The End of Decoding

By Scott Simpkins

Rubber Pencil

In her collection of essays, Anecdotal Theory, Jane Gallop proposes an alternative to a formal academic rhetoric by using an initiating personal anecdote as a theoretical basis for a thesis presentation. In order to "produce a more literary theory," Gallop writes, she "experimented in the 1980s 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 honour[s] the unanny 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, told him he was wrong, that what he perceived as off-centred was just an optical illusion.

But, as numerous examples can show, it appears that nothing of any certainty or finality can ultimately be "gained" from decoding texts without accepting that these results are manufactured (or so use Nietzsche's term, "invented") 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 semiosis carries on, endlessly.

Humans, Nietzsche maintains, have arranged an epistemological "puzzle game" 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 uniquely valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language establishes the first laws of truth" (1873: 889). This is how we "invented knowledge" – "Truths are illusions that have been written, rather than invented" (891). Decoding, accordingly, could be viewed as a "redundancy of the page in this regard. While he avers that "the reproducibility of results, is undeniably seductive. 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 constraining. The text, along these lines, then, is
believe that the whole institution of literary education is a rubber pencil. Yet, a practice based on a lie – a hat trick, an act of legerdemain, a tremendous coincidence. 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 "Anyone". This clearly short circuits any conventional determination of its signification possibilities. There are no "final" decoding of Peanuts, the article explores how introducing the characters' state of emotion, prompting the decoder cannot assert definitely that this figure is a sign-vehicle rendered unreadable. The initial reference to the narrator's health condition, Poe could be seen as fundamental for his decoding/re-encoding activities of people watching, but it may serve as a type of "sick" denominator for his decoding/re-encoding of the symptoms. Or, they will discover that the patient happened on the episode up to this point. Either this will lead to the group to dismiss the proposed dishonest hypothesis, but in the process, they will see the symptomatically closer that the patient is suffering from two different medical conditions at the same time, and thus the second set of otherwise excluded symptoms actually matches up with those characteristic of the second malady. At this point, "Dr. House", it turns out that the patient withheld some key information that House or his team can literally uncover to produce a substantiable diagnosis. ("Everybody lies," is Dr. House's motto, and this is as true for medical semiotics as it is for semiotics as a whole. In other words, everybody in semiotics lies – a position consistent with Barthes's famous claim about semiotics as fundamentally the study of lying [1976].)
Hooper" (1836: 38). The "one thing remarkable in his appearance," the narrator adds, is "Swathed about the face, and hands, and body, so that he could not 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. An initial, and by this time the reader's own, standstill on decoding possibility, all this does is increase the semantic distortion of the sign vehicle, rather than clarifying it. Without detailing how this perspectival shift is accomplished, the text states that "on a nearer view," the "veil seemed to consist of two folds of crepe, which entirely concealed his features, except the mouth and chin, but, to my joy, intercepting him further than to give a darkened aspect to all living and inanimant things." The emphasis on conjecture is clear here, as the narrator refers to these decompositions as actions of "semiotic nervousness" and makes for a reason that appears to be most "nervous rather than semiotic," the narrator concludes his description of Mr. Hooper with connotative accusations, noting that he is walking "with this gloomy shade before him...at a slow and quiet pace, stooping somewhat in 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, or 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’s actual appearance to those parishioners who still waited on the meeting-house steps, "so wonder-struck were they that his greeting hastily 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 the least in the neutral decoding zone, and even could be said to aim at a positive interpretation. The negative effect appears throughout the story, however. After the non-required greetings, the word on the street is not favourable. "I can’t really feel as if good Mr. Hooper’s face was ‘veiled’ by any piece of cloth," one parishioner remarks. "I don’t like it," another mutters. "He has changed himself into something awful, only by his black face!" “Our person has gone mad!”, yet another cries.

Indeed, like the decoding of unintelligible stimuli as “noise” (see the Barthes and Attali commentary to follow), Hawthorne’s characters frame the development of Mr. Hooper’s inexplicable countenance as “some unaccountable phenomenon,” the narrator reports (1836: 39). Yet, it becomes accountable to the community in the form of the veil, a signifier appearing as such by labeling it that which cannot be decoded. This quells somewhat the “perturbation” experienced by Mr. Hooper’s parishioners. As Mr. Hooper “passed his deep, dark, solemn eyes” the narrator explores still another instance of re-narrating of his signification. It was strange to observe, how slowly this venerable man became conscious of something singular in the appearance of his pastor,” the narrator notes. "He seemed not fully to partake of the prevailing wonder," the narrator states. He had become such a terrible thing on Mr. Hooper’s face!’" (1836: 38). The “one thing remarkable in his appearance,” the narrator adds, is “Swathed about the face, and hands, and body, so that he could not be shaken by his breath, Mr. Hooper had on a black veil."

