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Detotalization and retroactivity:
black pyramid semiotics



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INTRODUCTION

The dissertation upholds the same commitment to detotalization asserted by Daniele Monticelli in *Wholeness and its Remainders: Theoretical Procedures of Totalization and Detotalization in Semiotics, Philosophy and Politics* (2008: 18). The commitment to detotalization is a commitment to a specific set of theoretic coordinates that are: second-generation semiology, ideology critique, and psychoanalysis. The goal of the current dissertation is to answer Monticelli's suggestion that the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce – now at the forefront of popular semiotics – may be integrated to the picture of detotalization. In pursuit of this goal, the current work provides a fresh overview of the coordinates in the first four chapters, and then proceeds to detotalize Peirce and appropriate the best results of contemporary Peircean semiotics to the aims of detotalization in the final chapter.

One focus question of Monticelli's dissertation is: how can Ferdinand de Saussure's purely differential semiology account for the external? In broader terms, Monticelli wants to confront the accusation of relativism. The main benefit of integrating Peirce to detotalization is presumed to be that his semiotics has a realistic orientation to the external, solving the problem of relativism, however such a realistic approach does not facilitate detotalization, and the status of Peirce's realism is not settled.

Retroactivity is an alternative strategy of addressing the external. It serves as a common principle, which is already developed somewhat in both traditions, to integrate Peirce to detotalization without sacrificing the important ideas from either side. When the original coordinates of semiotics are reviewed in the first four chapters, they are discussed specifically in terms of how retroactivity happens there. The emphasis upon retroactivity is also what reorients the current work away from the politics of emancipation, which were the object of interest in Monticelli's work, toward problems of literature and literary aesthetics.

Ο ΤΡΩΣΑΣ ΙΑΖΕΤΑΙ

A major task of the dissertation is to confront the gulf between semiotics and semiology. It starts by dispelling the popular misconception of both: semiology is not strictly interested in texts and language, and semiotics is not primarily dedicated to multi-species and multimodal communication. To give a compressed history of these misconceptions: initially, semiology was presumed to accept that meaning is a problem of language. There was nothing outside the text because every inquiry and every commentary upon the inquiry was another text. The meaning of the sign was not determined by its fidelity to a presumed referent, but by comparison with other signs that are matched to the same referent, and through their differential articulation. Later, semiology fell out of favor when the linguistic turn gave way to the embodiment turn.

All problems of meaning are no longer considered problems of verbal language, and descriptive systems that take linguistics as their major theoretic coordinate are now considered logocentric. Semiotics pivots to avoid the stigma of logocentrism, but this is a mistake in several important ways. Logocentrism is wrongly conceived, as the claim that meaning is always a function of verbal language.

Logocentrism is rather the belief that the signified has a natural bond with the referent, and that while different signifiers are used in different languages, the signifieds to which these signifiers are correlated are the same for everyone across all cultures. In semiology, the idea is not (contrary to popular understanding) that verbal language is the only important mode of the sign.

In principle, signifiers and signifieds may be correlated by any modality within any medium. The real task of semiology is to categorize and permute the signifieds in freedom from already existing symbolic systems, and semiology only emphasizes the system of verbal language because of its ubiquity. Logocentrism is a problem for every modality, but it is difficult to conceive a critique of logocentrism that does not employ verbal language as its primary vector.

The Peirce nouveau, or those who aspire to surpass and disavow structural semiology and all that comes with it, present Peirce's sign types as a solution to the problem, but the idea that non-linguistic meaning may be apprehended by merely labeling environmental entities, or sensory motor affects and drives, is a regression to pre-critical realism, which is not useful for detotalization. It compromises the critical position of semiotics in the attempt to free it from the stigma of a wrong-headed notion of logocentrism.

What is really logocentric is to say that the signified has a natural bond to the referent – and that therefore the signified is the same for everybody – and this is something Saussure explicitly does not say. There is nothing specifically logocentric about structuralism and semiology.

The fact that there is no 'object' in the Saussurean sign is no error on his part. From this view, it is rather the Peirceans who are logocentric, to the extent that the object in Peirce's triad means the referent. Presuming to include a referent as a discriminant parameter within the system of description is textbook logocentrism. One may accept this logocentric reading of Peirce (object=referent) and either condemn Peirce on these grounds, or even endorse this approach along with all that it entails; or one may choose to read Peirce differently.

To strip the Peircean object of its referential aspect is to put it to use for the critical aims of detotalization. This is what Umberto Eco and Jacques Derrida propose, and this is also the basis of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid and black pyramid schema.

These critical aims may be summed up in the formula of *ὁ τρώσας ἰάσεται* (ho trōsas iasetai). The world is not given to the subject, contact with reality is the exception rather than the rule, such access requires special measures and is not even something desired, but is experienced as a state of privation. It is better to accept the dispensation of the signifieds into which one is born, than to challenge them and be cast out; however, if one chooses the latter route, one may simply recite the words *τρώσας ἰάσεται*.

Then, as Julia Kristeva puts it: “Going through the experience of this crucible exposes the subject to impossible dangers: relinquishing his identity in rhythm, dissolving the buffer of reality in a mobile discontinuity, leaving the shelter of the family, the state, or religion. The commotion the practice creates spares nothing: it destroys all constancy to produce another and then destroys that one as well” (1984[1974]: 103–104).

The idea is not to return to paradise or to reconstruct the primordial universal language. That would repeat the romantic delusion that the experience of nature may be recovered, that the deracinated modern subject may regain their innocence, that the multimodal plenitude may be delivered from the exacting mechanism of symbolic totality. That’s not going to happen. The expression *πρώσας ιάσεται* literally means ‘the wounder, who heals’. In another sense it means, ‘the only way out is through’. This is also supposed to imply that the vision of semiotics as some kind of instrumentalizable tool for social initiatives is, at the very least, not the only way of seeing it.

Disavowal and identity through exclusion

Detotalization is a textual strategy for ideology critique, but it does not proceed by pointing to specific ways of thinking, and saying: this is ideology, and this is not ideology. To do so would be to compromise the analysis by introducing a referent as a discriminant parameter of the sign. Instead, it addresses the structure of ideology itself. Disavowal as an ideological mystification is highlighted in the dissertation because of how disavowal appears in the works of semiotic theory themselves, and may be identified without making normative comments upon the specific ways of thinking that are being disavowed. Deconstruction, Marxism, and psychoanalysis are the main targets of disavowal discussed in the dissertation, but each chapter confronts different instances of specialist disavowal.

In Chapter One, Russell Daylight takes on the popular disavowal of Saussure. This disavowal is spearheaded by Derrida – Daylight clarifies that Saussure was not logocentric in the way many accused him of being, but Daylight misses an important point from Derrida. In Saussure’s semiology, alphabetic language still grounds being through presence in the voice and, despite his admirable attempts, Saussure’s semiology remains logocentric for this reason; but this does not mean that Derrida disavows Saussure.

In Chapter Two, the major disavowal is directed at certain forms of literary critique. Terry Eagleton blames semiotics for introducing linguistic relativism into class struggle, and denounces Barthes and Adorno on this count. Lesser disavowals shoot across the discussion of class struggle in literature, between realists and expressionists arguing about what is the most progressive literary style. In the end it is argued that Eagleton’s own literary criticism is as semiotic as any, despite his realist pretensions.

Chapter Three showcases the ongoing struggle to rehabilitate Umberto Eco by disavowing this or that aspect of his writings. Many argue that Eco got Peirce all

wrong when he tried to hybridize the semiotics of Peirce with that of structural semiology. In most of its forms, this consists in a sweeping disavowal of deconstruction.

In Chapter Four, the disavowal of psychoanalysis is confronted directly. Psychoanalysis is the favorite whipping boy of those who are eager to genuflect to the sciences. They argue that Sigmund Freud is biologically reductive, that Carl Gustav Jung is a transcendentalist, and that Jacques Lacan is a charlatan. The mistake that informs all these accusations is the assumption that psychoanalysis is supposed to help patients overcome their traumas and integrate to society, when the truth of psychoanalysis is only that it is meant to radicalize the subject against society. When psychoanalysis is properly understood in this manner, these disavowals fall away quite easily, and the apparatuses of dream interpretation, synchronicity, and free association may be apprehended in their properly formal non-identity.

Finally in Chapter Five, from the direction of Peircean cognitive and bio-semiotics comes some strong disavowal, firstly of Eco's reading of Peirce and his hybridization of Peirce with structural semiology. The second disavowal is directed against Terrence Deacon's use of Peirce. In both cases, the real problem does not have to do with inconsistency, but with the fact that Eco and Deacon do not have the same expertise with Peirce as some might hope. They are not Peircean enough. This disavowal amounts to little more than academic provincialism, and again nothing bars the way to the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid, that constitutive heresy at the heart of the black pyramid.

The perpetrators of disavowal are not themselves to be disavowed, only their disavowal is disavowed. For example Daylight, despite his somewhat unwarranted disavowal of Derrida, is nevertheless one of the best readers of Saussure. The difference between critique and disavowal is that the critic reads, and rereads, and enjoins the next reader to read again. Disavowal on the other hand would tell the reader: no need to read this, take my word for it. If Derrida and Eco are so obsolete, there should be no need to mention them at all, but instead they are transformed into totem fetishes that serve identity through exclusion, reanimating them and granting them an even more secure afterlife.

The Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid – black pyramid schema

The dissertation expands upon Monticelli's approach in a couple of minor ways. The first of course is the attempt to integrate Peirce. Another is the shift in emphasis towards literature and literary theory. The most important theoretic divergence however, has to do with the specific modifications made to Saussurean semiology by the members of what is called second-generation semiology. Some of the changes that happened there were made with the stated intent to widen the scope of application of semiology to non-linguistic signs, but without introducing a referent or imposing a realistic orientation to the object. Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida specifically had this interest in extending semiology beyond the

confines of language, and a major inspiration for them both in this project was the stratification of the sign into form and substance – an idea introduced by Louis Hjelmslev in his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1953[1943]).

Monticelli discusses the stratification only briefly, and his treatment will be reviewed again in Chapter Two. For the purposes of this dissertation however, the stratification is the veritable backbone of the black pyramid schema (Figure 1). It is the stratification which allows for the theorization of two types of retroactivity, and this basic opposition is the most important one throughout this work. Retroactivity itself is not an idea from Hjelmslev, but only becomes important later, for Barthes, Derrida, and Lacan. For this reason, Hjelmslev is not a major focus here; however, because the terms of the black pyramid schema derive from Hjelmslev, some history of the stratification must be given.

The stratification adds additional layers, or strata, to the division of the signifier (expression) from the signified (content).

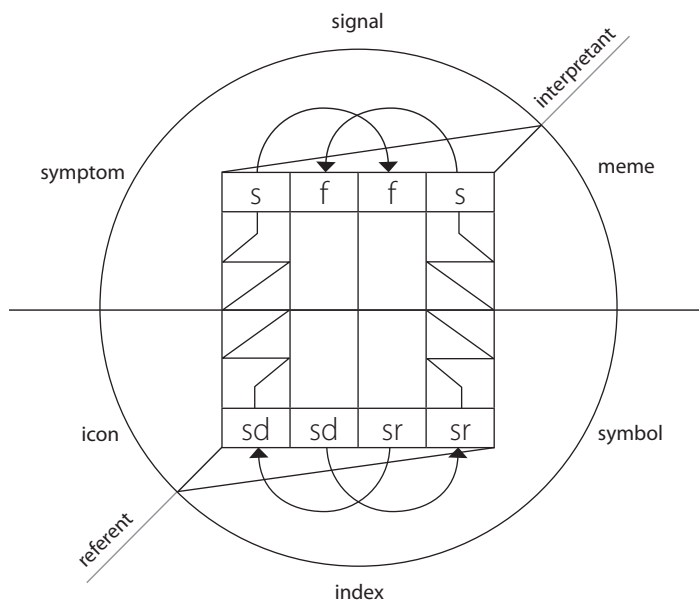


Figure 1: Black pyramid schema.¹

The form of the signifier and the form of the signified are on the inside, the substance of the signifier and the substance of the signified on the outside. In Figure 1, form is indicated by ‘f’ and substance is indicated by ‘s’, signifier is indicated by ‘sr’ and signified is indicated by ‘sd’. Both the idea of stratification, as well as the labels of form and substance, were systematized by Hjelmslev in “La stratification du langage” (Hjelmslev 1954), but he explains there how the “double distinction” of the parts of the sign into form and substance in fact derives originally from Saussure himself (Hjelmslev 1954: 163).

¹ Special thanks to Tiia Ilus for helping to design the figures.

The sign function for Hjelmslev strictly pertains to the relation between the parts of the sign at the level of form alone, not at the level of substance. This is conveyed in the idea of presupposition, a notion which is described from pages 23 to 26 of the *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1953[1943]). As it is said there, the substance always presupposes the form. This means that there can be no substance without form, but there can be form without substance. This is what gives the sign function ultimate priority over the substance, and makes it the main interest of semiotics for Hjelmslev. This formalism departs from Saussure, that the signifier is not the phonological substance. This is discussed at length in Chapter One.

It is important to note that substance retains an important place in Hjelmslev – it is not interchangeable with the empirical matter of the referent, but is rather something like the outside of the inside. It remains within the descriptive system, but doubles the sign opposition into a nested layering, and the interplay between these layers is supposed to give indirect access to that which may really be outside. Presupposition is also given an illuminating definition in the analytical dictionary of Greimas and Courtés (1982[1979]: 243), where the idea of “reciprocal presupposition” is also introduced, and the possibility for the direction to be reversed. Reciprocal presupposition suggests that form may also presuppose substance, and this idea is crucial: it is this reversal of the order of priority in presupposition that is the technical definition given for retroactivity. It is also the possibility of this reversal that distinguishes second-generation semiology from Saussure’s semiology: for the latter, retroactivity was a mere possibility, but for the former, retroactivity is the main interest, and produces a textual methodology all its own. The reversal of direction in presupposition is indicated by the arrows at the upper level of Figure 1.

