of modernity considered to be a superannulated, main thing to attempt to explain it was made into a new science from the perspective of the logic of explanation and causality. "Naturally enough" the term natural has been habitually taken in its reductive sense of a linear direct cause-effect connection pertaining to atomistic parts and what we are left with describing the whole of Nature. The "prompt" conclusion arrived at by means of syllogistic reasoning was simple: either anomalous effect or anomalous cause. Brier's volume not only problematizes this logic but brings biosemiotics into discourse in science, but also breathes life into science per se.

Importantly, as Brier notices at the outset, this book is an extended and updated synthesis of many previously published articles from as early as 1992 and supersedes all of the others. He is motivated by the desire to create a knowledge paradigm independent from ideological concerns (I leave it to readers to decide whether it is ever possible or even desirable). Brier begins his "quest for biosemiotics" (3) by revisiting cognitive evolution and the birth of research programs in information science against which he proposes to formulate a new transdisciplinary framework that combines "Peirce's semiotics, second-order cybernetics, Luhmann's systems theory, cognitive semantics, and language game theory" (4). This is an ambitious project, and understandably my brief essay won't be able to offer a fair review of and/or critique of all the areas addressed in the book.

My argument is that, contra Brier, information is very much enough — but if and only if we will have recontextualized it very much. In support of this I will invoke the cutting edge science of coordination dynamics (Kelso and Engstrom 2006) as well as the current program of transdisciplinarity developed and conducted by physicist and philosopher Basar Babur Niculesu. I think that both sources not only can but should inform contemporary research in semiotics. Brier freely fluctuates between different discourses (social science, natural science — especially biology, philosophy — especially phenomenology but with a twist of metaphysics — linguistics etc.) under the following motto: "I am presenting a new theory; clearly, then, I am not fully satisfied with the old one. Yet each of these older theories provides useful concepts that have helped me in my search for a framework broad enough to encompass our present experience and knowledge" (5).

The blend of old and new theories is seen in the titles of the book's twelve chapters, which occupy nearly 500 pages and include the following (slightly paraphrased for brevity). "The Problem of the Informations-Processing Paradigm as a Candidate for a Unified Science of Information"; "The Self-Organization of Knowledge"; "An Ethological Approach to Cognition"; "Bateson's Concept of Information in Light of the Theory of Autopoiesis"; "von Foerster's Cybernetics: Theory of Systems," "Embodied Intelligence, ""Embodied Metaphors," "Integration of Inwardness, Empiricism, and Peircean Bisemiotics"; "An Evolutionary View on the Threshold between Semiosis and Information Exchange: A Proposal for the Study of Information, Signification, Cognition, and Communication"; "The Five-Level Cybersemiotics." In addition, Brier offers a chapter on the practical problem of information and documents (6) that can, at least, be claimed to be solved by means of cybersemiotics.

The overall paradigm that assists Brier in developing his new theory is Peirce's triadic semiotics; but the sources are many. Here are the few: Bertalanffy, Bohm, Deely, Emmeche, Gadamer, Heidegger, Hoffmeier, Hiser, Husserl, Jahnch, Lakoff and Johnson, Lorenti, Merleau-Ponty, Noth, Popper, Rusek, Sebuk, Spencer-Brown, Suzuki, Varela, Wiener, Wittgenstein.

Among Brier's extensive endnotes I would like to single out one. In a time computer scientist and human Husse's master-piece Magister Ludi also known as the Glass Bead Game and which is a mode of playing with the total contents and values of the whole universe not unlike the organ pipes on the organ. However the range of this magisterial 'organ' is the entire intellectual cosmos and, hence, is capable of reproducing, at least in theory, the full intellectual content of the universe.

The game is played with 'ideas' like with musical notes in a fugue and partakes of the new symbolic language that can simultaneously represent the structure immanent to the ideas it expresses; as well as having its own means of symbolic, albeit hierarchically, expression. Brier concludes that "Magister Ludi is a manifesto for the reintegration of intellectual life with the 'real' world, of intellectual and mystic enlightenment with practice... We are in serious need of a broader global view of knowledge and enlightenment to individuals as well as in society" (443).

The word "enlightenment" in this context seems, however, to be slightly problematic. Rather than using a specific word that traditionally highlights reason as the over-rational paradigm of modern thought, I think that creative Jonathans illumination will have captured Brier's idea better. Indeed, Peirce (as Brier's major intellectual inspiration) appears to be the first post-modern (post-postmodern) philosopher (Deely 2003; Griffin 1993) and his semiotics as the science of signs partakes of post-modern critique of the Cartesian subject who stays forever separated from the world of objects that he can observe with the cool gaze of an independent spectator, a scientist, informed by the positivist paradigm stemming from modernity's culture of Enlightenment.