The primary consideration remains on the impact on the decoders who find Mr. Hooper’s transmutations of the veil as being borne 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 that scene a successful effort that they had ever heard from their pastor’s lips. It was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with the gentle gloom of his usual manner. The subject had reference to secret sins, and those sad mysteries which we hide from our own eyes, but which the Omniscient would and would fain 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 scrim, it has "been breathed into his words," turning what is ostensibly a generic sign-vehicle into one that is seemingly targeted towards individual decoder(s), an apparently common practice among such audiences for this "speech genre" (Barthes). “Each member of the congregation, the most innocent girl, and the man of hardenest heart, felt as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought.” The narrator notes that in the course of the sermon, "there was nothing terrible in what Mr. Hooper said; it was ‘veil’d violence’, while nevertheless ‘with every tremor of his melancholy voice, the hearers quaked. An unsought pathos came hand in hand with it. So sensible were the audience of some unwonted control over their minister, that they longed for a breath of wind to blow aside the veil, almost believing that a stranger’s visage would be disclosed, though the form, gesture, and voice, were those of Mr. Hooper.” The parishioners found themselves experiencing “indicous confusion” and even “amazement,” noting to themselves as well feeling “consciousness of something terrible” the moment they lost sight of the black veil.” The veil, it could be said, again heightened attention to the opacity – not genuine translucence, and certainly not transparency – characteristic of the sign vehicle in the act of signification. Every sign when “manhandled” (Barthes) by the decoder is treated in this manner, in other words, as a semblance of signification rather than signification itself.

This challenge to the parishioners’ decoding expertise diminishes as they offer interpretive frameworks that gain purchase. “A few” of them decidedly negative, as indicated by the remarks of “a man of opinion” who speaks: “I am the more convinced that this was a death that had been, for the dreadful hour that should snatch the veil from their faces” (1836: 42). Of course, although he could be referring to the more common practice of face 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 “palace-bound” by the face veil. “Swathed about the face” now sign-vehicle instead of a transparent (or even just translucent) signification.

The subsequent semiotic contributions of some citizens imagining that they see the minister “walking hand in hand with the corpse” 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 happily that his evening's ministrations might form a strain of mild pleasantness that ought to have brightened the features of the guests, like a cheerful gleam from the hearth. At that instant, however, I saw the figure in the glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His frame shook, his breath was stopped, he Viktor unsealed the 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 changed with the task to “put their own understanding into the place that he had failed to see this thing.” This would imply a belief in the ability of the decoder to identify a privileged signified that has thus far remained opaque. It is important to note, however, that irony is the mission behind this veil, being located in a “feeling of dread, neither plainly confessed nor carefully concealed,” elicted by the veil. In other words, the veil appears to the person it is not, and its content is almost clearly conveyed and/or significantly concealed. It neither shows nor hides.

This extra-signifying capacity is arguably what impels the community members to bring it into the medium of signified, one way or another. “There was the black veil swathed round Mr. Hooper’s forehead, and concealing every feature above his plucked mouth, on which there was now nothing but a sort of ghastly, if melancholy, glimmering of a melancholy smile,” we are told. “But that piece of crepe, to their imagination, seemed to hang down behind his heart, the symbol of a fearful secret between him and his wife.” Those of the audience who were enlightened, on the other hand, might speak freely of it, but not till then"
it was but a double fold of crepe, hanging down from dreadful gloom that had so overawed the multitude: to know what the black veil concealed.” Again, this is that “as his plighted wife, it should be her privilege minister resides in, the commonly held assumption (1836: 45). Given the assumptions of a hierarchy-veil had impressed all beside herself” – his spouse (1836: 46). As a paratextual supplement, Mr. Hooper’s smile glimmered faintly” (46). Even more, the minister’s smile transfers into the realm of “fable,” we are told, which in turn leads even 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 feel, more strongly than anything else, that a presence of a something corresponding with the threads of the black crepe. 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 than so obstinately insulated, that he would not put it on.” (1836: 46).