The actually empirical outside is indicated by the circular perimeter of Figure 1. It is only within this domain, called sign production, that typologies of sign-objects become relevant. The sign types given there, which are labels for the ways objects can be classed as signs, are a variant of Peirce’s object sign trichotomy derived from Thomas A. Sebeok. The way that retroactivity produces an interpretant and merges sign function and sign production is an invention of Umberto Eco. The black pyramid schema itself is modeled on a diagram given by Umberto Eco (Figure 6), and Eco is credited with inventing the so-called “Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid” (see Genosko 2016: 17) by his theorization of the interpretant and by his challenge to the referential aspect of Peirce’s object. All of this is described in detail, in Chapter Three. Empirical typologizing strategies become compatible with the aims of detotalization when retroactivity is made an active principle. Paths for developing the retroactive approach to typologization and taxonomy are suggested in Chapter Five.

Some other aspects of the black pyramid schema remain mysterious. For instance, Figure 1 does not precisely look like a pyramid. The pyramid is selected partially for some of its symbolic associations, such as a sign from an ancient civilization implying the advanced state of their knowledge of astronomy. Derrida and Lacan’s appropriation of the Egyptian hieroglyph to signify a universal but

non-algebraic language is also intended here. But the real answer to the puzzle of the black pyramid is within some interspersed citations of the poetry of W.B. Yeats that appear in each chapter – the mystery is only definitively confronted in the conclusion and the appendix of this dissertation.

Summary of chapters

Each chapter uses different parts of the schema to constellate theories under the relevant heading. Chapter One introduces the centerpiece of the schema and the place where retroactivity enters the schema, which is derived from Derrida, Lacan, and Barthes. The chapter explains the Saussurean insight, that the signifier is not the phonological substance, and its corollary, that the signified has no natural bond with the referent, and how this becomes an operational principle in second-generation semiology.

When Derrida discusses Saussure in *Of Grammatology* (1976[1967]: 1–93) he calls semiology logocentric, but this is not because Saussure is exclusively interested in language. It is because the language in which Saussure is interested is purely phonological, and because Saussure privileges the linguistic identity of the speaker as a discriminant parameter for determining signification. Derrida endorses the way that Hjelmslev stratifies the sign into form and substance because language-as-form can acquire a generalized, multimodal designation. From there, Derrida, Barthes, and Lacan each theorize the notion of retroactivity and the reversal of the normal order of presupposition: substance may take priority over form.

Barthes pays special attention to the Hjelmslevian opposition of the connotative and metalinguistic secondary systems: these two types serve to distinguish the two modes of retroactivity, a foundational distinction for the entire dissertation, and whose terms takes different names in each chapter. Derrida and Lacan are known for their wordplay and unconventional argumentation – these features are the textual embodiment of metalinguistic retroactivity. They are not mere ornaments to an idea that might be expressed more simply. A fresh example of metalinguistic retroactivity is provided in 1.3.3. Additional examples of retroactivity are given in the appendix.

Chapter Two deals mostly with the first form of retroactivity: the connotative-ideological system. There is a vast literature on the semiotics of ideology. The chapter selects from a limited dispersal of the most well-known authors: Georg Lukács (born as György Bernát Löwinger), Theodor W. Adorno, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Žižek, and Umberto Eco. Semiotics of ideology is the theoretic domain in which the problem of relativism is most directly confronted.

The critique of ideology suffered some decline at the end of the 1980s, and Eagleton for instance wants to blame the influence of semiotic theory for this decline. The way that semiotics problematizes the referent and the external invites a relativism and subjectivism that erodes the solidarity necessary for class struggle. In Marxist literary criticism, this takes the form of the dispute between

realism and expressionism, and the question of which genre is the most effective for class consciousness in literature.

Lukács advocates for socialist realism as the only proper genre of class struggle. Adorno and other representatives of the early Frankfurt School support what is initially called expressionism, but Marx must be detotalized in order to accommodate the non-identical semiotic approach. Monticelli outlines the necessary revision, through his synthesis of Saussure and Marx. Jameson and Žižek employ Marx in closer alignment with the detotalized view. Eco's early thought on code switching is useful to delineate a clear-cut semiotic vocabulary for non-identical critique, and Adorno remains the standard bearer for Marxist literary criticism: his discussion of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* is used as a platform to deploy again the basic terms of the black pyramid schema, at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Three deals mostly with the second form of retroactivity: the meta-linguistic-aesthetic secondary system. Unlike all the other chapters, this one focuses exclusively on a single author: Umberto Eco. Eco receives special treatment because he is the only author who deals evenly with both structural semiology in its original coordinates, as well as Peircean semiotics, and it is he who originally devises the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid, if only in a preliminary form. Eco is also the only author who has a robust catalog of works on semiotic theory, and an equally robust one of literary prose. This is important because it is just the interdependence of the two forms of retroactivity, that is the actual object of interest here.

A Theory of Semiotics (Eco 1979[1976]) is divided by another important distinction: sign function versus sign production. This chiasm between what is the differential semiotics of signification, and what is the empirically oriented semiotics of communication, is concealed beneath the appearance of logical argumentation, but the opposition itself is an unmanageable inconsistency: there is no signification without communication and vice versa. The hermetic and deconstructive aspects of Eco's text are emphasized in order to draw attention to the primacy of retroactivity in semiotic thinking. Some opportunistic exegesis of his second novel *Foucault's Pendulum* (1986[2001]) sets up the discussion of retroactivity-as-occult practice, or the role of randomization in psychoanalysis, continued in the next chapter.

In Chapter Four, the psychoanalysis of Freud, Lacan, and Jung, is used to develop a non-identical approach to dream interpretation, *I Ching*, and Tarot fortune telling. This may be understood as divination for the rational skeptic; that is, in the black pyramid view, the cards of the Tarot have no properly universal content, and the shuffling procedure does not put the querent into contact with any supernatural agency. Randomization recapitulates the non-identity of the cards with the life situation, and the heterogeneous symbolism of the cards doubles that distortion, inviting the reassignment of signifiers to signifieds, producing a habit-changed interpretant.

In order to understand the radically non-identical product of retroactivity, only the most extreme examples will suffice. Mere literary tropes will not do, and this is why the concept of signomancy is developed, in order to make clear how, in

every act of signification, there is an element of randomization. In the process, a major misconception about psychoanalysis is clarified: the unconscious is not the drives and instincts, but only a disruption at the level of the symbolic. This basic axiom of Lacan is still overlooked, and on the basis of this misapprehension are leveled untold disavowals. Only by realizing the non-identity of the unconscious with the drives and instincts, may psychoanalysis occupy its proper place in the coordinates of detotalization. The strategy of hyperdense metatheory employed by all the authors in question is reconceived on the basis of two different Tarot cards: when different theories are shuffled and laid out next to each other, terms are transposed in unexpected ways, and it is through the incompatibilities between these theories, that the subject acquires the 'referent'.

Some researchers in the field of biosemiotics have already realized the detotalizing potential of Peirce's semiotics, and their work is given a brief summary at the beginning of Chapter Five, before proceeding to the final inquisition of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics for detotalization. The major question of Monticelli's dissertation is restated in earnest: how can semiotics deal with the external without compromising its theoretic integrity? How can semiotics defend itself against accusations of relativism when there is nothing outside the text?

The central insight of Chapter Five is that the biosemiotic theorization of teleodynamics and the causal force of absence is the Peircean equivalent of retroactivity, and thus it is by this concept that the two approaches may be bridged. Where detotalization understands retroactivity mostly in terms of ideology and the textual strategies for fighting it, Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics localizes retroactivity with empirical scientific strategies. Terrence Deacon's *Incomplete Nature* (2012a) explains how the emergence of mind from matter may be described non-reductively, in the way that medium constraints are preserved and transmitted to produce self-organizing systems. This is the embryonic form of retroactivity.

Deacon's emergent dynamics is challenged by one of the other leaders of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, Frederik Stjernfelt. Stjernfelt argues that Deacon's use of Peirce is too simplistic. In hashing out the problem of compositionality and taxonomy between Deacon and Stjernfelt, some of the other topics of the dissertation arise again, in a different form. Stjernfelt for instance excoriates Eco's reading of Peirce, and he dismisses the solution that second-generation semiology provides for how to account for the external. If Stjernfelt may on the other hand be read sympathetically with detotalization, his doctrine of the Peircean dicisign (alongside Deacon's emergent dynamics) may take its place within the broader coordinates of detotalization, providing finally a non-reductive and empirically sound answer to the problem of relativism in semiotics, without compromising its theoretic integrity.

I. SECOND-GENERATION SEMIOLOGY AND DETOTALIZATION

The title of this chapter adopts Émile Benveniste's (1969, 1985[1981]) label for the twentieth century descendants of Saussurean semiology, with emphasis upon those who discuss Louis Hjelmslev's stratification of the sign by form and substance. Specifically, it begins from Jacques Derrida's treatment of the sign theory of Ferdinand de Saussure as a critique, but non-disavowal, of the linguistic basis of semiology.

Linguistics remains a principal theoretic coordinate of semiotics, but this need not entail the structuralist totalization and exclusion of the external that Monticelli is concerned with dismantling. Rather, following from the extension of semiology inaugurated by Derrida, Barthes, and Lacan (and as paraphrased by Benveniste in his French article published in 1969, having been translated into English in 1981, reprinted as a chapter in 1985) the object-referent is included within the model of the sign only by means of incompatibilities and inconsistencies at the level of the system of description (that is, at the level of language).

Derrida's critique of Saussure in *Of Grammatology* (1976[1967]) does not reject the separation of *langue* and *parole*. On the contrary, Derrida says that Saussure does not go far enough in this procedure, and that the object-referent is covertly smuggled back in to Saussure (Saussure's semiology becomes logocentric) by means of his reliance upon phonological alphabetic language and the linguistic identity of the sender. Derrida unfurls somewhat the concrete object of linguistics, which is no longer any particular language, but a translinguistic, profound articulatory matrix, which is the precondition of all languages, and which he labels alternately as the trace and primordial *différance*. The matrix is only describable by means of de-centered arche-writing (French: *archi-écriture*; cf. Derrida 1976[1967]: 56, 57, 60, 61, 68, 69, 92, 109, 110, 112, 125, 128, 140, 228).

When it comes to the problem of how to account for the external without compromising the formality of the system, it is argued that the Hjelmslevian stratification, and its extension elaborated by Derrida and Barthes specifically, is the best tool for the job. Attention is placed firstly upon the particulars of Derrida's critique of Saussure through discussion of Russell Daylight's *What if Derrida was Wrong about Saussure?* (2012[2011]); secondly to the Lacanian concept of retroactivity and its implementation in Derrida's notion of arche-writing; and thirdly to the differentiation of the two types of secondary semiotic systems: the connotative and the metalinguistic, introduced originally by Hjelmslev, developed by Barthes, and adopted by Monticelli.

This is the first piece of the black pyramid schema, demarcating the primary from the secondary semiotic system, and the two forms of retroactivity at the secondary level. Chapter Two explains more completely the operations of the first type (the connotative-ideological), and Chapter Three does the same for the second type (the metalinguistic-transgressive), building up the other parts of the schema towards the eventual integration of the semiotics of Peirce in Chapter Five.

1.1. Detotalizing semiology

To begin with, this section makes reference to Benveniste, who introduced the term second-generation semiology for designating a theoretic constellation coming from Saussure. While posing the question “What is both the integral and concrete object of linguistics?” (Benveniste 1985[1981]: 230), he upholds the Saussurean *dictum* that linguistics is only one part of the broader semiology.

It is therefore possible to conceive of a science *which studies the role of signs as part of social life...* We shall call it *semiology* (from the Greek, *semeion*, ‘sign’). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance. Linguistics is only one branch of this general science. (Saussure 1983[1915]: 15–16)

The assertion that linguistics is only one part of a broader semiotics is meant to uphold that language is only one modality among a number, including sensory motor, affective, emotional, and quantitative semiotic systems for example. This of course is true, but the statement has led to the misapprehension of the intent of the semiological approach. When the reverse claim is made, that rather semiotics is only one branch of linguistics, it can be interpreted to mean the opposite: that sensory motor, affect, etc., are subordinate to language, and language is the only semiotic modality that matters. The pivotal opening assertion of this work is that this gets semiology all wrong.

A key feature of the approach is that linguistics must remain the central theoretic coordinate exactly because of the tendency for language and the symbolic to eclipse other modalities of the sign. These other modalities are part and parcel to the concrete object of linguistics, which is itself beyond mere language, and second-generation semiology prescribes a very specific textual methodology (in deconstruction and psychoanalysis mostly) for challenging the hold that language exerts on the sign, and freeing it to other modal expressions, which themselves may not be expressed by any tangible positivity in language, but which may nevertheless be approached by means of the trace, by de-centered arch writing, and by other retroactive strategies which are described throughout the dissertation and which are elaborated in the appendix. The concrete object of linguistics is the form which underlay all languages and modes of signification whatsoever. Isolating the form of this “great semiotic matrix” (Benveniste 1985[1981]: 227), or “profound articulatory matrix” as Eco calls it (Eco 1979[1976]: 229), means doubling down on Saussure’s own claim, that the signifier is not the phonological substance, and the signified is not the actual thought in the brain of a particular individual.

Regarding the ontological difference between form and substance, as briefly discussed in the introduction, neither term pertains to empirical reality, and the opposition need only imply a fundamental nested layering imparted to the signifier

(expression) signified (content) opposition by its stratification, through which the relation of inside to outside is troubled.

Through Derrida, Barthes, and Lacan, this troubled relation of inside to outside yields a textual methodology for semiotic analysis, that is the main interest throughout the dissertation, and takes a different name in each chapter. The black pyramid schema is built upon Hjelmslev's description because this retroactive methodology derives directly from the stratification of the sign, but retroactivity itself does not come from Hjelmslev. Retroactivity only becomes important from Derrida, Bathes, Lacan, and after, so the chapter focuses on them, and not upon Hjelmslev. Still, the basic terms come from him.

	expression	content
form		
substance (matter)		

Figure 2: Hjelmslev's stratification, adapted from Stjernfelt (2007: 167).