The triadic nature of a Peircean sign, however, makes a "scientific observer" the very participant in the process of semiosis. A genuine sign such as ensembles a triad comprising, as John Dewey said, "the observer, the observing, and the observed" (Dewey 1991: 97). The act of observing plays the role of a Peircean interpretant: knowledge is embodied in action making a transaction defined as an "unformed observation" (Bld.3) the minimal unit of analysis. Such participation in the reality of that which is produced was indeed a distinguished feature of mystical, pre-modern, thought. In this regard, Brier brings to our attention that Brier's mysticism and transcendentald (383) is very appropriate even if Peirce himself emphasized intelligence as specifically scientific yet inseparable from experience. Peirce asked "what must be the characteristics of a sign used by a 'scientific' intelligence, that is to say, by an intelligence capable of learning by experience" (CP 2.247, Peirce's italics).

Herman Husse's conceptualizations are Peircean to the core. The boundary between science and mysticism is blurred when both conflate to form unitary "evolutionary cosmology, in which all regularities of mind and nature are regarded as products of growth" (Peirce quoted in Brier, 382). As Niels Bohr who coined the term "complementarity" pointed out, the extremes of materialism and mysticism alike must be avoided by means of balancing analysis and synthesis. Whither information, then? Not enough or just the right amount?

Brier concludes his book by telling his readers that he "developed an informational theory that accepts that he 'developed an informational theory that accepts that the information-processing paradigm is the hub of the "systemic" approach to science'" (Peirce quoted in Brier, 382). As Niels Bohr who coined the term "complementarity" pointed out, the extremes of materialism and mysticism alike must be avoided by means of balancing analysis and synthesis. Whither information, then? Not enough or just the right amount?

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Brier concludes his book by telling his readers that he "developed an informational theory that accepts that he 'developed an informational theory that accepts that the information-processing paradigm is the hub of the "systemic" approach to science'" (Peirce quoted in Brier, 382). As Niels Bohr who coined the term "complementarity" pointed out, the extremes of materialism and mysticism alike must be avoided by means of balancing analysis and synthesis. Whither information, then? Not enough or just the right amount?
human experience per se, would be "located" precisely at this included middle-in-between what appears to us as two disparate Cartesian substances of body and mind.

As Deely points out, "at the heart of semiotics is the realization that the whole of human experience, in our practical life, at the level of action - making this information meaningful. But the information in our practical life at the level of action is not 'there' - it requires information for the interpretant in the form of meaning. As Peirce said, signs are in fact signs only when interpreted. Still, the information is always already here, embedded in semiosis and in its implicit, potential, virtual form. Meaning is "alter ego virtual ... It is contaminated in what is actually thought, but in what this thought may be transformed into a communicative sign by a symbol of reconciliation, '~', and which serves as a complement to a triadic

The transference of information between levels is what enables the evolution of signs, the very process of semiosis as a complex system grows, indeed, because it 'learns' by virtue of making the information meaningful. Information in the universe, in their potential to interact, in the structural network, in neural network terminology, would be qualified as unsupervised learning (1998:100), which is contrasted with the 'supervised learning' which is the model of knowledge structure. I believe that this is what Peirce meant when he says that "information is not enough". I believe he means what he says to be that it is a particular input output linear fashion. It is a "not enough" and with which he engages in shadow-boxing. It is the included third of the interpretation (in any guise) that, by creating a self-referential feedback, expands the boundaries of what is called 'filling it with information that as such acquires meaning.

Signs are the patterns of coordinated, interpretive activity comprising "embodied cognition" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 89) analogous to that invoked by Brier (referring to Lakoff and Johnson). However, what is important in such coordination, or the triadic relationship between an interpretant and signs, dynamics is that the interaction (the included third, the interpretant in the Peircean triad) is a priori informational and the dynamical (or sign) systems are "informationally based" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 9); information is what establishes psychophysical unity thereby confirming what Peirce was saying more than a century ago: "The old dualistic notion of mind and matter, so prominent in Cartesianism, as two radically different kinds of substance, will hardly find defenders today" (Peirce CP 6. 24, quoted in Brier, 203).

However, and again in agreement with Peirce, old habits of thought die hard. In the language of the science of coordination dynamics, a genuine Peircean sign system cannot be by a complementary sign - a pair, in which an interpretant is designated by a symbol of reconciliation, "~", and which serves as a complement to a triadic (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 101), self-organizing. A sign is not a sign unless it is interpreted; it is not even a functional sign. Coordination dynamics as such offers a new syntax to make the two poles a complement to a triadic.

