

STRUCTURALIST USES OF PEIRCE: JAKOBSON, METZ ET AL.

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Most of this paper¹ will consist in the setting up of premises for the purpose of making two or three fairly simple points. Some of those premises will be about structuralist semiology, which I take to be relatively familiar. Nevertheless, for the purposes of exposition, I shall take the familiar version of structuralism, as a homogeneous theoretical field identifiable by a few key terms ('synchronic/diachronic', *langue/parole*, 'arbitrary/-motivated' etc.) as imprecise, and shall re-do it as a set of controversies over particular issues. The use of Peirce made, for instance, by Jakobson or by Eco are intelligible from the positions taken in these debates. The other premises will be about Peirce, which I take to be relatively unfamiliar, and which, I shall 'do', taking the risks of an objectifying exegesis.

The points I shall make will pertain to both the "theory" and the "applications" of semiotics, principally during the 1970s. What I am calling, with scare marks, the "theory" is the set of propositions taken to define the presuppositions of semiotics and the range of objects to which they are deemed to apply. Under the head of "applications", I shall limit my discussion to Jakobson on language, and Metz and Wollen on the cinema. The scare marks, of course, are pincers, designed to show that what was joined in heaven has been put asunder by the unnatural tendency of language, and theory, to make problematical distinctions.

I suppose, *quant a moi*, that the distinction between "theory" and "application" is less a distinction of the kind of propositions made — it is not a question of wondering about the theoretical contents of application,

or the applicability of theories — and more a distinction between genres of theoretical writing. On this view, the kind of writing I am engaged in is “theoretical”, since it is concerned with the implications for the theory of the application of Peircean concepts (to objects such as language and film) and not with the pay-off that such applications had in the description of semiotic objects such as language and film. That these applications are part of a project to write “theories” of their respective objects goes, I hope, without saying.

One of the premises I have needed for the reading of Peirce has been the sharp distinction between ‘representation’ and ‘signification’. Peirce’s theory of the sign is a theory of representation: a sign represents something (its object) to something (its interpretant) in some respect or capacity (its ground)². Diagrammatically —

OBJECT	REPRESENTAMEN (Ground)	INTERPRETANT
2nd correlate	1st correlate	3rd correlate

The term ‘sign’, in Peirce, denotes this complex of correlations. Speaking Peirce-language: this complex of correlations is the *object* of the term ‘sign’, whose ‘ground’ is a concept of representation. Any reading of Peirce’s semiotic will be an *interpretant* of the way the term ‘sign’ construes this object. This construal, further, will be an explicitation of the ground of the term ‘sign’ and the interpretant will tease out its implications.

Readings of Peirce have, caricaturally, fallen into two broad categories (this excludes the philosophical work, which has, appropriately to its disciplinary conventions, treated “Peirce” as a collection of philosophical issues, and has not, properly speaking, produced readings of Peirce but readings of these issues.) I have distinguished between the two groups of readings in terms of the decision that informs them as to whether, or not, Peirce is “useful”:

I: Peirce *cannot* be used, because —

(a) Peirce is an idealist. The world (‘the object’) is so totally bound up in the sign that the theory excludes material existence.
or: (b) Peirce is a naive empiricist: signs refer to a preconstituted real world.

II: Peirce *can* be used to supplement structuralist semiology, because

(a) for him, signs are about something (‘the object’), thus re-admitting ‘content’ to the discussion.

and (b) this content is related to the pragmatic dimension of communication by the requirement that the definition of signhood include interpretation, through the 'interpretant'.

II(a) and II(b) above are also invoked as reasons for *not* using Peirce in theoretical linguistics, from which it is clear that II(a) and II(b) are versions of I(b). Peirce has become the place for the readmission of real speakers in a real world.

The only thing right about any of these readings is that they take Peirce (i.e. Peirce as a metonym for his writings on signs) as a "sign". That is, as interpretants, they take 'Peirce' as a sign, where 'sign' is not, as in Saussure, a member of a set or signifying system, but a discursive unit: here, a theory, a knowledge. Of course, we always do. And Peirce is about this fact. It is not about codes and the rules and units that constitute the grammar of such systems: it is about the discursive constitution of knowledge of the world,³ the making of theories, their systematization, their unmaking, their entry into dictionaries and their fall from grace. Let us leave aside, for the time being, the complexities of the ontology of the "world" as explored by Peirce — the metaphysician — perhaps to return to them later, for the problem of the object won't just go away.

'Saussure', the theory of signification, is about the making of differences — pertinent differences, the differences that make a difference. Difference is the condition *sine qua non* of signhood, that which constitutes value, and thus function, in and according to the rules of a system. It is thus the formal condition that must be satisfied before any signifying, even theorising, can get under way. The necessary, but not the sufficient condition, for all acts of discourse. It starts with the code: in Jakobson's elaboration, the distinctive phonological feature; in Benveniste's construal of the signified, the lexico-semiotic differential. If 'Saussure' is about the enabling condition of signification, and Peirce is about what is enabled, representation/-knowledge of the world, discourse (but what of text?), then they must, so the argument might run, be complementary. Were we to pursue this line of argument — and you never can tell, we may do just that — it would take us to a point where we could see that the two theories, though complementary under certain conditions, are not symmetrical. For if it is the case that the theory of difference is the necessary condition for signification, representation is not, on the other hand, its necessary product. Nor, as Barthes for instance⁴ has amply shown, does representation exhaust the productiveness of signification. To limit what is enabled by signification to representation — under however sophisticated a construal — is to limit the implications of the theory of signification by eliding the significant differences between the two

problematics. The argument as to the complementarity of 'Saussure' and 'Peirce' thus has a trap built into it. The trap is sprung by the elision of 'signification' into 'representation', whereby (propositional or represented) content re-emerges as central in discussions of the semiotic. It is a trap — dangerous and undesirable, to be avoided with assiduity — because a generalised concept of meaning such as this excludes from the purview of semiotics music, architecture, gestures, table manners, the intonations of speech, dance, dress, and rhetoric, including genre. Formal languages such as numbers present parallel, but other problems; insofar as they can be construed as "having objects" — the performance, for musical notation, for instance, the building, for architectural drawing, the proposition, for symbolic logic, they can be considered under a problematic of representation. But their *modus operandi*, their conventions, their character as rule-governed systems of arbitrary signs, cannot be adequately described on this basis.

My very simple argument will be, that structuralist uses of Peirce have fallen into this trap; that insofar as they work on the premise of the complementarity of 'Saussure' and 'Peirce', they have overlooked the difference between theories of signification and theories of representation, and have reproduced from this oversight a generalised concept of 'meaning' which it had been the business of the premise of the primacy of the significant and the systemic determinants of value, to displace.

* * * * *

It was principally the work of Jakobson in the mid-60s and, following him, that of Eco in the 70s, that installed Peirce in the centre of the questions to be considered by the burgeoning "science of signs". Peirce had, before this, been considered marginal to the interests of European semiology;⁵ now it is rare to read work in semiotics or literary theory which does not at least allude to the Peircean notions of *infinite semiosis* and the *interpretant*,⁶ or to the distinction between *icon*, *index*, and *symbol*.⁷ The "use(r)s of Peirce", however, fall roughly into two groups, according to which of these two sets of concepts they allude to. Even Jakobson, who does use them both, does so in different places and for different purposes. One would be excused for thinking, on the basis of this, that Peirce's work was a collection of heteroclite notions, where the taxonomic programme, and the inspired notion of the productiveness of the signifying process were, if not in outright conflict, at least of little help to one another.