Although Benveniste in his article of 1981 (reprinted as a chapter 1985), includes Roland Barthes as a paramount representative of second-generation semiology, Barthes expresses the extension of semiology somewhat differently than Benveniste does in the preceding citation. He appears to contradict both Benveniste and Saussure before him. Derrida calls it (1976[1967]: 52), the “Barthesian reversal”. In the early pages *Elements of Semiology* Barthes explains how linguistics, no matter the modality of the object of inquiry, remains the central coordinate of semiotics because:

the moment we go on to systems where the sociological significance is more than superficial, we are once more confronted with language. It appears increasingly more difficult to conceive a system of images and objects whose signifieds can exist independently of language: to perceive what a substance signifies is inevitably to fall back on the individuation of a language: there is no meaning which is not designated, and the world of signifieds is none other than that of language. (Barthes 1977[1964]: 68)

At face value, this is merely a restatement of the linguistic turn; it is also consonant with the premise of critical theory, which is the idea of alienation. The subject is born into language – more simply, all cognition is constrained by language. Barthes' *Elements* can appear old fashioned in this reading. He can be interpreted to simply be behind the times, behind the Peircean, iconic, embodiment, or schematic turns (Stjernfelt 2007: 72–75). He can also be read anthropocentrically, as if his purpose here were to reassert the significant privilege of language-capable species. An alternative reading is proposed, whereby Barthes

here is actually of a piece with the others (Derrida, Eco, and even later Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics incidentally).

The Barthesian reversal concerns the naturalistic-romantic idea, that by simply labeling sensory motor affects, emotions, or environmental entities with terms from different sign typologies, one may somehow recuperate these entities out from under their subordination to verbal language and other symbolic systems. Barthes was concerned that, in its laudable efforts to avoid logocentrism and anthropocentrism, semiotics might lose its defining feature, which precisely is the exclusion of the external.

He does not reject the possibility of non-linguistic meaning; he does not deny the existence of *parole*, the external, and matter; what he does is, he reasserts that if one's goal is to make access to sensory motor emotions, affects, and environmental entities, or better yet to even begin to describe 'non-human meanings', the starting point remains within language, to attack language from inside. He parallels Derrida precisely in his observation that Saussure *did not go far enough*, in the isolation of *langue*-form from *parole*-substance. It is with all this in mind, that one should read Barthes, when he performs the 'Barthesian reversal' of Saussure's order of priority between semiology and linguistics:

In fact, we must now face the possibility of inverting Saussure's declaration: linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics: to be precise, it is that part covering the great signifying unities of discourse. By this inversion we may expect to bring to light the unity of the research at present being done in anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis and stylistics round the concept of signification. (Barthes 1977[1964]: 68)

The full implications of this formulation, especially as they are drawn out by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, have not been absorbed by the greater community of scholarship in semiotics. Note first that this re-prioritization of linguistics in semiotics is not an attempt to limit the array of possible objects of analysis, as if to say that non-linguistic objects cannot be considered signs, nor does it comprise any sort of statement about the capacity of species other than humans to perceive or to use signs. Rather it maintains that the priority of linguistics as theoretic coordinate of semiotics is crucial specifically for its nonlinguistic applications and for serving as metatheoretic cross-disciplinary organizer between them.

And here the argument addresses a different level: this linguistics Barthes has in mind, which remains the central theoretic coordinate of semiotics, is not precisely the linguistics of Saussure. As he formulates it, linguistics is expanded or extended and applied to the great signifying unities of discourse, and the extrapolation of early semiology to the so-called secondary semiotic/modeling systems depends on this misunderstood extension. "Even so, such language is not quite that of the linguist: it is a second-order language, with its unities no longer monemes or phonemes, but larger fragments of discourse referring to objects or episodes whose meaning underlies language, but can never exist independently of it" (Barthes 1977[1964]: 11).

Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* similarly extends the linguistic coordinate of Saussurean semiology by redefining the integral and concrete object of linguistics, not as the substance of any particular language, but as a trans-linguistic articulatory matrix. "Linguistics is not *general* as long as it defines its outside and inside in terms of *determined* linguistic models" (Derrida 1976[1967]: 43). Derrida and Barthes both conspicuously promote Louis Hjelmslev's stratification of the expression (signifier) and content (signified) planes of semiology by form and substance into four terms, as the diagrammatic key to the extension of semiology.

To repeat in the simplest possible manner, what is important about Hjelmslev's extension of Saussurean semiology is only that Hjelmslev underlines something that Saussure merely said, which is just that: the signifier is not the phonological substance, and its counterpart notion, if less easily conceived, that: the signified is not the concept in the brain of a particular person.

A problem that arises for Saussure's *Course* turns out to be that, although Saussure upholds that the signified is not the substance, he nevertheless privileges the acoustic sound as the exemplar of the signifier; more complicated, for Saussure the meaning of the sign remains with the language user or sender, in their linguistic identity.

But one can see here how, by endorsing the Hjelmslevian extension, Derrida is explicitly not calling for Saussure to account for the external object-referent in any literal fashion, especially not by including a dimension for it within the sign model itself, such as Peirce's index is presumed to do. By Derrida's thinking, this would merely impose a false center to the system of description, when the aim of the deconstruction is one of de-centering. In the view of second-generation semiology, which includes Derrida and Barthes but can also be extended to Kristeva and Lacan, Saussure came very far in his theorization of the sign, especially in its strictly differential definition and attempted exclusion of the object-referent.

The paradoxical formulation is that, if one takes Saussure to the limit, and does away with the object-referent not only in name but also in methodology (if one excises the linguistic identity of the sender from the system of description entirely) the external inevitably breaks back into the description (later, in the form of the interpretant). This is the basis for certain textual and methodological procedures – it is Jacques Derrida's reading of Saussure in *Of Grammatology* that initially lays out this possibility, but Derrida's reading of Saussure is not accepted unequivocally.

1.2. What if Derrida was Wrong about Saussure?

Russell Daylight's book could just as well be titled "What if Derrida was Too Hard on Saussure", given that in his own words, it is really only that "Derrida's engagement with Saussure is fragmented, tangential, and implicit" (Daylight 2012[2011]: 2), and not that Derrida was entirely wrong about Saussure. Daylight's

specific argument is that Derrida gets Saussure wrong when he locates in Saussure the heritage of “classical semiology” (Daylight 2012[2011]: 19–32) and argues on this basis (and others) that Saussurean semiology is logocentric. Daylight also understands the intent of Derrida’s reading, even if he does not sympathize with it. As he states: “Derrida acknowledges the progress of the Saussurean event which helps to loosen Western metaphysics, but at the same time, shows how this event falls back into the language it seeks to contest” (Daylight 2012 [2011]: 9).

Daylight’s work serves to underline how Derrida’s ambition is to amplify the definitive features of Saussure’s semiology, as discussed above. “On that precise point, it is not a question of ‘going beyond’ the master’s teaching, but of following and extending it” (Derrida 1976[1967]: 53). But Derrida’s charge of logocentrism against Saussure runs deeper than Daylight is interested to pursue.

Daylight’s first chapter covers classical semiology, by which term he mostly means Aristotle but also includes Augustinus, in order to elucidate the differences between it, on the one hand, and Saussurean semiology on the other. Daylight finds that Derrida’s accusation against Saussure betrays a disregard for these differences. It is important to summarize these issues here because, among other reasons, the definition of logocentrism depends on these Greek and Latin sources. The naïve understanding of logocentrism that may be called glottocentrism, is not under discussion here. Only the real logocentrism that asserts a bond between signified and object-referent (*denotatum*) is under discussion here, because it is only this of which Derrida accuses Saussure. Derrida’s interrogation of classical metaphysics begins with a quotation from the opening few lines of Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*:

Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images. (Aristotle: 16a, 2–4) in: Daylight (2012[2011]: 20)

For Daylight at least, the above fairly summarizes the meaning of logocentrism: the belief in a common substrate of thought shared by all people, independent of language. The substrate is reinforced by a natural relation between concept (*signatum*) and object-referent (*denotatum*). In Daylight’s view, Derrida imparts upon Saussurean semiology this classical perspective, which in truth Saussure does not share. That is, “Derrida posits a system of classical semiology in which a *signans* is opposed to a *signatum*, and in which the *signatum* can stand equally well for the concept or the thing” (2012[2011]: 27), even though Saussure doesn’t hold this.

But Derrida does not find logocentrism in Saussure in this obvious way. The logocentrism Derrida finds in Saussure is more insidious, and Daylight as much as admits this, while in other places still characterizing Derrida’s account in a simplistic way. Derrida does not neglect the fact that, in Saussure’s semiology,

there is not *meant* to be any bond between thing (object-referent/*denotatum*) and concept (signified). This is not where Derrida finds logocentrism in Saussurean semiology. He finds it in the *phonocentrism* of Saussure, but the link between phonocentrism and logocentrism for Daylight remains unclear.

Derrida asserts that phonocentrism is essential to certain ancient and medieval theories of language. The only textual evidence that Derrida offers for such a classical phonocentrism is Aristotle's *On Interpretation*. However, this position is hardly disputable, if one allows dissenting positions to exist on the margin. Derrida also argues that these same theories display a logocentrism, which, in this context, is the existence of a sense or meaning prior to the derivation of linguistic signifiers. (Daylight 2012 [2011]: 31)

Daylight does not deny the logocentric aspect of classical semiology. What he denies is the accusation of logocentrism against Saussurean semiology, because he claims that Derrida's accusation there rides entirely upon a conflation of phonocentrism (a charge which Daylight allows against Saussure) with logocentrism. While Daylight is correct that the one does not equate the other, he is wrong that Derrida's entire charge against Saussure rides upon this conflation.

What Derrida mainly fails to demonstrate in his characterization of classical semiology is the logical or linguistic co-dependence of phonocentrism and logocentrism. For phonocentrism – as the privilege of speech over writing – and logocentrism – as the belief in mental experience without the need for language – are very different notions, even if they are found together. (Daylight 2012[2011]: 31)

While Daylight is right that these are not the same thing, he seems not to take seriously the major idea in *Of Grammatology*, which is how being is falsely grounded in presence through the voice. When the voice of the spoken word is accepted as the guarantor of truth, an external factor is accepted into the sign as a discriminant parameter of its signification. In this way the sign is no longer purely differentially articulated, and this compromises its theoretic integrity. Thus, it is the phonological aspect of Saussure's conception of semiology, which imparts upon it a false center, a false certainty given by the presumed truth of the voice and the spoken word.

One important feature of this perspective is that, when speech and the voice are accepted as the guarantor of truth, they indirectly confer authority upon the linguistic identity of the sender and the community of language users. In this way, Derrida's critique of phonocentrism in semiology is the linchpin of the broader critique of different forms of logocentrism, such as ethnocentrism. In the latter, if signification is secured in the linguistic identity of the sender and the community of language users, those who are within the language group have privileged access to truth, whereas those who are outside that group are excluded from that truth and denied that authority. In this way, Derrida's critique of phonocentrism is a non-identical approach to the critique of ethnocentrism; i.e. an approach which does

not attack specific ethnocentrism per se, but which attacks the structure of ethnocentrism as such. The point is that, although Saussure did not confuse the signified with the object-referent explicitly, he nevertheless allowed for this confusion by grounding his analyses in phonological language, and Daylight does not take this link seriously.

The system of language associated with phonetic-alphabetic writing is that within which logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence, has been produced.[...] It is this logocentrism which, limiting the internal system of language in general by a bad abstraction, prevents Saussure and the majority of his successors from determining fully and explicitly that which is called “the integral and concrete object of linguistics”. (Derrida 1976[1967]: 43)

At the center of Daylight’s discussion of Saussure persists this bad abstraction, whereby the concrete object of linguistics is misapprehended. Daylight emphasizes the same aspect of Saussure that Derrida emphasizes: the exclusion of the object-referent, but fails to see how it is exactly by affirming the authority of the linguistic identity of the sender that Saussure fails to fully exclude the object-referent. Again, the Hjelmslevian extension is the means proposed here by which this problem is rectified, a link which Daylight does not address.

Derrida on the other hand dwells at length upon the position of Hjelmslev’s stratification and glossematics within his own grammatology and deconstruction. He cites Hjelmslev’s *Principes de grammaire générale* of 1928 to defend his own claim that the spoken word does not precede or take priority over the written one within deconstruction (Derrida 1976[1967]: 57), and that the formalism of glossematics, just like that of grammatology, “operates at the same time thanks to Saussure and against him; that, as I suggested above, the proper space of grammatology is at the same time opened and closed by *The Course in General Linguistics*” (Derrida 1976[1967]: 58). At the same time, Derrida does not adopt the whole elaborate edifice of glossematics by any means. Hjelmslev gives the point of departure, but does not provide the key to the extension of semiology which Derrida calls arche-writing, the broad term for which is retroactivity. Retroactivity only becomes important later.

This arche-writing would be at work not only in the form and substance of graphic expression but also in those of nongraphic expression. It would constitute not only the pattern uniting form to all substance, graphic or otherwise, but the movement of the *sign-function* linking a content to an expression, whether it be graphic or not. This theme could not have a place in Hjelmslev’s system. (Derrida 1976[1967]: 60)

The extension of semiology is bound up with the question: how to integrate the external without compromising the system of description by imposing a concrete object-referent? Retroactivity and de-centered arche-writing are ways of dealing with the external. It is an aspect *Of Grammatology* of special interest to Monticelli, and he discusses its place in Derrida and in some of the other representatives of second-generation semiology.

1.3. Extending Hjelmslev 1: retroactivity and metalinguistic regress

Monticelli's thought serves two specific purposes for the rest of the chapter. Initially, in his 2008 dissertation, he introduces the notion of retroactivity through exegesis of Jacques Lacan. Subsequently, he develops two types of secondary system called the metalinguistic and the connotative. He does this through the comparison of the semiotics of Roland Barthes and Juri Lotman. The major work of this chapter is to connect these two moves, by designating the two modes of retroactivity specifically as connotative and metalinguistic, a generalization which Monticelli does not go so far as to make. In this section, some examples are given of the secondary metalinguistic function of de-centered arche-writing, in Derrida and Lacan. In the next section, an example is given of the connotative function of ideology, as a procedure of identity-through-exclusion and disavowal.

1.3.1. Barthes' metalinguistic secondary system

Roland Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* and Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* overlap significantly, in how they both privilege the Hjelmslevian stratification as the centerpiece of extended semiology, they both note its limitations, and they both follow Hjelmslev in their simultaneous embrace of Saussurean semiology and deposition of its actual limitations. "Hjelmslev has not thrown over Saussure's conception of *language/speech*, but he has redistributed its terms in a more formal way" (Barthes 1977[1964]: 17). Barthes reiterates the position upheld by Saussure and repeated by Hjelmslev: the syntagm is always preceded by the paradigm. There can be no syntagm without there already being a paradigm, in the same way that there can be no substance without there already being a form. However, the important change that is brought by second-generation semiology is to theorize ways in which substance indeed may come before form, syntagm may come before paradigm, *parole* may come before *langue*. These are the ways of retroactivity, and in this chapter they are called connotation and the metalanguage. They have an interactive and interdependent relationship, as shown by the intersecting arrows connecting form and substance on the upper part of Figure 3.