In the universe perfused with signs information is what establishes psychophysical unity thereby confirming what Peirce was saying more than a century ago: "The old dualistic notion of mind and matter, so prominent in Cartesianism, as two radically different kinds of substance, will hardly find defenders today" (Peirce CP 6. 24, quoted in Brier, 203).

What is surely not enough is our perception of information as solely quantitative or measurable. It is meaningful in a pragmatic, Peircean sense as productive of observable effects. Hence, according to Peirce's pragmatic maxim, what is real, true, objective, and a precisiation for communication. Language is a type of functional information: it can change the coordination patterns. Functional information is, in short, the very use of language by a self-organizing sign "~" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 101), self-organizing. A sign is not a sign unless it is interpreted; it is not even a functional sign. Coordination dynamics as such offers a new syntax to make the two poles a complement to a triadic. Coordination dynamics as such offers a "ubiquitous science of life" (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 76) permeated with "functional information" (Bld., 98). Reconceptualizing information as functional makes the notion that "information is not enough" misleading.

Therefore we may consider matter, energy the all-pervasive space that encompasses, the very mediation or interpretant that enables the creation of information. Information is what establishes psychophysical unity thereby confirming what Peirce was saying more than a century ago: "The old dualistic notion of mind and matter, so prominent in Cartesianism, as two radically different kinds of substance, will hardly find defenders today" (Peirce CP 6. 24, quoted in Brier, 203).

Information is just right! It is on the basis of this information that the universe organizes its own dynamical evolution and it is a way for us to simulate reality, and to realize potential reality as the computation proceeds. In the universe perfused with signs, information and computation are everywhere: it is all there: In the information is potentially active everywhere, yet it is "actually active", only where and when it can form to it. It is a "field" (Bion and Hiley 1995:10). The complex semiotic universe must express itself in a dual mode of matter and energy. Lloyd points out that "most information is impossible to process and its information content (to compactify it, in a way, that is, to make it relatively visible at the level of physical observable world. The basic material elements such as "Earth, air, fire, and water," the "four elements of physical nature also the fifth, quintessential, element. It is appropriate here to recall Deely's assertion that, at some point, "the physical universe ceases to be merely physical [... that is, conforming merely to its classical description" (Deely 2001: 621), brackets mine it is perfused with signs, indeed. The fifth, quintessential, element is not a field of information from which emerges all that we can perceive by our senses, at the level of Peirce Secondness. It is a semiotic field as Merrell points out, semiotics alters a traditional notion of "the fundamental stuff of the universe" about meaning engendered when signs are in their act of becoming signs, a becoming that includes sign computing as participants acting as the very semiotic process of becoming" (Merrell 1995: xii). As Laslo comments, this invisible field named "dynamic virtuality" (Laslo 2004: 113) of virtual particles – a zero-point field also called the quantum vacuum is everywhere while the observable visible world just flows on its surface. Vacuum or nothingness does not make the difference. According to Merrell (1995), the three Peircean onto/logical categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, require the existence of the vacuum in order to hold them together, the as yet undifferentiated "field within which semiosis plays out its drama" (Merrell 1995: 217), acknowledged by Peirce as pre-Firstness or nothingness. Still, it is a "real" nothingness as a virtual potential informational "field [that] produces effects, and these can be perceived" (Laslo, 2004/2007:7), "virtual" in a Peircean pragmatic sense as real of the observable, sensible, world in which we live.

Brier asserts that "Information... becomes the organisational aspect of nature" (1954), but that with regard to information "a fullledged metaphysics" is underdeveloped. (Laslo 2004/2007) refers to the expression "virtual" used by physicist and cosmologist Mitchell who stated that information "is present everywhere... and has been present since the beginning" (Laslo 2004/2007:67). This information signifies "a subtle connection between the many different locations in space and events in different points in time. Such connections are... "nonlocal" in the natural science and "transpersonal" in consciousness research" (Ibid., 68).
The coordination relation (akin to the dotted line) is ubiquitous. Kelso and Engstrom, however, point out that this mode of coordination, like physical laws in general, are matter-independent, they are function- and context-dependent; they govern (hence make relatively predictable) "the law of functional information flow" of the inputs and outputs. It is the coordination that produces meaning (or "sense" in Norr's triangle). This means that, Neo-Platonic, 'equation': Or, the process of designates itself relationally to the framework of science of coordination dynamics; it is expressed in the form of another complementary pair, unity-diversity. Kauffman (2010) gives an example that unites one of the components of a band, which appears to be a paradoxical structure if not for understanding that it is the perspective of an observer and context that produce a paradox.