In the structuralist uses of Peirce, broadly speaking, each of these sets of concepts is brought in to solve a particular problem. To read the uses will therefore be a way of reading the problems that were posed by,

or in, the current understanding of the Saussurean model. Broadly speaking, “the interpretant” is brought in to solve the apparent paradox of the practice of post-Barthes literary theory, wherein the Saussurean theory of the sign and of language is placed as authority for the gesture of reading which, at the same time, it is claimed, it can in no way theorise. A model of the sign such as Peirce’s, which permits and indeed requires “interpretation” for signhood to be achieved or, better, performed, is allegedly superior to a theory of the sign which remains embedded in its system, excluding all human agency from the principles of its operation. A caricatural form of this line of argument will take Peirce’s terms ‘object’ and ‘sign’ to correspond, respectively, with the ‘signified’ and the ‘signifier’ of Saussurean theory. Thus Peirce supplements Saussure, as the interpretant supplements the code. And as the human supplements the structural. On the other hand, the distinction drawn by Peirce, and first taken up by Barthes⁸ and by Jakobson,⁹ between three kinds of sign, the icon, the index, and the symbol, has most frequently been used in the attempts to produce a semiotics of the visual, whether of photography, film, or painting and drawing. Here the term ‘symbol’ is taken to correspond to the Saussurean sign, since it is defined as the kind of sign that operates by convention, while ‘icon’ and ‘index’ are taken to be two forms of quasi-natural sign, the icon operating by resemblance, and thus appropriate to the visual representation of reality, and the index operating by causal or existential connection with its object (symptoms, weather-vanes, and shifters are the usual examples), and thus used, first by Peirce himself, to theorise the relation of the photograph with its object, insofar as this relation is governed by the physics of light. What is at issue here is the alleged incompetence of the principles of arbitrariness and of signification to found a description of signs other than linguistic signs and traffic-signals:¹⁰ two great families of signs, theorised by two unrelated grandfathers. The relation in-law was forged, however, when the requirement was put on general sign-theory to deal with the so-called real world. If icons and indices belonged in the same taxonomy as symbols, then the Saussurean theory was simply, and legitimately, restricted to this latter class, leaving Peirce to cover the questions of the observable forms of the real (the icon) and the guarantees we give to ourselves of its ontological substance (the index). Again, the figure is a form of supplementation, and again what requires to be supplemented is the conventional sign-unit of structuralist theory whose theoretical abstraction is rendered more humane by the retrieval of the subject and object of knowledge.

You can see, I suppose, why I’m suspicious.

Structuralism revisited

No structuralist, however, could be more suspicious than was Benveniste. Asked to write a paper on “La sémiologie de la langue” for

the first issue of *Semiotica* in 1971,¹¹ he produced what is taken, in American Peirce scholarship, to be a scandalously ill-informed dismissal of Peirce in favour of a linguistic semiology on Saussurean principles.¹² My view of this paper, however, is that it is at least extremely instructive, and probably more interesting than that. I take it as an intelligent naming of the issues that would have to be raised in any encounter, or joining, of the two traditions.

Benveniste's discussion is written from the point of view of a working linguist, that is, someone for whom the description of "une langue" is the methodological imperative. Whatever helps me to describe, say, the structures of Sanskrit or Swahili, Japanese or Javanese, Italian or Ukrainian, is potentially helpful as long as the borrowed principles are theoretically coherent with all the others I shall put to work. From this point of view, there are, according to Benveniste, some serious incompatibilities between Peirce's theory of the sign and Benveniste's version of Saussurean theory. The first is, that there can be no distinction between *langue* and *parole* for Peirce. This causes a problem for Benveniste, and a solution for Jakobson, since they are opposed on precisely this point. Jakobson espouses a functionalist perspective, which refuses the exclusion of problems of speaking from problems of code or system; Benveniste, on the other hand, was concerned to produce a specific set of theoretical principles for the study of discourse. Jakobson was arguing against what he took to be an ontological distinction between two realms; Benveniste by contrast, was arguing the methodological discontinuity of two different kinds of problems. Given this, then, Peirce's position is untenable for Benveniste, since the theoretical and methodological specificity of the domain of questions of "la langue" cannot be maintained from it; given Benveniste's topic, "la semiologie de la langue", Peircean semiotic has the status of the pre-theoretical. Allow me, then, to anticipate my discussion of Jakobson's use of Peirce: given the continuity of code and discourse supposed by the functionalist position, it is not surprising that it is just for this reason that Jakobson can ask the same question as Benveniste — "can Peirce help me to do descriptive linguistics?" — and come out with the opposite answer.

It is for the same reason that the question of reference is taken up by these two theorists in quite different ways. For Benveniste the question of reference is asked, and answered, in terms of the theory of discourse, the enunciation: reference is not inherent to the code or the system. While it is true that the code assigns referring tasks to certain signs, reference as such is occasional and local, and performed by the action of language in use. On the other hand, because for Jakobson the theory of language includes a prediction of its function, the referential function is never specified as being either systemic or occasional. It is therefore perfectly consistent with his general position that he can adopt Peircean terminology for signs that refer, "the index", "indexical".

Thirdly, the Saussurean concept of *langue* derives from Durkheimian anthropology: a language is a cultural system. The question that opens the *Course in general linguistics* is not the question “what is language?” but the question “what is a language?”¹³ — what, in other words, are the criteria whereby we assign some expressions to English and others to French? what is it that makes these two systems discontinuous with one another, despite their common ancestry? Jakobson’s question, in stark contrast, as revealed in titles such as “Quest for the essence of language”,¹⁴ is “what is language?”, and is thus much closer to the Chomskyan reworking of the Saussurean problematic. Benveniste’s topic, “Semiologie de la *langue*, presupposes the discontinuity of one language with another. Now, given that Peirce’s theory of the sign derives not from a consideration of languages, but from logic, construed as a universal language of reason, in place to transcend the approximate truths and the ambiguities of natural languages, Benveniste’s rejection of Peirce is entirely appropriate. The sign, in the two, is a different sort of thing.

A further point at issue for Benveniste in relation with Peirce is the principle of the arbitrary nature of the (linguistic) sign. This principle is designed to account for the fact that, though for instance many European cultures may share large parts of the material world, they don’t talk about them in the same way. Why ‘ox’ instead of ‘boeuf’ for example? Why ‘tree’ instead of ‘arbor’? These examples, as they are given and discussed in Saussure, have led to the possibility of a serious misconstrual of the question: writing in 1939,¹⁵ Benveniste claimed that the signs of language were ‘arbitrary with respect to the referent’, but non-arbitrary in relation to the rest of the language. This would seem to mean that within the language there is a necessary relation of signifier with signified; any shift in this relation then, would have to be determined by something other than the code. One wonders if this agency could possibly be the speaker. The dangerous word is ‘motivated’. This construal of the principle has led to a serious set of problems in metaphor theory, amongst others. My own view of the matter, following Saussure and a later argument of Benveniste not directly related to this issue,¹⁶ is that both signifier and signified are the product of difference; this being so, it is equally arbitrary for the value of definite article to be assigned to the syllable ‘the’, and indefinite to ‘a’, as for the values of ‘enunciation’ and ‘annunciation’ to be as they are. Jakobson takes a position similar to that of the 1939 statement of Benveniste, arguing for a degree of ‘relative motivation’ in the deployment of signs.¹⁷ The problem is that the terms ‘arbitrary’ and ‘conventional’ have, in this regard, been taken to be interchangeable. My preference is to treat them as complementary: the signifying bond between signifier and signified is both arbitrary and conventional.

Arbitrary, because not governed by the pre-coded world, and conventional, because rule-governed. It is thus open to play, but not to disregard, and it is necessitated neither by nature nor by culture.

Benveniste's construal of this problem allows us to explain a major objection he makes to Peirce. For Benveniste, the relevant distinction is the one that would oppose what is 'inside' language to what is 'outside' it: 'inside the language' corresponds to culture, 'outside' corresponds to nature, and again, this opposition simply has no place in Peirce. Peircean semiotic is an attempt to account for 'knowledge'; as such, it is all within the ambit of the human, knowledge of nature being not essentially different from knowledge of any other phenomena. Knowledge has 'objects', and these objects are both of the sign, and projected by the sign as being distinct from itself. Benveniste takes this point in Peirce to transgress the boundary between language and the world. Taking the 'object' as necessarily ontologically distinct from the sign, Benveniste argues that the Peircean sign cannot serve to define the semiotic specificity of language. Furthermore, that there be an entailment of object with sign in Peirce seems to suggest a degree of naturalising necessity in the Peircean sign that would deny the theoretical force of the principle of arbitrariness.