The connotative secondary semiotic system reinforces the integrity and closure of *langue*, form, and paradigm, by dictating the essential and excluding remainders which fall outside that totality. It is the ideological semiotic system. The metalinguistic system does just the opposite: it works against the connotative one by introducing inconsistencies. It is the transgressive semiotic system.

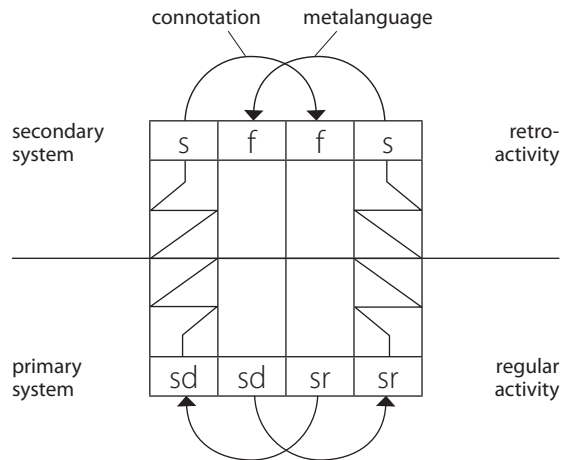


Figure 3: Two forms of retroactivity.

Barthes devotes some pages to this idea in a section near the end of *Elements of Semiology*, called “transgressions”, which in several respects anticipates Derrida’s notion of de-centered arche-writing.

III.3.7. *Transgressions*: [...] although such studies are only to be found here and there in a sketchy way, the whole of the phenomena in which one plane overlaps the other, in a way which is ‘teratological’ so to speak, compared to the normal relations of the system and the syntagm. For the mode of articulation of the two axes is sometimes ‘perverted’, when for instance a paradigm is extended into a syntagm. There is then a defiance of the usual distribution *syntagm/system*, and it is probably around this transgression that a great number of creative phenomena are situated, as if perhaps there were here a junction between the field of aesthetics and the defections from the semantic system. (Barthes 1977[1964]: 86)

Teratological overlappings are physical abnormalities and mutations – every deviation from the symbolic center begins from the retroaction of substance upon form. In this way, the critique of metalanguage undertaken by poststructuralism compounds metalinguistic stacking and its inevitable regress in the absence of a center².

² The arch critical style is best summarized by Julia Kristeva: “Semiotics is therefore a mode of thought where science sees itself as (is conscious of itself as) a theory. At every instant of its production, semiotics thinks of its object, its instruments and the relation between them, and in so doing thinks (of) itself: as a result of this reflection, it becomes the theory of the very science it constitutes. This means that semiotics is at once a re-evaluation of its object and/or of its models, a critique both of these models (and therefore of the sciences from which they are borrowed) and of itself (as a system of stable truths). As the meeting-point of the sciences and an endless theoretical process, semiotics cannot harden into a science let alone into the science, for it is an open form of research, a constant critique that turns back on itself and offers its own auto-critique. As it is its own theory, semiotics is the kind of thought which, without raising itself to the level of a system, is still capable of modelling (thinking) itself” (Kristeva 1986[1968]: 77, “Semiotics: A Critical Science and/or a Critique of Science”).

In this way, non-identities and internal contradictions are precisely guided against high value targets – this kind of writing is signature, aligns with no explicit political agenda or philosophical position, and from the perspective of those unfamiliar with the theoretic coordinates under discussion, reads as completely opaque. The metalinguistic system in this sense, is not merely the establishment of a higher-order language of description, but the transgression of lower-order ones as well. The critique of metalanguage itself is a function of the metalinguistic system.

One *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* reminds that “poststructuralist critiques have vigorously questioned the possibility of metalanguages. [...] Metalanguages seek to rise above their objects in order to examine them, but poststructuralists have questioned the possibility of such disinterested examination” (Makarysk 1993: 588). But not disavowing metalanguage by any means, Barthes, Derrida, and Lacan employ and rely on an even greater density of metalanguages than their precursors in structuralism; the regress of those metalanguages, the reversal of object language metalanguage dependency, and the inconsistencies that result, are repurposed for later usage. De-centered arche-writing as described by Derrida is writing in which the regress and its breakdown works against its parallel linear argumentation. Jerzy Pelc’s disquisition on the theoretic foundations of semiotics also poses the problem of regress in a discipline whose main ‘object’ is

Metametalanguage, that is, a semiotic metalanguage of a second order. [...] And to which level belongs the language we have used just now to discuss semiotics (MS) with its separate branches and metametalanguages? What we used was a language of a yet higher level, a metametalanguage, while the discussion itself belongs to a yet higher – metamatheoretical – level of semiotics (MMS). There can be more such levels as the present remarks demonstrate. (Pelc 1981: 22)

In the simplest possible sense here, when the topic of one’s article is, for example, ‘Martin Švanter’s reading of Russell Daylight’s reading of Jacques Derrida’s reading of Roman Jakobson’s reading of Ferdinand de Saussure’, one begins to understand what is meant by ‘the absurd regress of metalanguages and the loss of the object-referent’. On the same page, Pelc questions the “objective signs” (Pelc 1981: 22), the signs which Jakobson says refer to “items extraneous to language as such” (Jakobson 1996[1987]: 103). To postulate either the top-level metalanguage or a foundational object language is, as Derrida describes it, to impart a false center to the system of description. The provisional center allows for the fixation of both object and metalanguage, but even so, “along the way we formulate fragmentary generalizations of a lower order and it is sometimes difficult to draw the line between semiotics(S) and semiotics(MS). Similarly, the border between semiotics (MS) and the higher levels of semiotics is sometimes harder to define” (Pelc 1981: 23).

Absent such closure, the attempt to organize metalanguages with respect to each other in even the simplest analysis leads to an inevitable, and at times absurd

regress, in which elementary first order semiotic systems are already characterized as metametametanguages.

This term retroactivity is borrowed from Monticelli, but he develops Lacan's psychological notion of retroactivity specifically in application to the philosophy of time, whereas the whole operation of the black pyramid schema is conceived as outside of time, one cycle of its interactivity taking place in the phenomenal present. Still, the Lacanian proposal of retroactivity remains important here, because of how it recapitulates the two-fold structure of retroactivity, how it makes clear the psychoanalytic orientation to the ideological-connotative systems (which will be discussed again at length in Chapters Two, Four, and Five), and how Lacan uses wordplay to illustrate the transgressive aspect of the metalinguistic secondary semiotic system.

1.3.2. Wordplay as retroactivity in Lacan

As a strategy for maintaining the coherent totality of their descriptive systems, Saussure and Hjelmslev both maintain that the paradigm always precedes the syntagm, form takes priority over substance, language over speech, and one way to conceive the detotalizing strategy of retroactivity here, for destabilizing the totality without importing a simplistic object-referent, is the reversal of this order. This is the methodological key that, in distilled form, entails a kind of textual randomization that will be explored at greater length in Chapter Four on the topic of signomancy. Retroaction as the impingement of substance upon form and consequent generation of new codes by which to correlate expression and content, and as the marking of the regress of metalanguages, can however take an as-if positive form, but its products do not lend themselves to sign typologization and are tracked only by means of disruption of the extant codes of the symbolic.

In Monticelli's Lacanian usage, this dual understanding is explored in terms of the difference between retroaction and deferred action, the former referring to the interpellation of the subject within the extant symbolic, and the latter being the reassertion of the subject via the disruption of pre-established convention. Again, although this Lacanian formulation has a definitely temporal application for Monticelli, the two forms usefully anticipate connotation and metalanguage as the two forms of retroactivity used here.

The division of the positive and negative forms of retroactivity, just like that of the connotative and the metalinguistic secondary semiotic systems, is a mere descriptive necessity despite the abiding fact that the two can only be defined by their differential articulation and are best conceived as two sides of the same leaf, in the same way as *langue* and *parole*. Monticelli notes that "it is legitimate to examine the possibility for the subject to actively participate in the process of symbolization" and that "the alienating loss of man in language (the totality of the symbolic order) is, in fact, opposed by an alternative which Lacan defines as 'the subjective bringing to realization of being-toward-death'" (Monticelli 2008: 79). In other words, the aspect of retroactivity important to Lacan is specifically the

‘negative’ ideological one, and a space should be made for the positive one which Lacan calls deferred action. In this discussion Monticelli touches upon a topic to which he will return, in his 2016 work cited later: not all secondary systems are ideological ones.

But he asks rhetorically, “Should the activation of the subject thus be interpreted as a grasping of its authentic potentiality-of-being-a-whole?” (Monticelli 2008: 80). The question is a cryptic warning against the idea that retroactive systems may be grasped in terms of any positivity, rather than as a disruption at the level of the symbolic. In this way, Monticelli is true to the principle of *ὁ τρώσας ἰάσεται* (ho trōsas iasetai). Following on the author’s commitment to detotalization, the answer to his question is no, but then the question becomes: how is the positive dimension of retroactivity expressed? Frequently the solution is presented as a linguistic paradox.

Monticelli gives the examples of Lotman’s “translation of the untranslatable” (Monticelli 2008: 202), the “aleatory figure of non-being” and “possibility of an impossibility” (Monticelli 2008: 286), the “decision in a case of undecideability” (Monticelli 2008: 279), and bare statements of “constitutive incompleteness, openness and unrepresentability” (Monticelli 2008: 297). Meditation upon the paradox, through the formulation of new contradictory comparisons such as the above, may give rise to non-identical wordplay. In the following citation, Monticelli translates some pieces from Lacan that show how Lacan uses a play on words to illustrate the philosophical idea, that only through discontinuities at the level of the symbolic, may non-linguistic meanings be expressed.

We can use Lacan’s wordplay with the Latin verbs *separare* and *se parare* to illustrate this idea. Both verbs are founded on the concepts of ‘part’ and ‘partition’, which clearly opposes the totality of the symbolic order. In fact, according to Lacan, it is through a separation (*separare*), a break in the signifying chain (or “the interval intersecting the signifiers”) that the subject engenders itself (*se parare*). [...] If alienation marked the disappearance of being, separation gives rise to some being, which nevertheless remains evanescent and elusive, because it is from the area of the unborn – the unrealized – that the constitutive lack of the subject comes to inhabit the symbolic order as the irruption of something extraneous: “*discontinuity*, then, is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon”. (Monticelli 2008: 80; emphasis: D.M.)

In Chapter Four, wordplay and randomization are developed further in the context of psychoanalysis. For now, it is only necessary to bear in mind that the wordplay characteristic of some second-generation semiology is not mere ornamentation to something that could otherwise be captured in more conventional language. On the contrary, this wordplay is the main event.

In some important respects *Elements of Semiology* similarly does not merely describe the transgression of the metalinguistic secondary semiotic system, but also enacts it, in its hyper-dense metatheory and its emphasis on contradictions within the assortment of metalanguages of which it treats, not the least of which are between structural semiology and Peircean pragmatism, already. In the

same way, Derrida's de-centered arche-writing does not merely describe the dual movement of his arche-writing.

The event-moment announced by Derrida, in his address inaugurating post-structuralism at *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* symposium held at the Milton S. Eisenhower Library from October 18 to 21, 1966 with the infamous "Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences",³ (Derrida 2002[1967]: 278–294), denotes not just that moment, but also that of some deconstructed eschatology, and de-centered arche-writing becomes the talisman of protection against the depredations of accelerating alienation. "Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign substitutions came into play" (Derrida 2002[1967]: 354).

"This was the moment" (Derrida 2002[1967]: 354) after which the human and social sciences began the long process of disintegration leading to the current impasse, where social theory itself is all but dismissed as obsolete. The question who is to blame, and what is to be done, about the problem of relativism in the humanities, is discussed at length in Chapter Two, in the context of Marxist literary theory and ideology critique. Many will blame the very textual experimentation that came into fashion after this event moment, for the decline into relativism. The following section investigates the textual procedures of metalinguistic retroactivity a bit more closely, before moving on to introduce the connotative ideological ones, which are also the topic of Chapter Two.

1.3.3. The lightning tree and the tortoise shell...

Begin to understand arche-writing here by reading Derrida's statement 'the center could not be thought' as an unintended allusion to W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming", where the line is: "The center cannot hold/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" (Yeats 1919 in Finneran 1996[1983]: 187). There is no explicit allusion to Yeats by Derrida. The allusion is imputed retroactively.

The Yeats allusion invokes firstly the necessity of figurative (in this case poetic) language in retroactivity; secondly, it invokes the event-moment announced by Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play" (Derrida 2002[1967]:278–279) as the coming to self-awareness of the necessity of retroactivity; thirdly, it invokes the idea that the same event-moment of self-awareness coincides with another event: writing long ago replaced speech as the dominant form of human communication, but the consequences of this perceptual-modal shift become manifest only now.

³ « La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines ». The paper was published as: Derrida, Jacques 1967. *La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines* En : Derrida Jaques, *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, 409–429 (Chapter X) (cf. Derrida 1993[1967]).

Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose *conception, formation, gestation, and labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of childbearing – but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of a nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity. (Derrida 2002[1967]: 370)

The passage alludes to more than just the transgressive function of the meta-linguistic secondary semiotic systems. The political dimension of the birth pangs of the event-moment is signaled once again by an implicit reference to the poetry of W.B. Yeats, this time to his Poem “Easter, 1916” (Finneran 1996[1983]: 180). The allusion is specifically to the principal recurring line from the poem: “*A terrible beauty is born*”.

The poem famously describes the feelings of its author, on hearing news of the Irish Nationalist “Easter Rising” against British rule. Specifically, the British responded to the uprising by executing the Irish republican leaders for treason. Yeats, when saying that “A terrible beauty is born”, foresaw that the result of these executions would be the reinvigoration of the Irish nationalist home rule movement.