This also means that our very sentence is an emergent property and not rule-based, that is, it cannot be founded on merely propositional thought and logocentrism. Perhaps this is what Brier is getting at when he argues against algorithmic computation. The attention to different regimes of signs becomes imperative and Leibniz's unfinished project must be completed. Kelso and Engstrom indicate the non-logical origins of intentional action. The project begins by Leibniz reflects the interconnection of knowledge representation. In analytic philosophy the representational system presupposes a class of things represented which are not representations themselves, hence 'outside' language and outside the system of values and meanings exceeding objective facts as 'transdisciplinarity' was initially coined by Jean Piaget. Knowledge is based on the classical logic of the included middle that subject and object correspond to each other. They are in a triadic contra dyadic relation; they are in correspondence (NB Francisco Varela designated such a correspondence as a complementation between two, a complex, autopoietic, that is, self-referential, system structured, sure enough, as a network of signs; Brier indeed acknowledges the importance of Varela's contribution to his cybersemiotics; see Index p. 470).

Transdisciplinary knowledge is based on the logic where terms form a bipolar asymmetrical pair versus being binary opposites. In vivo knowledge is not a static knowledge of the facts per se but a dynamic understanding of meanings that by necessity brings in the dimension of values which is traditionally (in vitro) considered 'subjective', that is, located outside 'normal science'. Epistemology and ethics alike transcend the confines of an individual ego or Cartesian Cogito and cannot be separated from the collective, social, domain: the individual society, too, is a complementary pair in which the terms of the triadic relation sustain each other by the reconciling symbol "~". In the latest issue of the journal Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion, Nicolescu (2009: 240) points out that "a new system of values can appear only through the dialogue between different domains of knowledge, between different cultures and different religions. This system does yet not exist."

I think that this ethical dimension should now become the core of semiotic research so in establishing what Norr has recently called "intercultural competence" (2010: 19) and which is an urgent matter in our present time. On account of this, poetic or personal, metaphorical language, which 'represents' symbolically or indirectly via mediation, cannot be 'objective' in describing reality. But the reality is habitually taken as the empirically observable physical reality induced as such to the level of Priestly Secondness ignoring the fact that:

The Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem - for every fine argument is a poem and symphony - just as every true poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it rather with a painting - with an impressionistic seascape piece - then the Quality in a Premise is one of the elementary coloured particles of the Painting...The total effect is beyond our ken: but we can appreciate in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole (Frege, CP 5. 119 quoted in Brier, 384).

The make the total effect "our ken" we will have to realize Leibniz's project and to learn the signs' "silent discourse" (Semetsky 2010a).

To conclude, I would like to refer to the project of transdisciplinarity addressed by Basarab whose book Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity was published in 2006. The Program of the Center for Transdisciplinary Research should become a valuable complement to any research project in semiotics. Nicodorus advocates overcoming the split between sciences and humanities and contends that the term 'transdisciplinarity' was initially coined by Jean Piaget in 1970 to indicate something occurring across and between the disciplinary divides. Transdisciplinary knowledge belongs to what Nicodorus specifies as in vivo knowledge that exceeds scientific knowledge of the external world as independent from the subject. Bound to the internal world of human subjectivity, it necessarily includes a system of values and meanings exceeding objective facts alone. Yet, transdisciplinary knowledge does not reject science; what it rejects is scientism. Below is a Table 1 addressing disciplinary and transdisciplinary classification of knowledge:

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<tr>
<th>KNOWLEDGE (Disciplinary)</th>
<th>KNOWLEDGE (Transdisciplinary)</th>
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<tr>
<td>KNOWLEDGE (In vitro)</td>
<td>KNOWLEDGE (In vivo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited to the objective knowledge of external world (cf. spectrator theory of knowledge)</td>
<td>Correspondence, analogy, conversation, sympathy as a relation between the external world of objects and the internal world of subjects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Static knowledge of facts</td>
<td>Dynamic understanding of meanings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytic conceptual thought – separation between mind and body; mind observing the world, disembodied cognition.</td>
<td>Synthetic holistic intelligence – harmony or correspondence between mind and body; mind participating in the world; embodied cognition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriented towards power, possession and separation from, and control over the 'other'</td>
<td>Oriented towards sharing, cooperating with, and integrating the 'other'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Log of the excluded middle / dualistic philosophy</td>
<td>Logic of the included middle / non-dualistic philosophy as SEMIOTICS</td>
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<td>Exclusion of values</td>
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Table 1. Disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge. Adapted and considerably developed in the context of this paper from Nicodorus at https://www.metanexus.net/conference2005/pdf/nicodorus.pdf (accessed 15 November, 2010).

Disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge stay in a complementary relation to each other. Disciplinary, in vivo, knowledge is based on the classical logic of the excluded middle that induces a separation between subject and object and reduces the meaning of knowledge to knowing merely the facts of the external world. The new transdisciplinary or in vivo knowledge is founded on the logic of the included middle so that subject and object correspond to each other. They are in a triadic contra dyadic relation; they are in correspondence (NB Francisco Varela designated such a correspondence as a complementation between two, a complex, autopoietic, that is, self-referential, system structured, sure enough, as a network of signs; Brier indeed acknowledges the importance of Varela's contribution to his cybersemiotics; see Index p. 470).

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The Future of Wikileaks
By Gary Genosko

Wikileaks provides a familiar glimpse into the future of networked knowledge. It is an effect of the slow erosion of the distinction between classified and declassified information. This erosion is the consequence of the manner in which documents are stored and accessed and the inability of their keepers to make guarantees about their security once digitally archived and networked. This is both familiar and startling at the same time.

Dutch digital culture expert Geert Lovink (2010) put it well last August: Wikileaks is more of a quantitative leap than a qualitative game changer. It provides the leaked materials as content courtesy of the hackers working to further the Wikileaks adventure. He doesn’t deepen our understanding of what he is doing and why. Rather, he provides a discourse or context of interpretation; it does provide access to original documents, however, which deepens reportage. For much of this it relies. Rather, established journalist partners, especially The Guardian, Der Spiegel, El País, Le Monde, and on-and-off again The New York Times.

The fact that Wikileaks is so readily reducible to the figure of non-editor-in-chief Julian Assange is one of the reasons why as an organization it is vulnerable. Certainly, Assange has made some deals with blue chip mainstream news corporations and has a group of hackers - Anonymous - to defend his interests and counteract (via what they call they call a LOIC, Low Orbit Ion Cannon type of DDoS attack under the rubric of ‘Operation Payback’) against the financial service sectors like MasterCard, Visa, and PayPal that have closed its accounts (and the blocking of the site for Library of Congress stuff). Wikileaks’ counterassay that credit card companies like more stable revenue streams from porn and gambling is acute. This is the reason why, and not least because of the loss of the LOIC which is traceable and, as has been recently shown, a ‘nonanonymous’ for hacktivists at all (Peau et al. 2010). Either this is a bad mistake and everybody downloading LOIC should have been warned or Wikileaks really believes in transparency at any cost.

Where Assange is personally threatened, his only recourse is to up the ante by more and more spectacular disclosures. His behaviour becomes less complex and more fragmented. He doesn’t deepen our understanding of what he is doing and why. Rather, he plunges everyone into a politics in which he becomes a case, lepally, and psychopolitically, and this is what comes to dominate and drive the story, while the material awaits constructive narratives and actionability.

On the other side of the menu, there are the state agencies which lament their loss of control over secure information, and their right to privatize it, feeding the growing creature of the security industry. Then the security intellectuals enter the fray. Some, like University of Calgary’s Tom Flanagan (Wilson, Suzanne (2010) “Prof may face charge for ‘Anonymous’ WikiLeaks Proponents not Anonymous,” CTIT Technical Report 10:41 (Design and Analysis of Communication Systems Group (DACS) University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands): http://www.simpleweb.org/reports/loic-report.pdf (10.12).


The breakthrough into the world of classified information that Wikileaks has provided will need to be followed by more robust and sophisticated qualitative and, ultimately, actionable assessments of the dataset and the consequences of these interpretations will be the measure of this unfolding lesson for the sons and daughters of Wikileaks.

Gary Genosko is editor of The Semiotic Review of Books.

References


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General Editor: Gary Genosko
Address: Department of Sociology
Lakehead University
95 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario,
Canada P7B 5E1
Tel: 1-807-343-8291
Fax: 1-807-346-7803
Email: gary.genosko@lakeheadu.ca
Web: www.deeks.unsw.edu.au/srv/srb

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General Editor: Gary Genosko
Address: Department of Sociology, Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada P7B 5E1
Tel: 807-343-8391
Fax: 807-346-7831
Email: gary.genosko@lakeheadu.ca
web: www.chass.utoronto.ca/epc/srb

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