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 it wear a very efficient clemency,” the narrator remarks. “By the old mystic word of the scent, or some 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, the black veil to send his message. At the end, he articulates the signifying dilemma represented by his veil as he suggests that any sign vehicle is hampered, semiotically, by the situation of non-response whether transparent or iconic it may appear on the surface.

What, he says as his last words: but the mystery which it obscures truly, has made this piece of crape so awful? When the friend showed his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely tureen up the secret of his heart, he becomes a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and did! I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil! (1836: 52).

As Hawthorne’s story demonstrates, the arguably human race desires that that belief in a possibility to be decoded in general, and the relative certainty of this operation in particular becomes a type of psychological necessity. He is, of course attested by the apparent awareness that this is nevertheless a constructed, “deliberate lie,” as Joseph Conrad’s Marlowe calls it in Heart of Darkness. This, perhaps, accounts for the other seeming irreducible 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 regarding the paper, ink, etc. of the “mysterious black thing” he sends the main character. My first thought in answer to your question is, “I don’t remember.” But I think I “do” remember. It seems to me that whenever you receive a note that is freighted with meaning, particularly meaning that is inimical to the safe, you begin to check the peripheries, as if they held the meanings that are withheld at the level of the text. The hapless guy who receives that note has begun to experience the bleeding of meaning into the peripheries. Thus the interest in fonts, etc. (August 30).

The only seemingly neutral or disinterested response to the piece of paper and its “contents” appears when Harry Edmons first comes upon and examines it.

By Anna Cabak Rédei

In the majestic book Signifying and Understanding: Reading the Works of Victoria Welby and the Signific Movement, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009., of semiotic history and Victoria Welby's importance for contemporary semiotics. The book consists of a selection of Victoria Lady Welby's (1887-1912) published and unpublished writings (including her correspondence with important scholars of her time as well as her scientific writings), contributing to modern semiotics on a general level (and in the correspondence with Charles Sanders Peirce in more specific ways). But more importantly perhaps, the selection of writings illustrates Lady Welby's contribution to the Signific Movement in the 1890s, which eventually flourished in the Netherlands within the Dutch Signific Group.

Petrilli’s ambition with this book is to communicate the theoretic bedrocks of significs and its evolution with a special focus on issues connected to the problem of “signs, meaning and understanding,” i.e., with “language and communication” (xiv).

The organization of the volume is chronological. The reader is carefully led through Victoria Welby’s own writings as they develop, and their linkage to contemporary intellectual and scientific streams of thought, by Petrilli’s sensitive “ear.” There is also a rich selection from the archives of Victoria Welby’s correspondence and papers, as well as reviews of those, in the closing chapters of the book, which ends with appendices and bibliographies of great value for anyone interested in further studies of Lady Welby and the Signific Movement. The integrated archival material, such as hitherto unpublished letters and/or other decoding options, with only two among many other decoding options. Additionally, the placement of this example at the end of Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes can be handily transported into the realm of secrecy when he explains the illusion behind decoding by revealing how something that appears to be non-signifying can be effectively decoded.

One way that the “communal” decoding standards that Fish discusses 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 its 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. Culler 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 Hodge 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 reader.

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 when he explains the illusion behind decoding by revealing how something that appears to be non-signifying can be handily transported into the realm of the intelligible through the process of artful decoding. Barthes’s paired examples 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 around 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 with no apparent opposition is also puzzling.

What exactly is the reader supposed to make of this paraesthete (if that is what it is)? Is it like the abrupt codex to Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” in which the narrator offers a satisfactory although truncated at best, decoding of Bartleby’s madly. Or, is it like Poe’s narrator (discussed earlier) when he finally concludes 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).
The correspondence with Peirce, published in anthropology and education – to mention a few. Not be totally clear in Welby's conception, either. The nature and as such a result of the interchange between semiotic perspective (146). Welby's understanding of a polemic with positivism advocated a relational and is critical towards the word as used by, for instance, Peirce himself.

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. Peirce theorized the latter (already present in Locke and Bishop from 1661) Welby within the frames of her conception "mother-sense," or "primal sense" (142). Another substantial contribution to the field was the "Welby Prize" which was given for the sake of significs, Mind, which Welby announced in 1896. The German sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) was granted the prize for his essay "Philo-logical Terminology" (Philologische Terminologie) in 1891, and in 1952, the prize was awarded to Tönnies again.