The prognostic quality of Yeats’ lines is underscored by means of another implicit allusion by Derrida to “The Second Coming”. “By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing” (Derrida 1976 [1967]: 7). The relevant stanza from Yeats’ poem is this:

*The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*
(Yeats 1919 in Finneran 1996[1983]: 187)

Twenty centuries of course refers to the birth of Christ and its obvious meaning in the stanza is the biblical prophecy of the resurrection, however in the context of second-generation semiology and *Of Grammatology*, the answer to the questions: what rough beast is about to be born, what terrible beauty is about to be born, and just what is this epoch-defining event, should not be sought in history or biography, but in linguistics and semiotics.

In his “The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud”⁴, Lacan touches on all of the principal themes discussed in the present chapter of this dissertation so far. He raises the critique of metalanguage, the regress of the hierarchy of metalanguages and object languages, the attempted bracketing of the referent and its covert phonological reappearance in Saussurean semiology, the occult-eschatological aspect of second-generation semiology, and the interdependence of metalinguistic retroactivity with connotation-ideology.

In the following passage, Lacan’s namesake for obscurity and wordplay is clearly illustrated. But it is just this feature which is the indispensable exigency of the event-moment.

For even broken down into the double spectre of its vowels and consonants, it can still call up with the robur and the plane tree the significations it takes on, in the context of our flora, of strength and majesty. Drawing on all the symbolic contexts suggested in the Hebrew of the Bible, it erects on a barren hill the shadow of the cross. Then reduces to the capital Y, the sign of dichotomy which, except for the illustration used by heraldry, would owe nothing to the tree however genealogical we may think it. Circulatory tree, tree of life of the cerebellum, tree of Saturn, tree of Diana, crystals formed in a tree struck by lightning, is it your figure that traces our destiny for us in the tortoise-shell cracked by the fire, or your lightning that causes that slow shift in the axis of being to surge up from an unnamable night into the *Εν παντα* [one in all] of language? (Lacan (2005[1977]: 117–118)⁵

There is no direct discussion of the cabala in this work by Lacan, but it can easily be read that way, and the hermeneutic reading strategies of gematria fit the thematics of Derrida’s event-moment nicely. In the same way as pairing Yeats with Derrida, the serendipitous association sometimes leads to a more important association because of its apocryphal status. This topic is returned to in Chapter Three in the context of Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum* (2001[1988]).

But to return to the quote: the free associative chain moves from the natural linguistic variance of (tree), through its paradigmatic associative axis (flora), to its symbolic associations. The crucifixion coincides with the first letter of the tetragrammaton evoking the element of fire, which later cracks the tortoise shell, as fire is associated with the suit of wands of the Tarot. The switch to the second person singular ‘you’ is addressed to the tree split by lightning, which is also now the tree of life of the cabala, the ten spheres or sephiroth of which provide the organization of the Tarot deck, the four suits of wands, cups, swords, and disks corresponding to the elements fire, water, air, and earth, corresponding to all four letters of the tetragrammaton, YHWH. The movement from the lowest sephira on the tree of life (Malkuth), to the highest sephira (Kether) represents the alchemical

⁴ One should notice that this chapter refers to an original intervention made by Jacques Lacan, under the title “L’instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient”, on 9 May, 1957, in the Amphithéâtre Descartes of the Sorbonne, Paris, at the request of the Philosophy Group of the Fédération des étudiants ès Lettres. Written version in French see Lacan 1966[1957].

⁵ Footnotes 17, 18, and 19 to pages 117–118 of Lacan (2005[1977]) are also worth reading.

process of transubstantiation, analogous to the process of sublimation in psychoanalysis, and abstracted to the phylogenetic level of human evolution, from sensory motor emotion and affect, toward language, and beyond. The tortoise shell cracked by fire was used in China three thousand years ago as a form of prognostic divination; this is allegedly the origin of the Chinese book of changes, or *I Ching*.

Dream interpretation, *I Ching*, and Tarot, are used in Chapter Four of this dissertation to explain the concept of signomancy and its inscription to the interior of the black pyramid. “What this structure of the signifying chain discloses is the possibility I have [...] to use it in order to signify *something quite other* than what it says” (Lacan (2005[1977]: 117–118).

1.4. Extending Hjelmslev 2: connotation and exclusion

In “Challenging identity: Lotman’s ‘translation of the untranslatable’ and Derrida’s *différance*” (Monticelli 2012), Monticelli repeats the importance of the extension of semiology, however he does not emphasize the specifically Hjelmslevian derivation of the theoretic point of departure (from Saussure) shared by Derrida and Barthes. This could be because the technicality of Hjelmslev’s descriptive language is not necessary for the application of structural semiology to emancipatory politics, which is the ultimate target of Monticelli’s dissertation (Monticelli 2008: 211–237); or it could be because the formalism of Hjelmslev excludes the external in a way that proscribes the notion of retroactivity; or because the planar model of expression and content retained by Hjelmslev from Saussure does not adequately intuit the chain of signification enjoined by Lacan. Monticelli’s reasoning for not adopting the Hjelmslevian extension is discussed further in Chapter Two.

In the later article “Critique of ideology or/and analysis of culture?” Monticelli (2016) develops the notion of the connotative secondary system, as the complement to the metalinguistic system. The article specifies the structural semiological approach to ideology critique, and contributes to the argument that the distinction between the ideological and the non-ideological secondary systems can likewise be conducted on a strictly formalistic basis. Like deferred action and retroaction, metalanguage and connotation stand in this chapter for the two basic forms of retroactivity, which take different names in subsequent chapters, depending on the theories under discussion. Like the metalinguistic system, the connotative system manifests directly in the process of theorization. In the following, Barthes’ deployment of connotation versus metalanguage, and Monticelli’s later treatment of the same, are briefly summarized. In the last part of this chapter, an example of the ideological connotative system is given, as a transition to the broader discussion of ideology critique in Chapter Two.

1.4.1. Barthes' connotative secondary system

Consider again Figure 3. It shows how, in the metalinguistic secondary system, it is the substance of the signifier (expression) that retroacts upon the form of the signified (content). In the connotative retroaction, the opposite is the case: there, it is the substance of the signified that retroacts upon the form of the signifier. In defining the Hjelmslevian derivation of the secondary systems, Barthes specifies that

The signifiers of connotation, which we shall call *connotators*, are made up of *signs* (signifiers and signifieds united) of the denoted system. [...] Whatever the manner in which it 'caps' the denoted message, connotation does not exhaust it: there always remains 'something denoted' (otherwise the discourse would not be possible) and the connotators are always in last analysis discontinuous and scattered signs, naturalized by denoted language which carries them. (Barthes 1977[1964]: 91)

The something denoted, which is excluded by the connotative secondary system in order to preserve its integrity, is just the remainder in Monticelli's *Wholeness and its Remainders*. The existence of connotative (ideological) secondary semiotic systems depends on centering and fixation by means of an object-referent. They appeal to the authorial voice and the community of language users to secure the meaning of their signs. "As for the signified of connotation, its character is at once general, global and diffuse; it is, if you like, a fragment of ideology: [...] We might say that *ideology* is the form (in Hjelmslev's sense of the word) of the signifieds of connotation" (Barthes 1977[1964]: 92).⁶

⁶ An alternative formulation of this fact is presented by Prieto in his book *Pertinence et pratique* (1975). The book includes a chapter devoted to connotation where Prieto defines connotation as "une conception d'une objet qu'on peut dire « subsidiaire » à l'égard d'une autre conception du même objet, c'est-à-dire [...] une conception d'une objet qui n'existe qu'avec (CUM-notatio) une autre conception du même objet à laquelle elle vient d'une certaine façon « s'ajouter »" (Prieto 1975: 67). Here is the translation: "a conception [as in a way of conceiving] of an object that we can call "subsidiary" in relation to another conception of the same object, that is to say, a conception of an object that only exists *with* (CUM-notatio) another conception of the same object to which it comes "to be added"" (transl. by Israel Chavez). In the said chapter Prieto explicitly discusses and criticizes both Hjelmslev's and Barthes' concepts of connotation. In order to define what is being denoted and what is being connoted, he refers to a sort of presuppositionnal chain of semiotic structures: for Prieto, the signified results from a connotative operation, while the message, or sense, conveyed by a sign is determined by a denotative operation; in other words, for Prieto the terms are somewhat inverted inasmuch as the signified is a function of the message, or sense, that the sender aims to convey. However, this does not take Prieto very far away from the reading of Barthes given here. In fact, it seems to bring him closer. This is all the more clear in his discussion of Barthes' *semantization of uses*, where Prieto claims that all usage is constitutively semantic by nature and all human activity *connotes*, the final aim of functionalizing connotations, within a society, being precisely that of legitimizing the privileges of the dominant class (Prieto 1975: 71 n 13). The last chapter of the book expands on these ideas and aims to show how semiology is geared, even since its phonological foundations, towards a critique of ideology.

Monticelli is interested in pointing out how the ideological secondary system can be formalistically differentiated from the non-ideological using the Barthesian vocabulary. He expands the idea: “although the second-order system is semiologically ‘construed’ [*s’édifie*] upon the primary system that it presupposes, from an ideological point of view the secondary system subjugates, as we will see, the primary one, replacing it as the surreptitious starting point (natural basis) of the semiological chain as a whole” (Monticelli 2016: 436).

Whereas the metalinguistic (transgressive) secondary semiotic system displaces the center provided by linguistic identity, the connotative (ideological) system imposes the anchoring center, effacing the play and regress of metalanguages and inviting the phantom referent as a factor in the determination of the sign. Barthes (1991[1957]: 128) describes all this as a passage from semiology to ideology, when he defines the signified of connotation as a fragment of ideology. It functions “as a retrospective anchoring, through ideological naturalization, of the otherwise ungrounded and possibly drifting signs of the primary system” (Monticelli 2016: 439).

Monticelli’s article points out how Juri Lotman’s model of semiosphere and explosion, particularly in the location of explosion on the zone of the periphery, is consonant with theorization of the detotalizing function of retroactivity (Monticelli 2008: 200–210). He notes that Lotman is less interested in the complementary ideological function of retroactivity – this is the main point of his article: that Barthes’ theorization of ideology as connotative secondary system, while finding no real expression in Lotman, is nevertheless a natural consequence of it.

“This is why, although Barthes’s and Lotman’s approaches to secondary modeling systems contain important differences, opposing them as two absolute and reciprocally excluding research programs is not the most productive theoretical attitude for contemporary semiotics” (Monticelli 2016: 449). The further conclusion is that, the exclusion of ideology critique from the picture of semiotics, whether that critique is of explicitly Marxist orientation or not, is itself a connotative procedure of consolidation of identity by exclusion.

1.4.2. Ideological secondary systems in action: disavowing Derrida

The full multimodal spectra of signs unrestricted by logocentrism, and the reworking of the theoretic coordinates of semiotics such that they may comprise a descriptive system adequate to the undifferentiated pleroma, is presumably what both traditions of semiotics aspire to achieving. It is the just *describability* of this pleroma that is a point of dispute between the two, and not really its existence, which is more or less given for both traditions. But the mere existence of the profound matrix implies already that some of the terms derived from linguistics, such as *langue* and *parole*, have application well outside that domain (“We shall therefore postulate that there exists a general category language/speech, which embraces all the systems of signs; since there are no better ones, we shall

keep the terms language/speech, even when they are applied to communications whose substance is not verbal” (Barthes 1977[1964]: 25).

The principal difficulty for this semiotic ideology critique remains that the identification of the connotative (ideological) secondary semiotic system is not undertaken with reference specific ideologies themselves. This sort of ideology critique should not proceed by pointing to certain ways of thinking and saying: this is ideology, and this is not. At the same time, it is difficult to concretely differentiate the ideological from the non-ideological without using examples. Disavowal is chosen in this dissertation as the exemplary ideological strategy because of how it may be located directly within theoretical procedures; i.e. disavowal of psychoanalysis or disavowal of deconstruction may be identified without making an evaluative comment on the actual status of these practices themselves.

Disavowal functions to preserve the totality of the connotative (ideological) secondary semiotic system, by excluding inconvenient particulars. Daylight’s book, *What if Derrida was Wrong about Saussure?* presents itself not as a disavowal of Derrida, so much as a careful restatement of the importance of Saussure. Daylight’s motivation is mostly a concern with fidelity to Saussure’s *Course*, and a worry that Derrida is not as careful as he should be in this regard. But in the conclusion of his book, Daylight cites Jonathan Culler, and the citation suggests a possible additional motivation which, at times, does in fact read as a disavowal of Derrida and/or Marx.

Referring to deconstruction, Culler (1975: 253) argues that “attempts to theorize a perpetual self-transcendence” must fail. He proposes instead that: “Rather than try to get outside of ideology we must remain resolutely within it, for both the conventions to be analyzed and the notions of understanding lie within it” (Culler 1975: 254). According to Culler and Daylight, Derrida’s deconstruction is in any case not as commendable as Saussurean semiology, because “In this [latter] kind of inquiry, *responsibility* lies within a democratic theme rather than with metaphysical-philosophical history. Arguably, the grounding of Derrida’s politics in metaphysical history encourages us to *too easily* demonstrate how cultural forms become naturalized and uncritical” (Daylight 2012[2011]: 183).

Another way of putting this would be, that deconstruction makes it too easy for one to distinguish ideological from non-ideological secondary semiotic systems. Given Daylight’s conspicuous word choice above, one might summarize his closing words somewhat differently, along the lines of: ‘Derrida was dangerous so you had better not read him’. Given the general utility of Daylight’s work, his closing statements on the supposedly non-democratic political affiliation of Derrida may be passed over without further remark, beyond the fact that they evince a certain lack of commitment to detotalization. If accurately attributed to Daylight (qua Culler), this disavowal of Derrida for the fact of his alleged political affiliations, would nevertheless compromise Daylight’s analysis by allowing the identity of the sender (in this case Derrida himself) to determine the meaning of the sign and thus, whether or not it is true (of Culler, of Daylight, or of Derrida), the point is instructive for understanding the formal character of the black pyramid schema.

II. NON-IDENTICAL MARXIST LITERARY SEMIOTICS

The inaccurate insinuation that he is a Marxist does not validate the disavowal of Derrida discussed at the end of Chapter One, but the displacement of the referent has definite consequences for Marxist literary theory, and some of those consequences are played out in this chapter. Only after such retooling do Marxism, semiology, and psychoanalysis come together in the convenient package in which they are sometimes presented. In the process, Marxism loses some of its self-definition: the basic oppositions of use value and exchange value, base and superstructure, false consciousness and class consciousness, no longer provide the anchoring center, and are put into what Monticelli calls circulation. Circulation is plotted to the terms of the black pyramid schema, in Figure 4. Circulation is meant to guard Marxist criticism against the accusation that it essentializes labor and hypostatizes class distinctions in its own signature totalization, but circulation also compounds the problem of relativism. The black pyramid schema proposes a middle path.