Coming up against the same problem is their reading of Peirce, both Eco and Jakobson¹⁸ make a slightly different move, but on basically the same grounds: true, they say, we can't really admit ontological objects. But Peirce himself makes a distinction between the 'dynamic object' and the 'immediate object'. Reading this as a metaphysical distinction, Jakobson and Eco select from this pair only the 'immediate object', relegating the 'dynamic object' to the realm, *outside*, of the non-semiotic, and retaining the 'immediate object' to correspond with 'denotation', or 'the object as represented'. Granted that the 'object as the sign itself represents it' is Peirce's own definition of the 'immediate object'. I would nonetheless quarrel with the construal given by the masters of the 'dynamic object'. My understanding of the dynamic object is that it is that against which, in scientific experimentation, the sign/theory/representation is tested, that which, in Peirce's words, can 'surprise us' — a capacity that the 'object as represented in the sign' manifestly lacks. Surprise is the counter to predictability, the always-already known, the only thing with the power to change our minds/signs/theories, the as-yet-unsaid impinging on the talked-over, the site of discontinuity and the place for questions. It may indeed lie outside the bounds of language construed as a synchronic system; but it is not beyond the semiotic, insofar as this is concerned with 'knowability'. For the thing radically beyond knowledge is not signified, certainly; but known to be unknown, it is. "That to which

the representation should conform, writes Peirce, “is something in the nature of a representation, or sign — something noumenal, intelligible, conceivable, and *utterly unlike a thing in itself*” (5.533, my emphasis). Recognised in its unfamiliarity, it is ‘dynamic’, in Peirce’s eccentric usage, because it is in a relation of contrast — the intellectual version of ‘reaction’ — with the system of predictabilities and interpretations already in place.¹⁹

The point I have been discussing relies on the nexus between the principle of arbitrariness and the principle of synchronicity in structuralist theory, and goes, I think, to the heart of the matter. Peirce’s theory is not synchronic, but continuous, a theory of the transformation of knowledge(s). Even in their use of the concept of the interpretant, and infinite semiosis, however, Eco and Jakobson tie it to transformation *within* the network of signs that makes up the system.²⁰ The question of the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the sign/language/semiotic system *cannot arise* in a theory that is governed by a temporal, rather than a spatial model. By contrast, in a structuralist semiotics that assumes the continuity of language and discourse, discourse, it seems, ends up being thought under the same notion of ‘system’ as phonology or grammar. Benveniste’s refusal of this move offers a naive, though paradoxically more satisfying, solution to the problem: *langue* is systemic, synchronic, arbitrary; only *discours* has as its business to refer to the world and say things about it. Thus, in “la semiologie de la langue” there is no place for Peirce. But in what Benveniste calls the ‘semantic’ — discourse in its acts of referring and performing²¹ — there would most certainly be no incompatibility.²²

Peirce visited

Peirce starts — not from the question “what is language?” — but from a post-Kantian problematic of the relation of the world to a mind. Where Kant models his formulation of the question on the classical view of the proposition, Peirce introduces ‘the sign’ — ‘the representamen’ — in the role of mediator. What is important about this move is that it aligns with his very strongly stated views on the basing of logic on non-psychological premises: By doing this, he reverses the relation between the mind and the sign, using the latter as model for the former, instead of the other way round. ‘The sign’, as a result takes on the status of a distinct problem, and while Peirce thought of himself as continuing, rather than changing, the Kantian project, the distinctness of the two emerges in various ways as Peirce gradually distinguishes the role of sign-theory from its place in metaphysics and epistemology, and gives it the function of a reworking of logic. One of his most frequently quoted titles is “Logic viewed as semiotics”,²³ where logic is

given three branches, each governed by one of the dimensions of signhood: Speculative Grammar, the study of the signhood of signs; Critic, or Logic Proper, the study of truth value; and Speculative Rhetoric, or Methodeutic, the study of the “development” of signs, their effects in circulation.²⁴

The problem with writing a brief exposition of Peirce is that his writings cover some fifty years, and many of his views — especially on technical questions in logic — were considerably modified during this period. There is no definitive version. For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to the “early” and the “later” theories, since in respect of his theory of signs little of substance changes from 1865 until about 1903. The early theory is recognisably Kantian, notwithstanding the importance of the concept of mediation; the later theory corresponds with the programme to enlarge the scope of logic, which can be dated from the Lowell Lectures of 1903-4.

In the beginning, the mediating sign has, says Peirce, a material form, but this is “unimportant”, a mere accident: the essence of the sign, of knowledge, is the representability of the world to the mind. This view is governed by the model of perception: the world, as it were, enters the mind through the senses, primarily vision. But the presupposition of this problematic — the conception of a fixed and stable meaning, entirely determined by the form of the object of knowledge — has no place in Peirce, who from the outset is less concerned with the contents of a cranium than with how knowledge is made, construing knowledge in a social, rather than an individual dimension. The problem of knowledge is modelled, then, not on perception, but on *systematic knowledge*, that is, the practices of science. Thus the sign, for Peirce, is the moment of transformation, and its interpretant a *second* transformation. Only in this way can he account for what he calls the process of enquiry. “A sign is something, by knowing which, we know something more”.²⁵ Although to proceed, scientific investigation must believe in the possibility of a stable truth, science would not be what it is, if it did not presuppose the necessity for our knowledges to supersede themselves. This may resemble a familiar progressivist position, and there is a great deal in Peirce which does suppose the implacable march of Western rationality towards ever more accurate representations. Yet the interest of his work does not depend on this faith. For his theory of the sign is posited on the absolute instability of meaning. Hence, in the later theory, Critic is only a part of logic, and its second part at that: truth values are subject to the destabilising mechanism of interpretation. The interpretant is both that which follows through the implications of a sign, draws conclusions in such a way as to produce propositions in

their turn open to the same process, and that which by definition raises questions, brings doubt to bear upon a statement not from the position of automatic scepticism that he derides in Descartes, but from the position provided by another necessarily discontinuous set of statements.²⁶

Another way in which the traditional theory of representation is problematised in Peirce is in what has frequently, but I think mistakenly, been taken to be his idealism. The object and the interpretant are not of distinct substances, they are not different orders of phenomena from the sign or representamen. The process of signhood, which Peirce calls 'semiosis', is deemed to be continuous: that is, nothing that is not of the order of a sign can translate, or be translated by, a sign. From this it follows that the three terms of the sign relation, the object, the representamen, and the interpretant, are not distinguished from each other by different essences or inherent properties, but by their respective places in the process:

FIG. 1²⁷

SIGN	SIGN	SIGN
1	2	3
representamen	object	interpretant

The sign has materiality primarily as event: it brings the object into relation with the interpretant, it permits of the decipherment of the world. Notice that in this phrase, which I borrow, modified, from Metz,²⁸ and which is very much in the spirit of Barthes, the object is taken to be not neutral — an amorphous mass, pure substance, or “in itself” — but rather, the always already significant world as defined by the multifarious systems and practices of culture. Thus, if it is the case that the world, as a set of kinds of objects, events, etc., is already significant, then the object is a sign. It needs the representamen, however, in order for further signifying to occur. Construed in this way, Peircean semiosis is signifying practice, but this is not posited in individual agency. The object is always already in the social processes which both define and destabilise the schemes of things. The representamen, we may well say, inserts it in these schemes, leaving it open to the interpretant to do as interpretants will.

A third way in which the traditional theory of representation is challenged by Peirce is his slow, and never fully worked out discovery

of the importance of the formal determinants of signs in themselves. In 1867, in his first and still most widely quoted published paper,²⁹ Peirce had produced his early formulation of the theory of signs, and had added to it that signs were of three kinds. When they represent by analogy, they are 'icons'; by existential — causal, spatial or temporal — connection, they are 'indices'; and when they represent by convention — a rule or habit that decrees their representational value — they are 'symbols'. In 1903, however, there are no less than three sets of divisions, called trichotomies, of which this is merely one; by combination, these three trichotomies form 10 classes of sign. Figure 2, following, shows the original theory; figure 3, the three trichotomies, and figure 4, the combination of the three trichotomies to form the 10 classes:

Figure 2

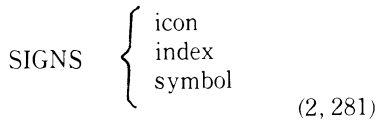


Figure 3 is the crucial one, since it is the basis for fig. 4 of which the terminology is formed by a process of combination across the three columns of fig. 3, from right to left. The following points should be noted in fig. 3:

—there is a trichotomy for each of the dimensions of signhood: the trichotomy of the representamen is the trichotomy of the sign considered in itself; the trichotomy of the object — strictly speaking, of the relation of representamen and object — is the trichotomy of the extension, or logical breadth of a sign, its denotation or subsuming power; and the trichotomy of the interpretant — strictly speaking, of the three-way correlation — is the trichotomy of the sign as it provides the basis for interpretation, its implications, the conclusions — necessary or not — that can be drawn from it.

—working from right to left, the trichotomies can be read as (3) —complete signhood, (2) signhood with the dimension of interpretation bracketed off, and (1) signhood with both interpretation and representation bracketed off, leaving 'the sign taken in itself' to mean 'the sign as having the power/potential to (a) represent something and (b) determine a second, interpreting sign.