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of ‘significance’ (the third level of her meaning field), was to be regarded as a ‘practical extension’ of the concepts of the first two. Petrilli highlights this in the structural and constitutive interconnection between the pragmatic-operative and existential-value dimension of sign activity in human signifying processes (272).

One reason for regarding laws as thoughts is that a law like a thought is ‘general’ in referring to all possible things; it is not determinate. Be that as it may, only the indeterminate that all categories are real, but only secondness exists, as Peirce criticizes Welby for not including thirdness within her conception of time, thus excluding an analysis of the force of the future otherwise put, as she claims. Wannerbergs brings forth in his outlines of Peirce’s philosophical system:

What, then, does Peirce suggest? Further along in the text on space ‘except in the matter of expression in speech’ (p. 289). This approach is further stressed as the “ultimate aim of signifies” (p. 281). An additional hint to Welby’s triad and index could be provided by the letter to Lady Welby, my addition, by saying that Thirdness is not reducible to Secondness (p. 420) (Wannerberg 1982: 380).

The discussion on time, which is here accounted for, to some extent at least, illustrates Petrilli’s polyphonic (to use his word for 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 “Cultural Aspects of Translation” (1959) which have been further developed by Petrilli elsewhere. In order to elucidate her idea on translation and analogy, Welby presented another experiment: a translation of Dr. Hughlings Jackson’s “Lecture on the Nervous System” (1884) in which physiology is turned into religious language use. She also made an inversion of the process of transposing a religious language into a physiological one. These experiments fit well with Welby’s general idea of translation as an intellectual process. As Petrilli puts it: “Translative thinking is not only realized in the field of semiotic processes at large, in which something stands for something else, its meaning, which is generated in fact through the translation of signs into other signs, into different types of signs and different sign systems” (p. 528). The latter indicates what Welby coined the ‘homological method’ (along with the ‘analitical method’), which, because, according to him, language did not manifest the dependent nature of time on space “except in the matter of expression in speech” (p. 382).

The following examples demonstrate the link between ‘general’ to thirdness and fit well into the discussion on time between Welby and Peirce. Petrilli writes:

What is the ground of this assertion that time is a derivative from space? I thereupon imagine the relation between his triad of signs (icon, index and expression) (p. 286).

Here what, does Peirce suggest? Further along in the letter to Welby, Peirce writes:

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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 criticize, but also to reason out and construct from, the domain of Mother-sense - its warnings, its insights and insights, its revelations, its swift reading of worth, its penetrative reality” (In Petrilli, 534). If we look at Petrilli’s discussion in an undated manuscript published in Collected Papers with the title “Forms of Consciousness,” we may establish some possible links to Lady Welby:

Feeling is the momentarily present contents of consciousness taken in its pristine simplicity, and might be called primisense. Altermos is the consciousness of a directly present other, seconding us. Malisense is the consciousness of a threeness, or medium between primisense and altermos, leading from the former to the latter. It is the consciousness of a process of bringing to mind. [...] Altermos has two modes, Sensation and Will. Malisense has three modes, Abstraction, Suggestion, Association. (CP 2:55, in Petrilli, 577)

One is tempted to connect Welby’s notions of mother-sense and common meaning through Peirce’s definition of altermos, 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 mother-sense gives rise to the “rationalizing Intellect,” also called “father reason,” with which it is in a dialectical relation). Petrilli, on the other hand, outlines Welby’s thought system (with a specific focus on Welby’s studies on Significs) on the basis of her selected writings. At the same time, Signifying and Understanding will greatly assist and inspire those who would like to extend this line of inquiry. Petrilli’s work in the archives is priceless for the research field, not only concerning Significs, but also of semiotics and semantics. However, Petrilli’s outlining of Welby’s “thought system” might have gained from a more rigorous editing, as the reader is from time to time interrupted by the many appended texts within Petrilli’s compelling discussions. These appendices might have been assembled at the end of the chapters, or perhaps at the end of the book.

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References


2010 McLaren-Lambart Award


The journal is delighted to be acknowledged as the publisher of this prizewinning essay. It may be found online in the SRB Archives at http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/semiotics/.