The chapter revolves around the question of how to at once protect against essentialism (how to keep the referent displaced from the sign function) and how to yet still account for the external (how to counter the accusation of relativism). The work of the chapter is thus to show how retroactivity as a solution to this problem manifests in the vocabulary Marxist literary semiotics. In its application to literary theory, the realism that is championed by Georg Lukács embraces the classical Marxist dependence on the linguistic identity of the sender. Terry Eagleton similarly dismisses anti-realist approaches to class critique in literature, because of the disintegrating effect it exerts on the revolutionary subject. Frederic Jameson takes poststructuralism more seriously. He comprehends a dynamic notion of realism in which the referential aspect of the object is still displaced. Slavoj Žižek anticipates how the non-identity of distorted realism dematerializes Marx back toward Hegel – his sublime object of ideology is compared with Eco’s ideological code switching toward this direction near the end of the chapter.

Finally, Theodor Adorno’s “Trying to understand *Endgame*” (1982[1961]) is set up as the non-identical literary critique par excellence, but it is shown how the negativity of Adorno’s approach can be supplemented by pyramid stratification. Beckett’s play also constellates a number of themes relevant to the broader dissertation, and some of the metaphysical implications of this doctrine are made flesh in Chapter Three.

2.1. Detotalizing Marx

One reason Monticelli compares Juri Lotman with Barthes in the 2016 article is because, although the similarities in their portrayal of the secondary semiotic systems is obvious, Lotman sidelines the connotative-ideological systems. So prominent is the metalinguistic-aesthetic form of retroactivity in Lotman that the connotative secondary systems are left out of the discussion entirely. Barthes

engages both types in *Elements of Semiology*, but similarly with Lotman even already there, and increasingly in his later work, the metalinguistic takes priority over the connotative. In other words, like Lotman, in Barthes aesthetics is in the foreground, while ideology is in the background. An account of the connotative systems in their own terms requires some recourse to more straightforwardly Marxist literary theory.

The differentiation of the secondary semiotic systems there predominately takes the form of the dispute about expressionism and realism. Jameson's *The Prison-House of Language* (1974[1972]) usefully glosses the metalinguistic versus connotative systems and covers much of the same material, but in closer conversation with poststructuralism. Terry Eagleton's later works *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990) and *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991) are both also preoccupied with the differentiation of the metalinguistic and connotative secondary systems, even though Eagleton does not adopt the Hjelmslevian terminology for this distinction. In the end, each source contributes to laying some foundation for integrating the semiotics of Charles Peirce to ideology critique. The necessary interplay of the metalinguistic and the connotative is in fact what gives the name to Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, where in the introduction he summarizes:

My argument, broadly speaking, is that the category of the aesthetic assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of these other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony. The construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic artefact is thus inseparable from the construction of dominant ideological forms of modern class-society, and indeed from a whole new form of human subjectivity appropriate to that social order. (Eagleton 1990: 3)

Eagleton's later critique of the Frankfurt school aligns with Lukács generally, and Eagleton's tirade against poststructuralism is mostly an expression of his frustration with failure of ideology critique after the fall of the Soviet Union (Eagleton 1991: xi–xv), where interest in class struggle is supplanted by identity politics and nihilistic relativism. This he blames mostly on poststructuralism and what might be called their expressionist leanings, towards the de-centered subject and textual experimentation, and away from the classical Marxist base-superstructure dichotomy and straightforward historicism.

While the decline of ideology critique described by Eagleton is rightfully noted and decried here, it cannot be blamed upon poststructuralist expressionist textualism. More importantly, the solution to the decline of ideology critique is not to be found in the classical Marxist, historicist-nationalist discourse and the disavowal of poststructuralism. Jameson's, Žižek's, and Eco's approaches to ideology critique are more sophisticated: their critique more intelligently circulates the primary and secondary levels, without losing sight of the practical emancipatory aims of critique. Monticelli gives a great summary of the basis of circulation in (2008), but ultimately it is difficult to say whether such semiotic revisionism remains Marxist at all.

2.1.1. Circularity on the black pyramid

The most important theoretic intersection of Monticelli's *Wholeness and its Reminders* is between Marx and Saussure. Marx occupies a central place as one of the founders of discursivity within the map of the sinthome (Figure 5), already populated by structural semiology, Eco, psychoanalysis, and later joined by Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics. These are the basic theoretic coordinates of semiotics, and the place Marx – specifically of Marx's theory of the commodity fetish, and generally what has become known as ideology critique – is integral.

The general form of the commodity in its semiotic extension is a base function of the matrix – it is the connotative type of retroactivity in the secondary semiotic system, and later Žižek explains why psychoanalysis is so crucial to understanding the sinthome in its properly general conception. Although in many circles the place of Marx in this picture goes without saying, a counter-tendency has arisen to obfuscate the place of Marx. In the hopes of packaging semiotics as something more palatable and profitable, ironically this disavowal of the original coordinates of semiotics (along with those of psychoanalysis) has led to nothing other than its even more precipitous decline, and thus the deconstruction of this disavowal is a major interest of the dissertation.

In Chapter Five, attempts by some of the exponents of Peircean semiotics to erase Marx are also discussed. Monticelli's discussion of the synthesis of Marx and Saussure is understandably dense – the chapter seeks not to recapitulate it in its full glory, but only to establish its importance for the broader discussion. Specifically in the case of this chapter, that discussion revolves around the question of what is the most effective mode of literary criticism for the purposes of ideology critique? Because much of the blame for the decline of ideology critique is laid on the fact that it relies upon semiotic theory for its expositions, some argument must be made for why literary criticism in this application cannot simply do without semiotics. This is provided by Monticelli's synthesis. At the same time, the bare link between Marx and Saussure on its own does not completely resolve the major accusations leveled against the effect of semiotics within Marxist literary criticism, such as the tendency toward abstraction and detachment from the external world, supposedly resulting in subjectivism and relativism (Ventsel, Selg 2020).

Monticelli's exposition on the interface of Marx and Saussure also proceeds by means of a critique of them both. The critique is two-sided: in the first place, the theory of value in Saussure is rejected as authoritarian totalization, and Marx's critique of exchange value and the universal equivalent is an implement of this rejection; but in the second place, Marx's own theoretic opposition between use value and exchange value imposes a static primary level object language by which to center the text. Monticelli explains how use value and exchange value (like base and superstructure, proletariat and bourgeoisie, or object language and meta-language) are always in definitional circulation, and the black pyramid schema illustrates the perpendicular relation of this circulation, with that of the modes of retroactivity.

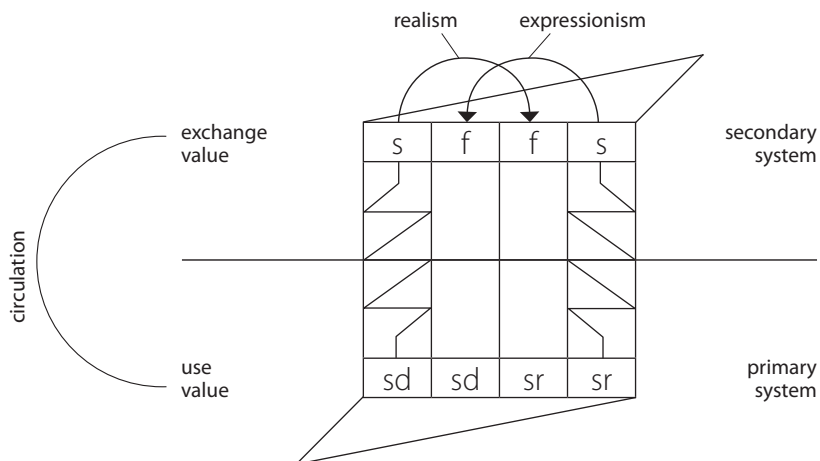


Figure 4: *Circulation on the black pyramid.*

Monticelli wants to say that the flaw in Marx's theory of value is that Marx accepts the notion of use value as a positive discriminant parameter. For instance, if the revolution is being waged on behalf of the working class, who gets to decide who is working class and who is not? The same problem applies to use value. Allow for the assertion that exchange value is a mere symbolic construct that covers up the actual use value of things. After exchange value is deconstructed, what is the positive index that one has arrived at use value? And how would one know? To allow for such a static parameter is to invite totalitarianism. Monticelli's circulation and his summary of Baudrillard's critique of Marx is meant to destabilize this, and the whole poststructuralist critique of Marx may be more or less summed up along these lines; however, remember that the question behind Monticelli's dissertation is: how does an already formalistic system like structural semiology account for what is external?

If the poststructuralist critique of Marx excises use value, the proletariat, and the notion of base (everything that would take the place of the 'object-language'), does it not merely reproduce the problem of relativism? Does it not merely compound the exclusion of the external? How is this exclusion of the discriminant parameter object term to be reconciled with the issue of relativism? The answer has to do with what happens in the text, when the referent really is completely excised, primary and secondary levels really do go into hyper-circulation, both forms of retroactivity start spinning and looping, and interpretants start shooting out of the zenith of the black pyramid.

In the context of Marxist literary semiotics, the full description of what happens at the moment of retroactivity is handled much better for example by Žižek and Adorno (although they too lack the terms from second-generation semiology necessary for its articulation). Ultimately it is only Eco who grasps the whole picture. Before moving to their texts, some details of Monticelli's summary of the Marx-Saussure connection should be reproduced here, because Monticelli

really perfectly and succinctly captures this connection, that is so crucial for understanding the total sinthome as it is deployed later.

2.1.2. The general equivalent

Monticelli manages to differentiate Saussurean meaning, value, and signification in a few short pages more effectively than Russell Daylight did in his whole chapter about value discussed in Chapter One, and this is just because Monticelli does so in the context of Marx, a comparison which, as discussed at the end of the preceding chapter, Daylight chooses to ignore. As Monticelli explains, first of all meaning and value are not the same in Saussure. As per available English language translations, meaning is associated specifically with the signified (Monticelli 2008: 122).

In semiotic systems which include a referent or denotatum as a discriminant parameter of course meaning may be more complicated, but since in Saussure's system there is no such referent, meaning is kept with the signified. Meaning and signification are also different: it is signification which accounts for the bond between signifier and signified. In other contexts, this might raise the question: of what does signification then consist, if the bond between signifier and signified is always arbitrary-conventional and not motivated? A mere capricious act?

While the question is of great importance for later discussion, for the problem of value it is secondary for now. Value, in contrast with these other terms, has to do with the relation of singular signs (already bound signifiers and signifieds) to other signs within a given system.⁷ How is a system given? From what place issues the boundary between system and the extra-systemic? This is the place of authoritarianism in Saussurean semiology, according to Monticelli, and he spells out Marx's discussion of exchange value as a (flawed) critique of the Saussurean totalization of *langue* through value. Needless to say, Marx's critique was not directed at Saussure, but Monticelli's synthesis clarifies Marx through contraposition with Saussure. The linchpin of totalization, the means by which every value in a given system is secured, is labeled as the 'general equivalent'.

The general equivalent in Marx is obviously money, but the brilliance of Marx and what assures him his place in the Mount Rushmore of semiotics, why the notion of the commodity fetish is key in the broader sinthome, is that the general equivalent may be generalized even further. The black pyramid schema shows how the 'concrete object of linguistics' is not any one language, or even all languages put together, but rather a template precursor called the profound articulatory matrix.

⁷ It may be argued that signifiers and signifieds are bound precisely by the way that independent signifiers are related to each other within this system, such that the system precedes 'signification'. This is somewhat closer to Lacan's conception, but is not discussed at this point in Monticelli's text.

It is substrate-independent in the sense that Terrence Deacon intends (discussed in Chapter Five), but at the same time its universality recapitulates every particular. Upon this dematerialized matrix are inscribed different circular loops between form and substance at the levels of expression and content. At the secondary level there are two forms of retroactivity: the metalinguistic-aesthetic, and the connotative-ideological.

In Chapter Three, the precise functionality of aesthetic retroactivity is described in more detail. But here, when the general form of the commodity, and the operations of the general equivalent, are discussed, they refer precisely to this other form of retroactivity: the connotative retroaction of the substance of the signified upon the form of the signifier. Monticelli shows how Marx already conceived of the commodity fetish and the general equivalent as something pre-existing money itself, something more general.

Monticelli cites *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud* of 1990, written by Jean-Joseph Goux on this: “This is why it is possible to consider Marx’s analysis of the ‘fetishism of the commodity’ as the paradigm for a critique of a certain more general mode of symbolizing [...] or modeling which is directly oriented towards the constitution of totalizing forms of representation” (2008: 142). Moreover, Monticelli (2008: 149) notes further how, when the general equivalent in commodity fetishism is departicularized and conceived in this multi-mode, it is possible to view it as the origin of many other theories of subject-oriented emancipation and critique, such as inform the other legs of the tripod of poststructuralism, in feminism, in postcolonialism, and in psychoanalysis.

Most of the semiotics out of twentieth century Paris was the elaboration of this commodification irrespective of actual money. Capitalism, and its behavioral symptom consumerism, is a way of thinking, not just an economic system, and it is for the generality of this insight on the part of Marx, that he is the unsurpassed proto-semiotician. Unsurpassed, except perhaps by Freud.

In Chapter Four, Freud’s parallel with Saussure is discussed in equal detail. So Marx criticizes the same totalization performed by Saussure, but by noting it at the level of economics. The abstraction that is money merely conceals the social relations of domination formerly more explicit in the system of feudalism and the character of the monarch. The way this critique problematizes Saussure is one way to comprehend poststructuralism, but in that application it is also turned back upon Marx himself.

When Marx claims that exchange value is arbitrarily imposed on social relations, he does so on the basis of the notion of use value. Another deceptively simple clarification Monticelli provides is that, when Marx says ‘exchange value’ he really just means ‘value’ (Monticelli 2008: 143), because the definition of value itself already implies a total system that is fixed by a general equivalent. Value has nothing to do with essential features and properties of presumed objects, but use value presumes to do so.