—none of the terms in any of the columns now stands as the name of a class of signs, but as the predicate defining a *dimension of a*

FIGURE 3³⁰

	<u>1st</u> <u>REPRESENTAMEN</u>	<u>2nd</u> <u>OBJECT</u>	<u>3rd</u> <u>INTERPRÉTANT</u>
<u>1st</u>	qualisign	icon	rhe me/term
<u>2nd</u>	sinsign/token	index	dicent sign/proposition
<u>3rd</u>	legisign/type	sy mbol	argument

FIGURE 4

(I) Rhe matic Iconic <u>Qualisign</u>	(V) Rhe matic <u>Iconic</u> <u>Legisign</u>	(VIII) <u>Rhe matic</u> <u>Sy mbol</u> Legisign	(X) <u>Argument</u> <u>Sy mbolic</u> Legisign
(II) Rhe matic <u>Iconic</u> <u>Sinsign</u>	(VI) <u>Rhe matic</u> <u>Indexical</u> <u>Legisign</u>	(VII) <u>Dicent</u> <u>Indexical</u> <u>Legisign</u>	(IX) <u>Dicent</u> <u>Sy mbol</u> Legisign
	(III) <u>Rhe matic</u> <u>Indexical</u> <u>Sinsign</u>	(IV) <u>Dicent</u> <u>Indexical</u> <u>Sinsign</u>	
		(2,264)	

dimension of signhood; thus, fig. 3 represents an analysis of the structure of signhood, where fig. 2 is a diagram of the genus 'sign' and its species.

It follows from this reading of two figures that the status of the terms 'icon', 'index' and 'symbol' has changed, and that these words *no longer mean the same thing* in the state of the theory corresponding to figure 3 as they did in the previous state. Now turning to contrast figures 2 and 4, each a diagram of the classes of signs and corresponding, respectively, to the early and later versions of the

theory, it is clear that the new scheme gives a place to the ‘sign in itself’ which was unavailable to it under the old scheme. While the distinction between ‘icon’ ‘index’ and ‘symbol’ is implicitly drawn in terms of formal considerations, these are never specified as such, and the material form of a sign is rarely seen as more than a trivial concern with the accidents, as distinct from the essence, of the function of the sign.

Not only do we have, in the new scheme, a place for the sign in itself, but this place is potentially of considerable interest. In the place of the qualisign, it is not difficult to imagine the material determinants (sound, colour, line) of the signs of different media; while the relation of sinsign to legisign is that of the instantiation of the law of a form, sufficiently close to the kind of distinction made by Saussure between *langue* and *parole* for the theory of codes to be articulated with Peircean theory at this point. But there is everything wrong with the way Peirce discusses this trichotomy — everything that sets it at odds with all that has been most productive in the European tradition as it arose from, and was largely determined by, technical linguistics. For this reason, Peirce cannot authorise the process of rewriting that it would be necessary to engage in in order to effect the join in this way. Which does not lead to the conclusion that it cannot, or should not be done. But not here, not now.

Allow me to recapitulate: the question of Peirce’s early work, following Kant, is, how the mind knows the world, or how the world turns into knowledge. The answer that is proposed is, through the mediation of representation(s). The place of *perception* in this problem is instructive: when we perceive, Peirce claims, we do not simply record the raw input of our senses; perception is the *organisation* of sense data, it is never “raw”, never unmediated by the structures of meaning. Perception is to the sense data, as predication is to the subject of a proposition. Perception is, therefore, a form of interpretation.³¹ The percept is always already a sign. Yet why does the question of perception take its place in the theory of knowledge? It is, in Peirce as elsewhere, the classic form of the epistemological problematic, the model that represents — the use of this term is not coincidental — the individual head coming to terms with its environment according to the Enlightenment privileging of sight as knowledge: while all the senses are thought as channels for the entry of the outer to the inner space of reason, they are organised hierarchically from the sense of smell, allied to the instinctual and the animal, to the sense of sight, allied to the understanding and the ambiguity of the term ‘vision’. Above this only is the blindness of Homer and the seers, which is called insight. Until ‘the sign’ takes its place within a theory of code, the traditional form of

the questions of the knowing subject and the known object cannot be radically altered. The placement of sign-theory within the ambit of social practice and the theorisation of the code as a socially ratified system of differentials, displace the framework of the subject/object and introduce the question of the formal and material conditions under which a knowledge, or a signification, can emerge.

My view of the development of Peirce's theory of signs is that at a certain point, under conditions which I cannot detail here, the problematic of representation is displaced in just this way. Starting with the post-Kantian problematic of the mediation of the world and the mind, it arrives at a point which admits of, but does not elaborate, a theory of the formal and material conditions of signhood. When this is in place, as the First Trichotomy, it effects a radical shift in the discursive economy governing the sense of the terms in the rest of the theory. No sign can ever be, simply, "an icon", "an index" or "a symbol" again. These terms become adjectives which must combine with others from the Third Trichotomy, to qualify the nominal terms from the First Trichotomy. The interest of the actual classifications displayed in Figure 4 may not be very great: my purpose in this paper is not to discuss this issue, but rather to point to the importance of the theoretical move that has resulted in the elaborated theory. Signs are now no longer classified in terms of their representational power; they are classified in terms of how each dimension of signhood is acting on each other.

As a result of this move, there are no signs to start with. Any sign is the discursive product of the interaction of one member of each trichotomy. Signs are therefore made, rather than used. They are not the constituent units of a pre-existent code, but the outcome of rule-governed practices with material qualities. Or rather, this is what I can say about the theory represented in figures 3 and 4. Peirce did not. Nor, I think, could he have done so. But that, too, is another story. And correlatively with the failure to pursue these implications, there is also the failure to see that the elaborated theory raises the question that I alluded to at the beginning of this paper. The elaborated theory remains a theory of representation: under the combinatority of figures 3 and 4, no sign can be produced that might exclude the representational dimension. All ten classes of sign "pass through" the Second Trichotomy; they all have objects. Thus no interpretant — no reading — can be produced in the Peircean scheme that could skip from the third to the first trichotomy; no reading could be a reading of the formal/material conditions of the sign without a content of some sort. Only if figure 3 were the names of classes of signs, instead of the rules underpinning the production of the classes, could music, for instance,

count as a semiotic system. Or non-figural painting. Or algebra. Or gestures, or architecture, or table-manners... The practice of any of these formal systems can be considered to take their own rules as objects, **but I** think it would be false to argue from this that they are therefore representational.

The objection could cogently be made at this point, that it is precisely a theory that has a place for representation that “we” need for the description of such things as photography, film, and most verbal discursive practices. That whether in the form of the early theory, or the later form, the distinctions between icon, index, and symbol are useful for discussing, say, the recognisability of a coded content. And a case can be made, and has been made in discussions of such painters as Mondrian, that formal compositional practices are what remain after recognisable contents have been eliminated, rather than being the semiotic *sine qua non* of such representations. There are two arguments here: one is, whether or not to use Peirce at all, and the second is, if we do, in which form? Those theories which are my business in this paper have answered the first question in the affirmative, and have chosen the early Peirce. And the early Peirce can be described quite precisely as pre-modernist, in this sense, that if, using this framework, you were to eliminate the represented object (say a “Tree”, by Mondrian), there would be nothing left at all, certainly not a formally composed pictorial space, but possibly, just possibly, a mental intention and a bit of the world.³²

The people who launched the use of Peirce were not really Peirce scholars: Metz borrowed from Barthes, and Barthes either from the small anthology of Peirce’s writings that was in circulation at the time, and that is the basis for Benveniste’s reading,³³ or from Jakobson and Jakobson borrowed from Arthur Burks, one of the original editors of Peirce with as close a familiarity with Peirce as anyone, a logician, whose seminal construing the original classification of signs barely alludes to the elaborated theory.³⁴ Our question, then, might be: what is it that makes the elaborated theory invisible? But I should prefer to modify it, asking instead, what is it about the simple classification that appears to correspond to the needs of structuralist semiology? What, indeed, are these needs? It is by asking the question in this way that we shall see how structuralist semiology became itself, and what it was that it became.