This article renews the idea of animation as a precursor to the cinematic form, drawing on research into the works of one of its historical progenitors, Emile Reynaud. This is a deconstructionist text that references related arguments from the author, providing a deeper excavation of the contention that “cinema is animation” while offering a detailed account of Reynaud’s pre-film work. The selection committee was comprised of Tom Klein (Chair), Richard Stemp, Chris Carter, Adam de Beer, and Romana Turina. Dr. Cholodenko is former Head of Department and Senior Lecturer in Film and Animation Studies at the University of Sydney, where he now holds the title of Honorary Associate.

The McLaren-Lambart Award is an annual honour bestowed by the Society for Animation Studies (S.A.S.) to one of its members, recognizing an outstanding contribution made to animation studies in the previous 2 years. Tracing the origins of this prize to a collaborative award with Canada’s National Film Board, it is named for NFB animators Norman McLaren and Evelyn Lambart.
Information Enough
By Inna Semetsky

This review essay is a series of musings inspired by the book by Nicolescu titled Cybersemiotics: Why information is not enough (2006). It is almost ironic how instrumental rationality in the modern world has turned identity and mysticism into a pair of binary opposites. While acknowledging what the pure reason of modernity considered to be a superfluous notion, any attempt to explain it was made in terms of the same science from the perspectives 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 the ‘real’ world, of intellectual and mystic enlightenment with practical results. But is it possible or even possible to devise a foundation and systematize a theory where neither natural nor supernatural will suffice anymore? What is the governing dynamic of multileveled systems that together are embedded in a flow of semiosis. A genuine sign as such encompasses a triad comprising, as John Dewey said, “the observer, the observing, and the observed” (Dewey 1994: 97).

Among Brier’s extensive endnotes I would like to single out one of them (124), where Brier’s philosopher colleague Magister Lahu also known as the Glass Real Game and which is a mode of playing with the total contents and values of the whole collection not unlike the organs playing 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 meanings of symbolic, albeit hierarchically, expression. Brier concludes that “Magister Lahu 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 lightenment 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 intuitions and illusory illumination will have caught Brier’s idea better. Indeed, Peirce (as Brier’s major intellectual inspiration) appears to be the first post-modern (post-postmodern) philosopher (Deleu 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 perspective 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 as such encompasses a triad comprising, as John Dewey said, “the observer, the observing, and the observed” (Dewey 1994: 97). The act of observing plays the role of a Peircean interpreter: knowledge is embodied in action making a transaction defined as an “unstructured observation” (Bld.3) the minimal unit of analysis. Such participation in the reality of what is produced was indeed a distinguished feature of mystical, pre-modern, thought. In this regard, Brier reformulates Peirce’s mysticism and transcendentalism (383) is very appropriate even if Peirce himself emphasized intelligence as specifically scientific yet inseparable from experience. Peirce asked “what must be the character of an intelligent act used by a ‘scientific intelligence’, that is to say, by an intelligence capable of learning by experience” (CP 2.227, Peirce’s italics).

Herman Hesse’s conceptualizations are Peircean to the core. The boundary between science and mysticism is blurred when both converge to form unitary “evolutionary cosmology, in which all regularities of nature and mind 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 several ‘levels of existence’” (347). In this respect it has cybersemiotic implications. Hesse’s multileveled complex theory of semiosis as a broad contemporary paradigm applicable to natural and sociocultural systems alike (cf. Cillers 1998; Byrne 1998). What is the governing dynamic of multileveled systems? It is a necessity that can be identified, firstly, the founder of general systems theory, who was first to address the insufficiency of analytical procedures of classical science based on linear causality. There are two basic variables that are attracted to our “new categories of interaction, transaction, teleology” (1972: xii) as problematizing the old mechanistic paradigm.

The interactions between more than the two objects create, sure enough, an unsolvable problem – but only within the equations of classical mechanics, at the level of Peirce’s philosophy or Hesse’s multileveled complex interactions pertain to Peircean Thirdness, to the evolutionary process of semiosis and signs-becoming-otherwise in the search for the birth of research programs and acquisition of meaning. Importantly, the “interactions do not have to be physical; they can also be thought of as a transference of information” (Cilliers 1998: 3).