Marx did not consider this sphere to be a detotalizing border-space, but rather as the authentic (real) totality of which the fetishized system of exchange-values would be

only a distorting representation. [...] For poststructuralists (1) there is no such thing as an ‘essence’ of human beings, in general there are no ‘essences’, and this is why it becomes impossible to make a clear distinction between an authentic internal space and an inauthentic external projection; (2) the human being can never coincide with her/himself just as the sign can never coincide with itself, this coincidence being always displaced and deferred. (Monticelli 2008: 161)

Monticelli’s summary of Jean Baudrillard’s critique of Marx recapitulates the whole poststructuralist polemic with Marx (Monticelli 2008: 160–166). For a Marxist critique to be anti-essentialist, to reject any static primary-level object language, and yet be free of the charge of relativism and subjectivism, it must rely on circular explanations of basic Marxist terms like use value and exchange value, base and superstructure, false consciousness and class consciousness, proletariat and bourgeoisie, etc. (Monticelli 2008: 151). As this inevitable logical contradiction is described by Figure 4, the place of this circularity can be explained systematically, if not with complete conceptual closure.

With Monticelli, it is asserted that this circularity and contradiction is not just some inconvenient feature, but is itself definitive and the main interest of the black pyramid schema. All of semiotic inquiry is oriented toward putting in relief this basic non-identity. But the way Monticelli puts it, seems as though to try and mitigate this contradiction, rather than draw it to the foreground. “This overwhelming use of circular explanations in the analysis of value, far from introducing a contradiction in the Marxian argument, adequately reproduces the self-enclosedness of the system of values (commodities and money) and its emergence by an abstraction from all the aspects linking it with the external space of production” (Monticelli 2008: 151).

The major point of the black pyramid schema is to show how circularity between primary and secondary levels necessitates retroactivity at the secondary level – retroactivity enacts contradiction, forcing the reassignment of signifiers to signifieds through the generation of habit-changed interpretants, and this fecundity shows up in the descriptive system itself. Again, Monticelli would as if cover over this mess and incompleteness, whereas the current work takes the mess as its main interest.

Simultaneously, the current work more willingly accepts the exigency of stratification. While the border of inside and outside must be challenged, it nevertheless exists and is reproduced in many of the other basic oppositions that are challenged by poststructuralism. The question is not how to do away with these oppositions completely (total destratification), but how to intelligently probe their borders and to test their adequacy. This is the whole point of the Hjelmslevian stratification.

In search of a reliable semiotic terminology for the operations of the general equivalent in the commodity fetish, Daniele Monticelli discusses Robert M. Strozier’s *Saussure, Derrida, and the Metaphysics of Subjectivity* of 1988, who says that “Within semiotics this idea can be understood as the total dominance of the code over the message” (Strozier quoted by Monticelli 2008: 154), but things couldn’t possibly be this simple. It is in formulations such as these, that one

discovers the real need for the specificity that is only brought by the Hjelmslevian stratification and extension of semiology, developed by Barthes and Derrida, but curiously overlooked by Monticelli. Eco's solution to Monticelli's main question, of how a descriptive system may at once eschew the referent of the primary level (e.g. use value) and still somehow account for the external, also overtly depends on Hjelmslev and his stratification as a starting point.

2.1.3. Detotalization remains stratified

If at no other point, it is this point at which the current dissertation minutely diverges from *Wholeness and its Remainders*, or at least adds something to it which might be absent there. When Monticelli writes of structuralism as a procedure of totalization (2008: 9), he describes it in terms of Saussure's separation of *langue* and *parole* – when universal system is abstracted from particular speech, the closure conferred upon that system is authoritatively imposed from outside. Values may then be assigned to its terms on the basis of this authority.

The more commonplace way of putting the critique of structuralism, the one that is more often issued by poststructuralists as a reason for moving beyond structuralism, is its 'logocentrism' in the vulgar sense. Because structuralism begins by applying terms and principles from linguistics to signs of a different sort, such as applying the division of syntagm and paradigm to the elements of a nonverbal visual advertisement for Coca-Cola, structuralism is construed to suggest that all meaning at base is linguistic and thus to privilege language above other modes of the sign. In a footnote, Monticelli relates to Jean-Joseph Goux's position as follows:

Jean-Joseph Goux suggests in this sense re-defining "logocentrism" as the choice of signs of spoken language as the "universal measure and ideal principle of evaluation" of all other signs (Goux 1990: 43; see also Spivak 1997: lxxviii and Derrida 1981: 21). If Hjelmslev took the synecdochic *langue-langage* to extremes by negating the existence of something linguistic outside *langue*, Roland Barthes similarly took the synecdoche linguistics-semiology to extremes by positioning the whole of semiology under linguistics. (Monticelli 2008: 9–11)

There is a number of possible points of disagreement to be made regarding this footnote. First, while Monticelli already makes clear that he understands that logocentrism is rather the assertion of a natural bond between signified and *denotatum*-referent, in his sections about Augustinus⁸ (2008: 25–35), he nevertheless seems to agree with Goux that it should be redefined simply to mean privileging verbal language over other modes.

⁸ Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis, A.D. 354–430, a medieval philosopher, known as St. Augustine, one of the Latin fathers in the early Christian Church; bishop of Hippo in North Africa.

However, as Daylight discussed in Chapter One, and as raised in the general introduction of this dissertation, too much is lost by this simplification. It loses completely the idea that logocentrism is mode-independent – it is important to understand also how the latter mistake also recapitulates the mistaken presumption that the signified has a natural bond with the referent. This tragic extension is covertly forwarded by the thought that, as long as a verbal signification (for example) is redundantly backed by parallel significations in other modes (tactile and auditory, for example), this signification is reliable, when the disheartening truth is that these other modes are just as susceptible to wrong signification as any other mode.

One might even argue that systematic ideological distortion (connotative secondary system) is even more insidious when it is conducted by means of signification in nonverbal modes, even if it is less prevalent. Either way, to simplify the definition of logocentrism in the way that Goux suggests is to strip it of its critical value for these other, less tractable discussions.

The other major problem with the footnote is that Monticelli appears to accept the commonplace reading of the ‘Barthesian reversal’ discussed in Chapter One. He seems to accept that Barthes, by saying that semiotics is part of linguistics, was really just saying that all signification takes place in verbal language; i.e., that Barthes was ‘logocentric’ in the vulgar sense. This is tantamount to ignoring the real answer, given in Chapter One, to Benveniste’s question: what is the concrete object of linguistics?

The reader should recall that the answer to this question is not ‘actual language’ or ‘all languages’, but rather the profound articulatory matrix that makes language possible in the first place. It is doubtful that Monticelli actually accepts the commonplace reading of Barthes statement, especially considering that it was Derrida who clarified it in *Of Grammatology*, however recall also that Derrida performs this clarification via Hjeltslev, and Monticelli seems not to endorse Hjeltslev’s stratification in this application (Monticelli 2008: 74, 115).

When the poststructuralist critique makes a problem of basic oppositions like inside-outside, subject-object, conscious-unconscious, it needs to do so from some kind of systematic basis. As Derrida noted in *Of Grammatology* and as discussed in Chapter One, the Hjeltslevian stratification reproduced by the black pyramid schema is a very sensible way to approach the question of the outside of the inside, the inside of the outside, etc. The basic point is a cybernetic one: the principal oppositions like subject-object and inside-outside definitely exist, but there must be some elemental layering to problematize what is called inside, and what is called outside, and there must be constant movement between inside and outside.

The opposition of signifier-signified is the truly elemental layer, but the layer must be complicated into a series of nested oppositions, between which the directionality of action and retroaction can be specified. This basic layering is also a major thesis of biosemiotics, from Hoffmeyer (1996[1993]) and Kull onward. It is the descriptive means, by which Hjeltslev achieves this layering (or stratification), that Monticelli construes as totalitarian.

What is relevant for the reasoning in this dissertation is that Hjelmslev decides, as a matter of fact, that the sign function is just the correlations of elements from the plane of expression (signifiers) with those of the plane of content (signifieds) at the stratum of form. That is, referring to Figure 4 again, the inside of the inside is where Hjelmslev's sign function is located. On the other hand, the sign function always also presupposed by a substance, despite that it also precedes this substance and is prioritized over it. The substance, as per the diagram, is the outside of the inside.

When Žižek asserts his 'substance = subject' formula of Lacanian-Hegelian origin, it means that the unconscious is the substance of both expression and content, that the subject as divided against itself is constituted by its non-identity with this substance, and thus that the outer layer of substance, which is the unconscious, is the interface between the subject and the empirical world. This is what it means, to say that the unconscious is more outside, and more 'on the surface', than conscious thought. This is discussed further in the subsection about Žižek, as well as in Chapter Four on the topic of dream interpretation.

The point here is to say that Hjelmslev's stratification provides a great tool for navigating the complexities of these dilemmas, both the circulation of the primary and secondary levels, as well as the porous exchange between inside and outside, and that it should be noted how Monticelli (2008) more or less rejects this tool despite Derrida's endorsement, although in the 2016 piece about Barthes and Lotman he indirectly takes it up through Barthes, without giving comment on its Hjelmslevian origin.

It could be explained by Monticelli's decision to reject the opposition of inside-outside and subject-object entirely, however what is clear from his text is that he does not in fact reject these oppositions. His descriptive system remains stratified. There is no tangible break down of these oppositions within the language itself, as would be expected from a work that submits completely to the second kind of retroactivity, to de-centered free play, total destratification, etc.

Monticelli does, however, indicate that he understands the place of meta-linguistic retroactivity and the distortions it causes, in the following words: "This conception of (emancipative) politics as an infinite or detotalizing (impossible, that is) totalization by which the singularity of the event universalizes itself through a non-completable procedure of subtraction from (always particular) State totalization is the final result of Badiou's⁹ theory of the event" (Monticelli 2008: 296).

The cited and quoted excerpt formulates retroactivity through basic contradiction – while it is not the same thing as incompatibility, and while it does not quite achieve the height of non-identity achieved in the de-centered texts of Derrida and Lacan, it at least marks the place and acknowledges the necessity of the breakdown in language. Towards the end of the book he calls it "the constitutive incompleteness and impossibility of completion in any (emancipative) politics" (Monticelli 2008: 292), which conveniently anticipates the way Terrence

⁹ Worth mentioning is here Alain Badiou's book of 2005, *Being and Event*, translated by Oliver Feltham from the French original *L'Être et l'Événement* of 1988.

Deacon's emergent dynamics finds its coordinates in the greater theoretic constellation (*viz.* Deacon 2012a). On the same page Monticelli says that "this process has a random and aleatory trajectory insofar as it escapes each representability and thus predictability within the situation. [...] This is why universalizable singularity is said by Badiou to break with identitarian singularity" (Alain Badiou of 2003¹⁰ cited by Monticelli 2008: 296).

This is probably the most direct acknowledgment of the necessity of retroactivity, but once again formulated in an as-if logical way, as if retroactivity really could be explained by means of a concrete concept. For an explanation of retroactivity that would satisfy the rational skeptic, make use of some empirical strategies or accord with some analytic standards in philosophy of language, it is not in the domains of Marxism, deconstruction, or psychoanalysis, that one should look. Rather, this question put to the *sinthome* is fulfilled by Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics. Its place is described in Chapter Five.

The lengths to which Monticelli goes to paper over the fact of how semiotic ideology critique really is implicated in what is often called 'fashionable nonsense' are commendable in a way. On the one hand, it is understandable because of just how much traction the argument has gotten, that the political efficacy of ideology critique is only diluted by semiotics. This is the argument taken up by many Marxist literary critics, discussed in the following. Monticelli strives to show how semiotic theory does not compromise ideology critique, it need not lead to total relativism and subjectivism, it may remain concerned with the external.

However, the very critique of the notion of use value shows how any uncritical presumption about class struggle can only ultimately lead to fresh authoritarianism. In this way, by attempting to diminish the place of the de-centered play of the metalinguistic retroactivity, in order to rehabilitate semiotics against charges of fashionable nonsense or relativism or whathaveyou, detotalization itself may marginalize the aspect that makes semiotics just what it is.

In the next section, the stakes of this dispute are specified for Marxist literary criticism, coming to the same conclusion, that ideology critique must remain non-identical, must continue to reject a static object language, and embrace some of the textual procedures that characterize poststructuralism. The problem of the outside and how to deal with the external is continued in the section on Žižek. Also there it is explained, how a full description the 'general mode of symbolizing' that is the connotative procedure of ideology, requires that other coordinates in the broader theoretic constellation of semiotics need to be explicitly situated – psychoanalysis for instance is presented in the 2008 work as little more than a supplement to deconstruction, whereas at least according to Žižek, psychoanalysis comes first. After that discussion, Eco's ideological code switching shows how the basic Hjelmslevian stratification (with some help from Peirce) provides an answer to the problem of relativism in ideology critique. In the final section, these ideas are applied to Beckett's *Endgame* and Adorno's famous treatment of the play.

¹⁰ This reference pertains to Alain Badiou's *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, edited and translated by Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens in 2003.

2.2. Realism and expressionism in Marxist literary criticism

Eagleton's eloquence is unmatched when it comes to the defense of the importance of ideology critique, however his treatment of the place of semiotics in this project is instructively flawed. The truth of his claims, when Eagleton spells out the situation of ideology critique in the early nineties, only finds its resonance now, entering the third decade of the twenty-first century. At the same time, the grounds of his position within a realist classical Marxist perspective are already apparent here.

The ways in which these grounds compromise his critique, and the alternative given by some of his opponents, are the main interest of the section. Eagleton's tacit endorsement of realism, and his open denunciation of poststructuralist de-centered textualism, are clarified in the context of the debate over realism and expressionism in *Aesthetics and Politics* authored, in particular, by Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno (1980 [1977]). The creative metalinguistic aspect of the expressionist approach is blamed by Eagleton for the decline of interest in ideology critique. Some preparatory remarks are cited from the introduction to that book. All citations from *Aesthetics and Politics* are attributed to their original authors. "Its 'creative method' was a search for essences pursued through stylization and abstraction. While the Expressionists professed to attain the kernel of reality, they merely gave vent to their own passions, in a subjectivism that verged on the solipsistic, since words were not used referentially but only 'expressively'" (1980[1977]: 31).