Structuralist uses of Peirce

At the same time as the implications of the theory of signification were being pursued by Derrida,³⁵ the work of Hjelmslev³⁶ was being retrieved primarily as an attempt to theorise the signified, in such work as Greimas' *Semantique structurale*³⁷ and the subsequent productions of the group of workers that gathered around Greimas' seminars. In Hjelmslev, the sign is theorised as having two "planes", the expression and the content, and each of these is articulated as a form and a substance. In place of the Saussurean imperative, which ties the signified to its signifier, without which it is strictly unthinkable, in Hjelmslev, we have a theory which allows the two relative autonomy. In work following Saussure, the signified is the product of the signifier, in a non-transitive or asymmetrical relation; in work following the Hjelmslevian line, they are viewed as parallel and distinct, Eco explaining that it is the rules of the code that provide the rules of correlation between the two planes.³⁸ It is in Greimas' work, however, that the paradox to which this gives rise is fully revealed: this is a semantics tied in no way to a theory of the sign, and it is accepted in this school that this is a semiotics governed by the concept of "the form of the content" which is not thought in terms of the material determinants of signhood. This, of course, is the re-emergence of the disembodied signified — said to be given in discourse, certainly, but where "discourse" is a term not theorised through a theory of code and medium as the enabling conditions of the semiotic. Eco's insistence on correlation prevents him from falling into this trap, though it cannot eliminate the existence of the trap itself; while Jakobson on the other hand has no truck with a view of meaning that is not the product of coded convention.³⁹ While I would want to add to this view of signification the notion that the sign is not merely a material form, but an event, my sympathies lie in general with Jakobson on this point. However, my thesis will be (a) that, whether in the Jakobsonian or the Hjelmslevian framework, Peirce is used primarily to supplement the theory of the signified, as *if* this were a separate problem from the theory of signhood, and (b) that in both frameworks, the signified has returned as a representation, precisely because the sign no longer has the job of enabling it, but is there to "mediate" or to "vehicle" it.

It is not at all certain that in much recent work, signification and representation are seen to be antagonistic. Indeed, in many places, they may even appear to be interchangeable, and, according to the dictates of good style, which tell us that we should vary our vocabulary as much as possible, the more synonyms we can use for any concept, the better. But notice that this stylistic precept is based on the idea

that the concept remains the same, though the word might change. It is — dare I say it? “in other words” — a precept based on representationalism: the concept is somehow independent, the word merely conveys it. The word is the name for the concept, as *arbor* is the Latin name for tree. Let me remind you, therefore, that Saussure made it clear that representation and signification were quite distinct notions of how language works:

For some people, when language is brought back to its first principles, it is seen as a nomenclature, a list of terms corresponding to so many things. This conception can be criticised from many points of view. It supposes ready-made ideas ... (p. 97)⁴⁰

The linguistic sign binds not a thing and a name, but a concept and an acoustic image. (p. 98)

The bond uniting signifier to signified is arbitrary ... (p. 100)

The signs of politeness ... are established by rule; it is this rule that compels their use, not their intrinsic value ... (p. 101)

There are no preestablished ideas, nothing is distinct prior to language. (p. 155)

In semiological systems, like language, where the elements are held together in a reciprocal equilibrium by definite rules, the problem of the identity [of a sign] is the same as the problem of its value. (p. 154)

... language can be nothing but a system of pure values... (p. 155)

... the solidarity of a linguistic system is the product of all its elements; the value of one term is the product of the simultaneous presence of all the others (p. 159)

... instead of ideas given in advance, we find values produced by the system. (p. 162)

In the passage just quoted, Saussure argues that value is only one aspect of signification; this latter is the relation of signified to signifier, while value is the relation of sign to sign in the paradigmatic dimension. Here, it is not made clear exactly what function he ascribes

to value in the formation of signification, but this is clarified at the end of the chapter:

... instead of ideas given in advance, [we find] values produced by the system. When we say, then, that they correspond with concepts, we mean that these concepts are purely differential, defined not positively by their content, but negatively, by their relations with the other terms of the system [...] The real interpretation of the diagram

signifier

signified

is to symbolise signification... the concept is in no way originary: it is a value determined by its relation with other similar values, without which there would be no signification. (p. 162)

Saussure goes on to gloss his own procedure:

When I stay at the level of the association of concept with acoustical image, I am making a move that may be more or less precise, and may give some idea of reality; but in no way am I talking about the linguistic fact in its essential features or in its fullness. (Ibid.)

I wish to contrast these arguments with the following passage from Metz:

a child that recognises a car in the street also recognises one in a photograph [...] while the one that does not recognise it in a photograph is also the one that does not recognise it in the street: that is to say, he does not know about cars.

So at this point, the teacher of images becomes a teacher of civilisation, concerned to increase the number of cultural objects, or of objects allegedly natural, that his pupils should be able to recognise: in practice, *this amounts to naming them*. *The lesson in images has become a lesson in things*, that is to say, in large measure a *lesson in words*.⁴¹ (emphasis added)

Now, would you trust this man if he tried to sell you a used sign-vehicle? — let alone a second-hand semiology. Some people, as Saussure was overheard to say in a sinister and menacing tone, think that language is just a nomenclature.

Metz is something of a naive representationalist. Not that he ever actually says that the roving eye of the camera simply captures reality. But it is at this point, and because of the insistence with which the myth of representation continues to reemerge in his work, that he has trouble with the concepts of structuralist semiology, and foremost among them, the concept of signification. When he claims that the image is a message without a code, his argument turns on the claim that there is no paradigmatic dimension in film language, no set of quasi-similar choices, no discrete units opposable among themselves. This in turn supposes that a paradigm is a set, rather than a differential rule that can produce sets. It would seem to follow from this argument that there are no values in the Saussurean sense, but Metz can hardly claim that. For to do so is to fall into the trap of mimeticism, and to assume that the representation of the real is as innocent as reality itself. French semiology was too dominated by Barthes by this stage for anyone working in the area to neglect the ideological, or mythic charge, of the apparently mimetic. So the solution to the quandary is sought in the distinction, borrowed from Hjelmslev, between denotation and connotation.⁴² Connotation is added by the discursive dimension, while denotation is merely the re-presentation of the real in another medium. It is here that Metz, to be followed by innumerable other theorists of the visual, uses the Peircean terms “icon” and its synonym “likeness” — for instance, in this passage:

This is an example of a code that is both “grammatical” and “rhetorical”, simultaneously and indistinctly both. It is grammatical because it guarantees the most literal level of the intelligibility of the visual plot (this is a denotative code even though it is also strongly connotative)...

There are of course other codes that come together to organise the play of smaller syntagmatic elements [but at the level of the smallest elements] there is a problem: among these codes ... which are specifically cinematographic, and which are simply integrated into the filmed spectacle? In the second case, we have to do with what is usually, in these discussions, called “reality”, a set of perceptive, iconographic and symbolic structures *that preexist the intervention of the camera and which the camera simply relays in the guise of an analogical recording* (“*representation*”, “*iconicity*” in the parlance of American semioticians, “*likeness*” in that of Peirce) — but this does not prevent it from superimposing on these images its specific codes.⁴³ (emphasis added)

Denotation, it seems, is the simple recording of reality. The intervention of the camera may superimpose the coded upon these images, but these images are thought of as distinct from this codification. The use of terms such as “icon” “representation” and “likeness” is a strategy for guaranteeing that this stupendously unsemiotic concept — a camera that relays “reality” in the form of non- or pre-coded images — can nonetheless be said to be producing “signs”. Now, of course, Metz does not stay in this bind. In a text designed to correct the naive reliance on “the icon”, he invokes Peirce as “initiator” of research into signs that operate by resemblance. Modifying Peirce in the light of his own recent work, he claims that “resemblance is itself codified”.⁴⁴ But yet again, it is a curious fact that he should persist in the assumption that what governs the identity of an image is the identification of its *denoted content*. His way of getting “beyond the analogy fix” (a free rendition of the title of the essay to which I am alluding⁴⁵) is to discuss the interaction of verbal languages and images:

the visible world and the idiom are not strangers to one another: while their coded interaction has not yet been studied in any detail, and while their relationship can hardly be conceived as a servile copy of one by the other... it is still the case that one of the functions of language, amongst others, *is to name the units the eye picks out (but also to help it to pick them out)*, and that one of the functions of sight is to inspire the semantic configurations of language (but also to be inspired by them). These are the problems of the *relation between language and perception*...⁴⁶ (emphasis added)

The question as stated in the “teaching of civilisation” passage are still with us; far from avoiding the trap set by the notions of ‘literal denotation’, ‘images that relay reality’ and so on, this passage continues to work on the premise that it is language alone that is genuinely semiotic. Notice that “the image” has given way, here, to the “visible world”, and ultimately, to “perception”. Classical epistemology is still in place, eliding the possibility of thinking the image as a signifying practice in favour of *objects of the real, admitted to the mind, and named*.