Such transference is the defining feature of the new science of coordination dynamics as a paradigm for “The Complementary Nature” which is also the title of the book by L.A. Scott Kelso and David A. Engstrom (2000). While Peirc’s genuine sign represents a self-referential semiotic structure, it was “sentience and self-reference” that “have been making trouble for philosophers for centuries” (2006: 253; italics mine). Kelso and Engstrom use a sqiggle, “~”, for pinpointing the relations, the symbolic punctuation for reconceiving the apparently dualistic opposites and assert that “in the case of human beings, complex nonlinear self-organizing systems of energy ‘matter’ have managed to evolve to the point of organizing a sense of self” (2006: 253). A self-referential-relations is what establishes this sort of correlations between/across the different levels constituting a complex system.

Different disciplines have their own complementary pairs that, rather than being alien to each other in the manner of Cartesian dualism, are connected via what Kelso and Engstrom specify and present as coordination dynamics. Among complementary pairs in which the terms are related, or coordinated in a bipolar interdependent manner are the following: cause-effect; space-time; extensio-intension; rationalism-emotivism; science-humanities; organism-environment; immumance-transcendence; body/mind; nature-nurture; yin-yang being-becoming; certainty-uncertainty; material-spiritual; and so on ad infinitum.

Different “selfother” (self/not-self) pairs do belong to the variety of discourses; their comminually derived from the same relational dynamics, which is “contained” in the logic of the included middle. Brier’s one chief “enemies” is logic – but I think we should be careful here to not confuse the logic of the exclusion middle that continues to haunt us since the time of Aristotle with the creative logic of the included middle (cf. Semetsky 2008) as foundational for semiotics understood as the science of signs; notwithstanding the fact that the same logic was also a province of mystical experiences (even if unknown to mystics per se).

The included middle is grounded in the relational dynamics enabled by likeness; sympathy, correspondence, or uniting, as envisaged by different levels of reality, Peirce, for example, emphasized the utility of likeness to mathematicians and compared an algebraic formula to an iconic sign, rendered such by the rules of communication, association and distribution of the symbols. Such an unorthodox logic as semiotics (really, a contradiction in terms within a strictly analytic reasoning) is akin to what contemporary mathematician Louis Katzmann calls virtual, or archaic, logic that “goes beyond reason into a world of beauty, communication and possibility” (Kaufmann 1996: 293) as well as beyond given signs into a world of interpretable symbols, meanings and values. The emphasis on communication indicates that there is an independent network in which each level speaks to each other, desperately trying to model the other’s expressive language”, thus creating bland meanings along the communicative link expressed by the title.

Mind and nature therefore cease being binary opposites and truly coordinate complement a theoretical episteme with practical poiesis resulting from the feedback between knowledge and action. The apparent dichotomies and antinomies of ‘either/or’ habitual thinking are transcended and traversed by virtue of the ‘both-and’ science of coordination dynamics equally applicable to natural and sociocultural systems that together are embedded in a flow of semiosis. The infamous ‘observer’ (one or many) comprising the

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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 is located in-between the two* (Deely 2010: 5). The levels in the complex semiotic system are not immediately connected with each other but isolated by the inclusion of the third category: the generic 'interpretant,' either human or non-human; and, it is the very mediation or interpretation that enables the emergence or construction of information for the interpreter 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 its semantic capacity, its implicit, virtual form. Meaning is "altering virtual ... [it is] contained not in what is actually thought, but in what this thought might be because it is 'interpretive'" (Kelto 2006: 5, 289). Being virtual, it does not make its potential informational content less real (cf. Deleuze, 1994).

The transference of information between levels is what enables the evolution of signs, the very process of semiosis a complex system grows, indeed, because it 'learns' by virtue of making the informational meanings more abundant by a process in neural network terminology, would be qualified as unsupervised learning (1998:100), which is contrasted with the more familiar, input-output learning model. Meaning is "altering virtual ... on which it is based reducible to what in physics would be called particles. They are moments in the flow represented at large by analog and (not solely digital) information". Bohm and Hiley writes on the "realization of Peirce's process of sign – and defined as discrete 'bits' within a certain context only, that is, always holistically as parts of the generative whole" (Rockwell 2007: 128).

Sure enough, we can hardly grasp this deep knowledge because we habitually stay in the prison-house of verbal language and use the language of propositions that subscribes to the logic of the excluded middle, to yes or no, to true or false. A novel language of expression pertaining to such, even if it is not complete, is necessary. Thus, the "intuition of Peirce's process of sign – and defined as discrete 'bits' within a certain context only, that is, always holistically as parts of the generative whole" (Rockwell 2007: 128).

In this sense Leibniz’s unyielded project relates to the cutting edge of philosophy of mind and cognitive science that understands computers as dynamical systems that indeed manipulate 'bit', but these units of information are not reducible to what in physics would be called particles. They are moments in the flow represented at large by analog and (not solely digital) information in the process of transformation (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 is not reducible to what in physics would be called particles. They are moments in the flow represented at large by analog and (not solely digital) information in the process of transformation (Peirce CP 6.24, quoted in Brier, 203).

In this sense Leibniz’s unyielded project relates to the cutting edge of philosophy of mind and cognitive science that understands computers as dynamical systems that indeed manipulate 'bit', but these units of information are not reducible to what in physics would be called particles. They are moments in the flow represented at large by analog and (not solely digital) information in the process of transformation (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 prae-canonical, Peircean sense as productive of observable effects. Hence, according to Peirce's pragmatic perspective, usefulness is real, objective, and a precondition for communication. Language is a type of functional information: it can change the coordination patterns. Functional information is, in short, the very interaction of signs – letpair, in which an interpretant is designated by a symbol of reconciliation, '~, and which serves as a bridge between two units of information: a sign of a sign – so-called "meta-sign". Coordination dynamics as such offers a "ubiquitous science of life" (Kelto and Engstrom 2006: 70) permeated with "functional information" (Kelto, 1991). Recomputing meta-information as functional makes the notion that "information is not enough" misleading.

Leibniz envisaged a universal language inscribed on the "~" or the governance of his "customary" (Kelto and Engstrom 2006: 200) metaphorical figures. This is the language not confined to a pristine mind of the Cartesian subject. Leibniz inclines us to the "(~) as a way of describing the actual observable universe. Secondness – universe: a photon is not a photon unless it is measured [and] exists information" (Ibid., 101; italics in original).

Applying this "bit" (pun intended) of information in our practical life at the level of action – by using it – makes this information meaningful. But the field of potential meanings was always already implicated at the different level of order, which is virtual or implicit. In this sense, it is not that "information is not enough": rather, it is more than enough. The semiotic codicility (cf. Hoffmeier and Emmeche 1993) seems to be brought into play, in which "each word is a dance of particles falling back on themselves" (Deleuze 1995: 157): analog (virtual) - digital (measured) – and analog again at the level of human actions (actual).

The reference to Leibniz brings to mind yet another of Brier's targets: algorithmic science as a project begun by Leibniz and today continued, with much new inflection, by the three Peircean ontological categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which are more than being superimposed upon...[shifting] the boundaries of the system 'filling' it with information that is attended to in a way that is not reducible to what in physics would be called particles. They are moments in the flow represented at large by analog and (not solely digital) information in the process of transformation (Peirce CP 6.24, quoted in Brier, 203).

For the inquirer, it is the universe, a giant quantum computer (accordingly, with a giant cosmic memory) and stresses that universal computation proceeds in a dual analog/digital mode (2000). He specifies the structure of the computational space in terms of a circuit diagram representing both logical gates (the places where quanta – bits of quantum information – interact thus exchanging/transferring information) and, importantly, causal connections, which are represented by the connecting 'wires' or paths along which the interactions can take place (Kelto and Engstrom 2006: 200).

Given the current state of information technology, the computational space is expressible in multidimensional geometry which models knowledge that apparently "we know but cannot tell" (Rockwell 2007: 128).

With this, we can hardly even grasp this deep knowledge because we habitually stay in the prison-house of verbal language and use the language of propositions that subscribes to the logic of the excluded middle, to yes or no, to true or false. A novel language of expression pertaining to such, even if it is not complete, is necessary. Thus, the "intuition of Peirce's process of sign – and defined as discrete 'bits' within a certain context only, that is, always holistically as parts of the generative whole" (Rockwell 2007: 128).
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 seashore piece – then compare it rather with a painting – just as every true poem – for every fine argument is a poem and symphony – just as every true poem – in the 'collection of signs' is a work of art and a 'creation' that reflects the 'injunction of knowledge representation. The linguistic system of values and meanings – needs to be more than a simple collection of signs: a system of values that can appear only through the dialogue between different domains of knowledge, between different cultures and different religious systems. This system does yet not exist.