If ‘language’ is arbitrary and conventional, it would seem, images must be “Natural”. The position is spelt out by Peter Wollen in a text-book style presentation of “The semiology of the cinema”. Wollen’s view is that the principle of the arbitrary sign had the unfortunate consequence that “would be semiologists *found themselves limited* to such micro-languages as the language of traffic signs... [and]

many of these were parasitic on verbal language proper.”⁴⁷ Wollen seems particularly concerned at the implications of Barthes’ gnomic pronouncement that, rather than linguistics being a branch of semiology, semiology should be considered a branch of linguistic. Linguistics, with its reliance on the principle of arbitrariness, might take over, making it impossible to talk about non-arbitrary signs:

This seems a desperate conclusion. The province turns out to be so much ‘the most complex and universal’ that it engulfs the whole.⁴⁸

Implicit in Wollen’s fear is the assumption that the specificity of the cinematic image is such that it cannot be theorised on the basis of the same principles as the ‘linguistic sign’, that the differences between them are such that the theory of one threatens the other with annihilation.

Saussure’s discussion of the place of ‘natural signs’ in semiology bears reconsideration at this point. It is a “passing remark”:

when semiology is organised, it will have to think about whether modes of expression which depend on entirely natural signs — such as pantomime — fall by right within its scope. Let us suppose that it does welcome them: even so, its principal objective will still be the set of systems based on the arbitrary nature of the sign. In fact, any socially ratified means of expression rests in principle on a collective habit or, and this amounts to the same thing, on convention. The signs of politeness, for instance, which are often invested with a kind of natural expressivity (think of the Chinese who salutes his emperor by bowing nine times to the ground), are nonetheless determined by a rule; it is this rule that compels their use, not their intrinsic value. So we can say that those signs that are entirely arbitrary display better than the others the ideal of the semiological function; this is why language, the most complex and wide-spread of the systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the general model of the whole of semiology, even though language is only a particular system. (pp. 100-101)

There is an apparent equivocation in this passage: on one hand, ‘natural signs’ are discussed as if they are a specific class, but on the other, as the argument progresses, they are seen to fall within the

province of a general semiology only insofar as their "natural expressivity" is displaced as the criterion of their class-definition. They are "systems", and these systems are rule-governed: whether or not they are naturally expressive, this is taken as relatively irrelevant to their use. They will fall within the scope of a general semiology only if they can be defined as belonging to the same class of objects as semiology takes as its specific province. The model of this class is the linguistic sign. In the continuation of this passage, which goes on to discuss the apparent naturalness of two classes of linguistic sign — onomatopoeia, and exclamation — Saussure argues that the kind of imitation of natural sounds that a language can effect is already governed by the conventions of the system, and that words formed in this way will nonetheless be subject to grammatical rules on the same basis as words formed from entirely arbitrary roots, and that exclamations display what Barthes was later to call "l'effet du réel", differing from language to language in the same systematic ways as the rest of the lexicon.

Wollen's argument assumes, by contrast, that "natural signs" are (I am tempted to say "by nature") a distinct class of objects:

... our experience of the cinema suggests that great complexity of meaning can be expressed through images [...] The implication of this is that it is not only systems exclusively 'grounded on the arbitrariness of the sign' which are expressive and meaningful. 'Natural signs' cannot be so readily dismissed as Saussure imagined.

(My reading of the foregoing passage in Saussure is that it does not 'dismiss natural signs', but that it dismisses the argument that some signs are natural.)

It is this demand for the *reintegration of the natural sign into semiology* which led Christian Metz, a disciple of Barthes, to declare that *cinema is a language, but a language without a code...*

What is needed is a more precise discussion of what we mean by a 'natural sign' and by the series of words such as 'analogous', 'continuous', 'motivated' which are used to describe such signs by Barthes, Metz and others. Fortunately the groundwork necessary for further precision has already been accomplished, by Charles Sanders Peirce, the American logician.⁴⁹ (emphasis added)

The theoretical sophistication of the Saussurean move is to shift the focus from the representational to the systemic, and to claim that pantomime is a semiological system only insofar as it is defined as a system governed by conventional rules. To retain the representational dimension as the criterion for signhood is to focus on the content, a “meaning [that] can be expressed through images”; it is to forget that mime, images, or good manners are the enabling condition for the formation of certain kinds of meanings. The Saussurean move depends on the requirement that a theory, to be cogent, must rest on a consistent definition of its object. The Metz and Wollen position would have respected this requirement had it concluded that images and other “natural signs” could *not* take their place within semiology. Instead, it seeks to extend “semiology” by “integrating” a heteroclitic object. It is in this way that it was able to produce such paradoxical statements as the one that holds that “cinema is a language, but a language without a code”.⁵⁰ Metz and Wollen stands as the paragon example of my argument, that Peirce is brought in to supplement Saussure, as the natural is to the artificial, as epistemology is to semiology.

If, to return to Peter Wollen’s metaphor, the province threatens to “engulf” the whole, this “whole” (the class of natural signs) must be saved, must not be theorised as if it’s the same, must be allowed its inherent difference. I am reminded of Jonah and the whale: mankind, that was given dominion over the earth and all its creatures, is very small beer for the monsters of the deep. The threat is that nature, if we’re not good boys, will swallow up culture. But Wollen’s version of the myth is curiously reversed. It is natural signs that are at risk, natural knowledge, we might say, uncoded, uncluttered by the overlay of convention. Recall, that it is through the eye that the world enters the mind without cultural intervention. Natural knowledge is the great humanist myth. Now it is this myth that is at issue in Peirce’s rewriting of Kant, and in particular in his construal of perception as interpretation, construing, and thus constructing the object in the course of enquiry. (We might take as an example of this process the object of the term ‘sign’, reworked in the debate between a representational epistemology, and a semiology.) This rewriting of the theory of signs alters the status of the “icon”. In the early theory, it is a kind of sign giving a likeness of a real thing, and is even used by Peirce to argue that the interpretation of a symbol must rely on a “mental icon” of the kind of thing denoted by the symbol. This is a fully-blown “picture theory” of language. In the later theory, however, the icon is an analytical diagram providing the grounds for a hypothesis about the structure of reality. It could only become this when it was no longer a

kind of sign in its own right, but an aspect of signhood, governed on the one hand by the conventions of interpreting systems, and on the other, by the formal and material conditions of signhood itself. But this post-humanist Peirce is not the one that is generally read, known, or, more seriously, sought after. When the semiological whale swallows Jonah, it is a monstrous, not a natural act, while its victim is the natural man of humanist epistemology.

The 'natural signs', needless to say, are taken by Wollen to be the icon and the index:

An icon, according to Peirce, is a sign which represents its object mainly by its similarity to it; the relationship between signifier and signified is not arbitrary but is one of resemblance or likeness.

An index is a sign by virtue of an existential bond between itself and its object.⁵¹

What you should notice in this gloss is the slide between two sets of terminology; the Saussurean terminology of "signifier" and "signified", which are the 'signs' of the theory of signification, and the Peircean terminology of "sign" and "object", as *if there were no difference between them*. Jakobson sins in the same way:

Peirce ... makes a clear-cut distinction between the "material qualities, the signans of any sign, and its 'immediate interpretant'", that is, the signatum. Signs (or *representamina* in Peirce's nomenclature) offer three varieties of semiosis, three distinct "representative qualities" based on different relationships between the signans and signatum. The difference enables him to discern three cardinal types of signs.

1) the *icon* acts chiefly by a *factual similarity* between its signans and signatum, e.g. between the picture of an animal and the animal pictured; the former stands for the latter "merely because it resembles it."

2) The *index* acts chiefly by a *factual existential contiguity* between its signans and signatum...

[these] semiotic deliberations revive the question, astutely discussed in *Cratylus...*: does language attach form to content "by nature" ... or "by convention"?⁵²

Notice that for Jakobson, there are three sets of interchangeable

terms: he replaces 'signifier' and 'signified' by 'signans' and 'signatum', then allows 'signatum' to carry the weight of the two Peircean terms — 'object' and 'immediate interpretant'; finally, they are conflated with 'form' and 'content'. This tells us a number of things: firstly, 'signatum' is not the same as 'signified'. For Saussure, and for Benveniste following him, value is the product of difference: the system is a system of values, and each sign has a value made up of the combination of its signifier and its signified, each of which is defined by reciprocal contrast with its neighbours in the network. In his *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*,⁵³ however, Jakobson explicitly reduces the scope of this principle. It is only, he says, phonology that is properly described by the concept of negative difference. This is because only the distinctive features are simply discriminatory, without a meaning in themselves. The signs at any of the higher levels of language, he claims, are 'positive', precisely because they are correlated with a content. Hence, for Jakobson, there is no incompatibility between the 'object' and the 'signatum', and the precision of the concept of the signified, especially as glossed by Benveniste for whom it is merely another discriminatory feature, is thereby lost.⁵⁴

The second thing that we learn from Jakobson's synonyms is that the crucial Peircean distinction between the object and the interpretant is conflated to become this positive content. If the (immediate) object and the (immediate) interpretant are equivalent, then again, we have a binary relation, the relation of word to (mediated) world, and the productiveness of the principle of infinite semiosis is reduced to the reproduction of a content, "in other words".