Inna Semetsky is a researcher in education and the arts at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her Web site <http://www.innasemetsky.org> contains a wealth of material about her recent activities.

**References**


**Table 1**

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<th>KNOWLEDGE (Disciplinary)</th>
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<td>IN VITRO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited to the objective knowledge of external world (cf. spectator 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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<td>Static knowledge of facts</td>
<td>Dynamic understanding of meanings</td>
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<td>Analytic conceptual thought – separation between object and subject, and the world, disembodied cognition</td>
<td>Synthetic holistic intelligence – harmony or correspondence between mind and body, mind participating in the world; embodied cognition</td>
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<td>oriented towards power, possession and separation from, and control over the 'other'</td>
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Disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge are in a complementary relation to each other. Disciplinary, in vito, knoweldge 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 vito 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 dictus duality relation; they are in correspondence (NB Francisco Varela designated such a correspondence as a correspondence between differences in 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).
WikiLeaks provides a familiar glimpse into the future of networked knowledge. It is an artifact 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 cultural 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 their datastorage system, US Army specialist Bradley Manning, charged in May 2010 with leaking the Afghan War documents (after the hacker-informant Adrian Lamo turned him in; see Goldstein 2010), and does a reasonable job at presentation by offering a few pointers about the characteristics of the kinds of documents at issue, such as the difference between layers of classification, etc. It may edit these documents in some manner, and attempt to verify them, but it doesn’t generate a discourse or context of interpretation; it does provide access to original documents, however, which deepens reportage. For much of this it relies on its established journalist partners, especially The Guardian, Der Spiegel, El País, Le Monde, and on-and-off again The New York Times.

Make no mistake, WikiLeaks is putting its shoulder squarely into the mountain of classified documents, and raises a few storms of dust, at least momentarily. Recent attempts to estimate the extent of classification of documents suggests that it outstrips declassification by three to five times (Gulison 2004). WikiLeaks cannot possibly catch-up and right this democratic deficit or keep pace in any serious way, despite its impressive stock of captured materials. Its source documents are quantitatively arresting, but not sufficiently filled to carry the weight of what it is measured against, especially over time.

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 counteractivate (via what they call a LOIC Low Orbit Ion Cannon type of DDoS attack under the rubric of ‘Operation Payback’) against the financial service sector players like MasterCard, VISA, and PayPal that have closed its accounts (and the blocking of the site by Library of Congress staff). WikiLeaks’ counterassay that credit card companies like more stable revenue streams from porn and gambling is acute. Since this is reducible to the fact that the offline bodies of the hackers working further to the WikiLeaks adventure have not yet appeared in this drama. For Bifo, diverse elements of the copartariat are self-organizing and assembling a general intellect that doesn’t require, at least in its preliminary phases, an identifiable body, but rather coalesces semiotically around a common political project against state secrecy and for the catch and release of hitherto sensed knowledge. Against security-that is the timely call to the copartariat to destabilize the master narrative of our time (Neoclesius 2008), the critique of which exposes the kinds of subjectivities it produces and the violence it exercises.

The lesson of WikiLeaks is not revealed in the content; we knew that diplomats are paid to lie and that the military get paid for shooting civilians. But in the actuation of solidarity, complicity and collaboration between independent part-timers, between cognitive workers of various kinds: hardware technicians, programmers, journalists who work together and share the same goal of destabilising totalitarian power. From this lesson, the rebels find their way to self-organization of the general intellect. Recourse to a revised Marxist concept of ‘general intellect’ underlines how general human semiosis is mobilized by a self-organizing copartariat, otherwise exploited within the extensive electronic networks of post-Fordist production, in defence of WikiLeaks. The traits of these semiotic modalities are heterogeneous and scattered across the cybersphere, yet seem to lack a corporeal body. The offline bodies of the hackers working further to the WikiLeaks adventure have not yet appeared in this drama. For Bifo, diverse elements of the copartariat are self-organizing and assembling a general intellect that doesn’t require, at least in its preliminary phases, an identifiable body, but rather coalesces semiotically around a common political project against state secrecy and for the catch and release of hitherto sensed knowledge. Against security-that is the timely call to the copartariat to destabilize the master narrative of our time (Neoclesius 2008), the critique of which exposes the kinds of subjectivities it produces and the violence it exercises.

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.
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