There is a complex equivocation in Jakobson's position at this point. As linguistic semiotician, the practical use that he makes of 'iconicity' and 'indexicality' is precisely to submit them to the imperatives of a code. Thus, the "kind of imitation that language [uses to] attach the signans to the signatum" is that "the arrangement of the words in the sentence, for instance"⁵⁵ may correspond to a sequence of events, or a hierarchical ranking. While the application of a principle such as this must be subject to the grammatical rules of the language in question, Jakobson's use of such words as "reflect", "reproduce" and "correspond to" shows that he is up against something of the same problem that we saw in Metz. Jakobson speaks of linguistic "devices" whereby such correspondence between word and world is produced, but nonetheless has a tendency to claim that such devices are a universal property of language, in the sense of *langage*, rather than specific coding devices produced differently by different systems. As if the business of *langage* were to correspond to the world as it stands. In an article entitled "Quest for the essence of language", representational claims such as

this take on greater status than we might have expected them to have in the theoretical perspective grounded by the “distinctive feature”.

Jakobson seems to want it both ways. On the one hand, the idea that the world is there to be spoken about allows the construal of index and icon as “natural signs”; but on the other hand Jakobson well knows that there is no such thing. The philosophical contradiction has little practical importance for him, since he is far too concerned with the furtherance of descriptive linguistics for the issue to be an issue. It may be better, for this reason, not to take Jakobson for the theorist of meaning he has been claimed to be, to leave him, so to speak, to his own devices. But we cannot. His work is too prominent, is used in too many places to too many purposes, for me to desist. Jakobson, I am about to argue, is, not a naive, but a wily old representationalist.

Jakobson is celebrated, for instance by Kristeva,⁵⁶ for permitting the reintroduction of the spoken and speaking subject, and is taken in general to the psycho-analytical heart for his theory of child language acquisition. We should recall that the bi-axial theory of language which he uses not only as the basic conceptual framework for his theory of the structure of linguistic systems, and the poetic, is also the basis of his theory of the acquisition and the loss of language: ‘contiguity’ and ‘similarity’, and the projection of one on to the other, provide, in the famous paper on aphasia,⁵⁷ the framework for discussing language disorders, artistic styles, and rhetoric. What had, in Saussure, the restricted status of a model for construing the term ‘system’, is here given astonishing explanatory power. The elegance of the argument is more than a little seductive, but, moderately resistant after years of reading Jakobson, I am led to wonder, not *how* this explanatory power is drawn from the model of the two axes, but what is at stake when it is.

Jakobson’s version of the theory of bi-axiality is not quite the same as Saussure’s. In this latter, the *syntagm* is the principle of the chain of signifiers — the sound chain, as well as the rules for morphological affixion and syntax. The *paradigm* is the open set of items that can occur in any slot as defined by this chain. The syntagm works “in praesentia”, the paradigm, “in absentia”. The syntagm functions by joins and gaps (difference), the paradigm by the substitution of similar or different items. When Jakobson reworks this set of concepts, you will recall, he does so by summing them up in the distinction between “similarity” and “contiguity”. Now, similarity (or association) and contiguity are the twin terms of 19th century psychology of perception, having there the function of defining the two kinds of organisation of sense-data into knowledge. Recalling that Jakobson published his first paper in 1921, his invocation of this framework is unsurprising. And

while it is possible also to read Saussure's opposition between 'paradigm' and 'syntagm' as being based, likewise, on the same theory of psychology, this would obscure the fact that Saussure transforms this pair through the use of models in grammar, where Jakobson treads, I submit, the same path in the opposite direction. Furthermore, by allowing 'contiguity' and 'metonymy' to be virtually interchangeable, Jakobson obscures what seems to me to be the obvious fact, that a metonym is a figure of rhetoric that works by paradigmatic substitution on the same principle as does metaphor. The difference between them is thus not a linguistic difference but a representational one: a whole is substituted for another whole (metaphor) whereas a part is substituted for a whole, or vice versa, in metonymy. Metonymy, therefore, is "syntagmatic" or "contiguous" only insofar as the *signatum* is analysed as a whole with parts. And by the same token while the paradigmatic is the principle of similarity of the form of the signifier, as well as of the signified, when it is aligned with metaphor, it is reduced to similarity of meaning. Somehow, the dimension of discourse is *inoperative* in the distinction between the two figures.

Peirce, again not surprisingly, had his notions of perception and psychology firmly rooted in the 19th century, and while in his theory of signs he claims to set aside notions of psychology in favour of notions of logic, the terms "association by similarity" and "contiguity" are not uncommon. Jakobson, therefore, was not wrong to use them in his gloss of Peirce's early theory:

The *icon* acts ... by a *factual similarity* between its signans and signatum...

The *index* acts ... by a *factual contiguity* between its signans and signatum... (loc. cit)

But even in the early Peirce, a "fact" is the product of the sign process, not the basis of the sign; nor — and this from his very earliest public lectures — was psychology given the role of explaining logic and the sign-process. So the notion of a *factual* similarity or contiguity, and the explanatory relation between the mind and the sign, cannot be said to be authorised by the name of the father of icons and indices.

We have in Jakobson the three points I have discussed in my general preamble to the structuralist uses of Peirce: the signans and signatum are separate, needing to be "attached"; there are traces of representationalism in notions used to construe the signatum, such as "content", "positive", "object", and "factualness"; and a model of the structure of language is modified to give a theory of the structure of the mind, which in turn is used to discriminate between two kinds of signified

contents. The distinction between “metaphor” and “metonymy” as used by Jakobson, is exactly the same as the distinction between the two kinds of “natural” sign, the icon and the index.

Jakobson, however, is the opposite kind of representationalist from Metz and Wollen. For them, the world is a quite different sort of thing from language, requiring, therefore, a kind of sign appropriate to its forms. For Jakobson, on the other hand, the structure of the natural universe is given by the structure of the mind — and, ultimately, of the brain. Ontology is gobbled up by the bi-axiality of the larger mammals. The world is both distinct, waiting to be reflected by language, and able to be reflected without any trouble because the structure of each of the two terms of the epistemological relation — the mind and the world — is the same as the structure of language. Mediation is not even necessary, here, because, as in any phenomenological reworking of reflection theory, there is a perfect fit.⁵⁸

... More perfect, in any case, than the fit between ‘signification’ and ‘representation’, or semiotics and epistemology, in which the function of Peirce is not so much to mediate, as to provide the interface for what Derrida would call a graft.

FOOTNOTES

1. This paper was first presented at the “Language and Ideology” Conference, Sydney, July, 1984.
2. C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vols 1 - 6 ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vols. 7 & 8 ed. by Arthur Burks (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1931-1958). 5, 283; 4, 531; 1, 346 etc. Future references will be given in the texts in the usual form, i.e. volume, and paragraph number.
3. I have made this distinction in more elaborated form, in my essay “On being here and still doing it”, *Local Consumption, The Foreign Bodies Papers*, Sydney, 1981.
4. Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning” in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. Stephen Heath, Fontana Paperbacks, Glasgow, 1977 (pp. 52-68).
5. This marginality is *not* marked in Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1968. Tr. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith.
6. Cf. “SIGN: Anything which determines something else (its *interpretant*) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its *object*) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*,” (2, 303); “A sign stands for something to the idea which it produces or modifies. Or, it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without. That for which it stands is called its *object*; that which it conveys, its *meaning*; and the idea to which it gives rise, its *interpretant*.” (1, 339)

7. Cf. 2, 247, 248, 249. a useful introduction to Peirce's semiotic can be found in Douglas Greenlee, *Peirce's Concept of Sign*, Mouton, The Hague, Paris, 1973. However, Greenlee's reading is not uncontentious.
 8. Cf. fn 5.
 9. Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, vol. II, "Word and Language", Mouton, The Hague-Paris, 1971; "Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb" (pp. 130-147); "Quest for the Essence of Language", (pp. 345-359). cf. also *Coup d'oeil sur le développement de la sémiotique*, Bloomington, Indiana U.P. 1975.
 10. Cf. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, London, Secker and Warburg/BFI, 1972 (1969) ch.3, "The Semiology of the Cinema", p. 118.
 11. Emile Benveniste, "La Sémiologie de la langue", in "Semiotica, 1 & 2, 1971. Reprinted in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. II, Gallimard, Paris, 1974 (pp. 43-66), and translated in *Semiotica* special supplement 1981 (pp. 4-24).
 12. An attenuated version of this critique can be found in Francois Peraldi "Why did Peirce terrorize Benveniste?" in *Semiotica* special supplement 1981 (pp. 169-180).
 13. Or rather, what is the languageness of a language? "Mais qu'est-ce que la langue?" asks Saussure when he first introduces the distinction between 'langue' and 'langage', and he answers that it is 'un système de signes' (p. 25, p. 43). *Cours de linguistique générale*, Payot, Paris, 1971 (further references will be given by page no. in the body of the text). The obligatory introduction of the partitive in English to construe "la langue" is true to this latter insofar as "la langue" is construed at various points in Saussure's text as e.g. "un idiome déjà constitué" (p. 105), "une langue constitue un système" (p. 107), *un produit de forces sociales*" (p. 108) etc.
- To suppose that Saussure is asking "what is language?" would in any case be contradicted by the distinction, normal in French, and exploited for his theoretical purposes, between "langue" and "langage".
14. *Selected Writings*, II, op. cit.
 15. Emile Benveniste, "Nature du signe linguistique", in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, I, Gallimard, Paris, 1966 (pp. 49-55).
 16. "La forme et le sens dans le langage", *Problèmes...*, II, op.cit. (pp. 215-240); "Les niveaux de l'analyse linguistique", *Problèmes...* I, op. cit., (pp. 117-131).
Cf. also Saussure, pp. 162, 163, 168, etc.
 17. Cf. Jakobson, "Quest..." op.cit., p. 353, et passim.; Roman Jakobson and Linda Waugh, *The Sound Shape of Language*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1979 (ch. iv).
 18. Umberto Eco, "Peirce et la sémantique contemporaine", in *Langages*, 58, juin 1980 (pp. 75-91); Roman Jakobson, "Quest ..." op.cit. The argument is spelled out by Eco, and alluded to by Jakobson in his restriction of 'objects' to 'immediate objects'.
 19. Cf. It is the special field of experience to acquaint us with events, with changes of perception. Now that which particularly characterizes sudden changes of perception is a *shock*. [...] It is the compulsion, the absolute constraint upon us to think otherwise than we have been thinking that constitutes experience." (1, 336).
- "We live in two worlds, a world of fact and a world of fancy. Each of us is accustomed to think that he is the creator of his world of fancy:

that he has but to pronounce his fiat, and the thing exists, with no resistance and no effort; and although this is so far from the truth that I doubt not that much the greater part of the reader's labor is expended on the world of fancy, yet it is near enough to the truth for a first approximation. For this reason we call the world of fancy the internal world, the world of fact the external world. In this latter we are masters each of us, of his own voluntary muscles, and of nothing more. But man is sly, and contrives to make this little more than he needs. Beyond that, he defends himself with a garment of contentment and habituation. Were it not for this garment, he would every now and then find his internal world rudely disturbed and his fiats set at naught by brutal inroads of ideas from without." (1, 321).

20. Umberto Eco, "Peirce and the Semiotic Foundation of Openness", in *The Role of the Reader*, Indiana U.P., Bloomington and London, 1971, ch. 7.
Cf. Jakobson, "Linguistic Aspects of Translation", in *Selected Writings*, II, op. cit. (pp. 260-266).
21. Benveniste, *Problèmes ...*, I, chs. 10, 21, 22, 23.
22. This argument is put in my essay "On being Here and Still Doing It", cf. fn. 3.
23. MS. 336 (see Richard Robins, *Annotated Catalogue of the Manuscript Writings of C.S. Peirce*, Massachusetts, U. of Massachusetts Press, 1967.) cf. also 2, 227.
24. Cf. "Ideas stray or stolen about Scientific Writing", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, vol. II, no. 3, Summer 1978 (pp. 147-155) (introduction by John Michael Krois).
25. *Semiotics and Significs*, The Correspondance between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby, ed. by Charles S. Hardwick, Indiana U.P., Bloomington and London, 1977; Peirce to Welby, 1904 Oct. 12 (pp. 31-32). Hereinafter P/W).
26. Cf. 2, 84; 3, 515; 5, 57-58; 5, 189, etc.
The relation between the surprise of a novel experience, the doubt this brings to bear on a previously held belief, and the transformation of 'doubt' into a question, can be read in the above passages. It should be understood that questions, which are "rational contrivances" have as their function to mediate the discontinuity of doubt and prepare the ground for a new continuity.
27. Cf. 1, 346; 1, 538; 1, 541; 1, 537; 1, 339; etc.
28. Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au Cinéma*, II, Paris, Klincksieck, 1972 (p. 144).
29. 1, 545-560: "On a New List of Categories".
30. This figure does not appear in Peirce's text; it is abstracted from 2, 243-253.
31. Cf. 5, 183-4.
32. I have attempted to demonstrate the alternative to this impasse in my paper "Reading the Visual", first presented at the conference of the Australian Screen Studies Association, Griffith University, Brisbane, Nov. 1984, and to appear in abbreviated form in *Photofile*, Sydney, 1985.
33. C.S. Peirce, *Selected Writings*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, Dover Publications, 1958.
34. Arthur W. Burks, "Icon, Index, and Symbol", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, IX (1949) (pp. 673-689).

35. Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris, Minuit, 1967.
36. Louis Hjelmslev, *Prologomènes à une théorie du langage*, Paris, Minuit, 1968 (Kobenhavn, 1943).
37. A.-J. Greimas, *Semantique structurale*, Paris, Larousse, 1966.
38. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Indiana U.P., Bloomington and London, 1976.
39. Roman Jakobson, *Six Lessons on Sound and Meaning*, Great Britain, The Harvester Press, 1978. Tr. John Mepham (Paris 1976).
40. Saussure, *op.cit.* Page references will be given in the text; translations are my own.
41. Christian Metz, *Essais...*, II, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
42. Cf. Metz, *Essais...*, I, ch. 5; it should be understood that Barthes both invokes this distinction, and problematises it, in e.g. "The photographic message", in Heath *op.cit.*, (pp. 15-31). This point is made with due acknowledgement to the work of Heather Killen in her Honours dissertation, French department, University of Queensland, 1983.
43. Metz, *Essais...*, II, *op.cit.*, p. 202.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 151-162. "Au-delà de l'analogie, l'image".
46. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
47. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema*, *op.cit.*, p. 118.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
49. *Ibid.*
50. The argument for this statement is given in *Essais...*, *op.cit.* (ch. 3).
51. Wollen, *op.cit.*, p. 122.
52. Jakobson, "Quest ..." *op.cit.*, pp. 346-347.
53. Cf. lectures II & III.
54. Jakobson's argument should be contrasted with the passage in Saussure (p. 166 ff) where it is argued that 'negative difference' applies only to the signifier and the signified taken separately: value is produced by them taken together, and is 'positive'. The expression 'negative value' does not appear in Saussure, and is no doubt self-contradictory. 'Value' should be sharply distinguished from 'signified' in Saussure.
55. Jakobson, "Quest ..." *op.cit.*, p. 350.
56. Julia Kristeva, "L'Éthique de la linguistique", *Polylogue*, Paris, Seuil, 1977 (pp. 357-368) translated as "The ethics of linguistics" in Kristeva, *Desire and Language*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1980, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, tr. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (pp. 23-35).
57. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, vol. II, *op.cit.*, (pp. 239-260).
58. My account is not in contradiction with the cogent reading of Jakobson's linguistics as fundamentally informed by Husserlian phenomenology, given in Elmar Holenstein, *Roman Jakobson's approach to language: phenomenological structuralism*, tr. by Catherine Schelbert and Tarcisius Schelbert, Indiana University Press., Bloomington, 1976.

It is this phenomenological tendency in some structuralism that allows Peirce to be seen as not incompatible with it. See Jacob Liszka, "Peirce and Jakobson: towards a Structuralist Reconstruction of Peirce", *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. XXVIII (1981) (pp. 41-61).

I am inclined to think that Peirce is far less of a structuralist than Jakobson is a phenomenologist. My insistence on the letter of the Saussurean text in this paper should therefore be read not so much as a purist view of the words of the master, but as a theoretical strategy for