This commonsensical gloss, on the way in which expressionist textualism ignores the reality of class struggle and the given unities of the working class and the bourgeoisie, anticipate Eagleton's more developed denunciation of post-structuralism. But even in that more thoughtful treatment, the presumption of the accessibility of the object-referent, and the givenness of the unities of class, are marked by a non-semiotic orientation to the nature of the sign. The ways in which Eagleton later minimizes the problem of the referent are put in the context of the earlier discussion in *Aesthetics and Politics*. Eagleton and Lukács are associated provisionally, as defenders of realism and opponents of expressionist poststructuralist textualism. "In the present debate we are concerned with a much simpler question, namely, does the 'closed integration', the 'totality' of the capitalist system, of bourgeois society, with its unity of economics and ideology, really form an objective whole, independent of consciousness?" (Lukács 1980 [1977]: 31).

Lukács says yes. The supposed disagreement between Lukács and his interlocutors regarding this is in fact secondary compared to the methodological issue of the object-referent, and Lukács exaggerates the former in order to endorse a more robust communism. It compromises his analysis by an objective interest. Lukács acknowledges that the expressionists have their own object of inquiry that is a de-centered, fragmented subjectivity endemic to the period of crisis during which they all labor, however he diminishes the importance of "the experience of disintegration" (Lukács 1980[1977]: 32).

According to Lukács, it is a mistake to allow this fragmentation to supplant what should be the real object of inquiry of Marxist literary theory, which is concrete class struggle, and which should be depicted in a realistic fashion. Critics who endorse the surrealist, avant-garde, and high modernist movements have their moments of eloquence but, “What has all this to do with literature? Nothing at all for any theory – like those of Expressionism or Surrealism – which denies that literature has any reference to objective reality” (Lukács 1980[1977]: 33). Whatever side one chooses in this debate, Lukács’ feud with Bloch and the others inspired a discussion that has had enduring value in literary theory.

By way of illustration, just compare the ‘bourgeois refinement’ of Thomas Mann with the Surrealism of Joyce. In the minds of the heroes of both writers we find a vivid evocation of the disintegration, the discontinuities, the ruptures and ‘crevices’ which Bloch very rightly thinks typical of the state of mind of many people living in the age of imperialism. Bloch’s mistake lies merely in the fact that he identifies this state of mind directly and unreservedly with reality itself. He equates the highly distorted image created in this state of mind with the thing itself, instead of objectively unravelling the essence, the origins and the mediations of the distortion by comparing it with reality. (Lukács 1980[1977]: 34)

Aesthetics and Politics as an anthology is mnemonicized by the feud, over who is the greater modern novelist: Thomas Mann or James Joyce? Which novel better expresses the fractured position of the European wartime subject, *The Magic Mountain* or *Ulysses*? (Cf. Mann 1995[1924]) and Joyce 1916) As Lukács portrays it, Mann’s book is a matter-of-fact account of the life of Hans Castorp, his illness and retreat to high alpine asylum, the prolonged realistic meditation on death and rejuvenation through contemplation of mortality. It is steeped in historical context and, by Lukács’ account, its devices grow up from that soil and enrich it. *Ulysses* on the other hand follows immediately on Joyce’s preceding *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a loosely autobiographical account of the avatar Stephen Dedalus, which culminates in his decision to defy the wishes of his family, to reject, among other things, the Irish nationalist language revival movement. The narrative of later *Ulysses* then famously and still emblematically captures the aesthetic of anti-realism as a strategy for ideology critique. One unavoidable note on this too convenient opposition is that, while writing the more experimental *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn, Told by a Friend* (Mann 1948[1947]), Mann consulted with Theodor Adorno directly, not just for the massive work’s citational exigencies, but also because Mann organized the chapters of the book loosely around the contrapuntal twelve tone scale devised by Arnold Schoenberg¹¹ (cf. Gödde, Sprecher 2006[2002]), the very same musical experimentalism Lukács associates with expressionism, surrealism, and the denial of the object-referent. Even *The Magic Mountain* is experimental in

¹¹ Arnold Schoenberg (born Schönberg, 1874–1951) was an Austrian-born Jewish composer, music theorist, teacher, writer, and painter, US citizen since 1933.

comparison with Lukács' favorite Balzac¹². The book still clearly exhibits a more frank realism than those of Joyce, but Lukács' blanket rejection of expressionism as a decadent distraction from class struggle, in favor of realism as the proper literary tool of revolution, appears retrospectively hasty.

So if we are ever going to be able to understand the way in which reactionary ideas infiltrate our minds, and if we are ever going to achieve a critical distance from such prejudices, this can only be accomplished by hard work, by abandoning and transcending the limits of immediacy, by scrutinizing all subjective experiences and measuring them against social reality. In short it can only be achieved by a deeper probing of the real world. (Lukács 1980[1977]: 37).

Eagleton characterizes the turn to the de-centered self in Marxist literary theory the very same way, as an indulgent self-referentiality that is Marxist only in name (and only at times) and smuggles reactionism qua reformism into what should remain staunchly realist class critique. Eagleton and Lukács are totally of a piece in this comparison, when they blame the rise of social democracy and its deferral of full-blown communism, on the expressionistic-experimentalist preoccupations of what becomes poststructuralism. For them, the self-involved arche-writing of the high-modernists, with its psychoanalytic subjectivizations, is merely a distraction from the real world concerns necessary to revolution. But what is meant by 'a deeper probing of the real world'? The way that Derrida and the poststructuralists take things, the disintegration of the subject is no mere by-product of tumultuous times, but the real baseline of experience, upon which the conventions of realism are the play of symbolic projection. The specter of relativism is real, however its cause is misconstrued by Lukács and Eagleton.

2.2.1. Ideology-as-semiotic closure: against expressionism

Lukács was right to anticipate the dissolution of ideology critique and its infiltration by apologetic reactionary tendencies, but he places the blame uncarefully with expressionism, when in retrospect the most enduring critics of ideology were precisely those whose object is squarely the de-centered self. In his *Ideology: An Introduction* (1990: 1–2) Eagleton gives sixteen possible definitions of the term ideology. The fourteenth definition can be mapped to the set of ideology critics that Lukács vilifies as expressionist, and who employ surrealist, deconstructive, and otherwise retroactive aesthetic strategies in their critique of the totality. 'Semiotic closure' is the definition of ideology which he attributes to the post-structuralists and the representatives of the Frankfurt school, on whom he and Lukács would lay blame for the decline of interest in ideology critique. The critics of ideology-as-semiotic closure are dealt with in chapter seven of the book. Their position, as he represents it, "is to regard ideology as a discursive or semiotic phenomenon" (Eagleton 1991: 194). Nearly paraphrasing Lukács, Eagleton claims:

¹² Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), a French novelist and playwright.

Those postmodernists who quite properly see through this illusion often enough end up pitting it against a ‘radical’ version of the very market-place behaviour it conceals. In espousing a rich plurality of contending viewpoints and idioms as a good in itself, they turn an idealized version of that market-place reality against the monistic certitudes which help to hold it in place, thus seeking to undermine one part of capitalist logic with another. It is then no wonder that their ‘radical’ politics are strained and bleak, or at the worst (one thinks of Jean Baudrillard and Jean Francois Lyotard) entirely vacuous. (Eagleton 1991: 166)

In his zeal to defend ideology critique against its detractors and to combat its precipitous decline, Eagleton openly ridicules some of the strongest standard bearers of the tradition. Baudrillard and Lyotard notwithstanding, the disdain Eagleton shows toward specifically Adorno and Barthes, while driven by the prescient observation that ideology critique is in the decline, misdirect a rage that ought better to be reserved for instrumental rationality, the logic and vocabulary of administration and managerialization, and the rise of the business model in the humanities, of which tendencies he is also an eloquent observer. But Eagleton’s disquisition is also already reflexive here: he introduces the below description as a vilification of expressionist poststructuralism, however the description is so apt that he perhaps inadvertently endorses these relativist semioticians and their free-wheeling aesthetic play; or it is possible that Eagleton’s critique, unlike Lukács’, while scathing, is no disavowal.

For this current of inquiry, associated with the French semiotic journal *Tel Quel*, ideology is essentially a matter of ‘fixing’ the otherwise inexhaustible process of signification around certain dominant signifiers, with which the individual subject can then identify. Language itself is infinitely productive, but this incessant productivity can be artificially arrested in ‘closure’ – into the sealed world of ideological stability, which repels the disruptive, decentered forces of language in the name of an imaginary unity. [...] The process of forging ‘representations’ always involves this arbitrary closing off of the signifying chain, constricting the free play of the signifier to a spuriously determinate meaning which can then be received by the subject as natural and inevitable. (Eagleton 1991: 197)

The poststructuralist view questions the possibility for solidarity in these terms and problematizes social and psychic unity as such. While Eagleton and Lukács decry this circular strategy as nihilistic and relativist, Frederic Jameson lauds specifically *Tel Quel* for its emphasis on the aesthetic mediation of the secondary systems (Jameson 1974[1972]: 177). In the end, despite Eagleton’s harsh words (more of which are to follow), his opinion of Adorno and Derrida is not so negative as it seems. Eagleton’s descriptions of the expressionist poststructuralist approach to ideology critique alternate between fond parody and cynical mockery, but while Eagleton evinces sympathy with the retroactive approach at times, he also shows at other times that he does not apprehend the methodological implications of the articulatory matrix at all. “It is via the category of ‘discourse’ that a number of theorists over recent years have made the steady trek from erstwhile revolutionary political positions to left reformist ones. This phenomenon is

generally known as ‘post-Marxism’; and it is worth inquiring into the logic of this long March from Saussure to social democracy” (Eagleton 1991: 203).

The realist revolution of Lukács and Eagleton is merely cosmetic in comparison with the epistemic transition envisioned by Derrida for example, which has as much to do with the transition from speech to writing as the principal mode of human communication, as it does to do with seizing the means of production. But what really makes Eagleton’s association of poststructuralism with reformism come off all wrong, is that the alternative to de-centered expressionism he offers is much the same as that of Lukács. Like Lukács, Eagleton at times presents the loss of the referent as if it could be solved by some commonsensical, realist, matter-of-fact nationalism by linguistic identity. It would be an exaggeration to do so, but given the tenor of Eagleton’s own hyperbole against Barthes and Adorno, it is not completely unfair to say that what he proposes as the solution to the decline of interest in ideology critique, is prone to the accusation of real logocentrism. As Eagleton hyperbolically describes the poststructuralists at times,

they want to deny the classical Marxist contention that there exists some internal relation between particular socio-economic conditions, and specific kinds of political or ideological positions. They therefore argue that socio-economic interests are just the product of political and ideological ones, or that the two lie on quite different levels, with no necessary linkage between them. Semiotics, once more, is a kind of politics – since if this is so, then many traditional Marxist theses about the socialist transformation of society being necessarily in the interests of the working class would need to be scrapped. Saussurean linguistics is once more craftily harnessed to the cause of social reformism – a cause rendered more reputable than it might otherwise appear by its glamorous association with ‘discourse theory’. (Eagleton 1991: 210)

What Eagleton says is sensible of course, but just what is this ‘necessary linkage’? And just what exactly, is ‘necessarily in the interests of the working class’? From the circular view of semiotics indeed, some of the traditional theses will need to be scrapped, but as Jameson makes clear later, this realization does not constitute a disavowal of Marx, as many would have it. The easy jump to make here would be to say, following Eagleton: if the problem is that the relativizing de-centered approach undercuts its revolutionary potential, and this approach derives from its theoretic coordinate in Saussure, then this coordinate should be replaced with one that is more empirically grounded, one that has a more realistic orientation to the referent. The semiotics of Peirce is the obvious choice, but it is important that the Peirce which is used not be the naïvely realistic one that is bandied about by the Peirce nouveau. If Peirce is used in this application, it is important that the referential aspect of the object be displaced outside the sign function. Otherwise, some of the worst aspects of classical Marxism could remain unchecked.

Up through the sixth section of Lukács’ realist tirade against Bloch, his arguments are as sound as Eagleton portrays them. It is hard to conceive of “Beckett and Schoenberg as the solution to world starvation and threatened nuclear destruction”, as Eagleton points out (Eagleton 1991: 360). But it is not long after the presentation of these reasonable qualms, that the limits of Lukács’ realism

become clear. Lukács shows here how simplistic realism and linguistic identity conspire to provide a center that undercuts the immanence of the critique and limits its applicability. In his conclusion to *Aesthetics and Politics*, Jameson notes how Lukács imports a simple object-referent qua historical association to his assessment of expressionism, so as to more easily demonize it.

Nothing has, of course, more effectively discredited Marxism than the practice of affixing instant class labels (generally ‘petty bourgeois’) to textual or intellectual objects; [...] A case in point is one of the more notorious of Lukács’ basic concepts, that of ‘decadence’ – which he often associates with fascism, but even more persistently with modern art and literature in general. (Jameson 1980[1977]: 201)

It is with the same matter-of-fact, commonsensical reasoning that Lukács champions realism. Realism in the simplistic variant presented below doesn’t even do justice to the term. Later in this chapter, and in Chapter Five, the problem of realism is given a more fair hearing, but realism in Lukács’ portrayal is little more than a platform of parochial values. The orientation of realism by the linguistic identity of the sender compromises it entirely from the semiotic perspective, following from the Saussurean insight that the signifier is not the phonological substance; worse yet, it misreads some of the great realist authors like Thomas Mann, who did not parrot this sort of watered down, nineteenth century conception of sovereign national identity as the secure anchor and foundation from which to wage revolutionary struggle. The way Lukács puts it below does an injustice even to his own thought, which is in most places a good deal more sophisticated.

In the first place, there is the question of cultural heritage. Wherever the cultural heritage has a living relationship to the real life of the people it is characterized by a dynamic, progressive movement in which the active forces of popular tradition, of the sufferings and joys of the people, of revolutionary legacies, are buoyed up, preserved, transcended and further developed. For a writer to possess a living relationship to the cultural heritage means being a son of the people, borne along by the current of the people’s development. (Lukács 1980[1977]: 54)

It can be excused that this view of the function of literature is merely pre-modern, in the sense that the traditional role of art (as social transmission and cultural preservation), is only really displaced at the end of the nineteenth century – it is only from then, that to speak the experience of the people really begins to mean, to speak the de-centered subject. At the same time, the comparison with his counterparts in the Frankfurt school at least, on the topic of national identity in the literary composition, does cast Lukács here as somewhat provincial. He goes on: “the tone and content of their writings grow out of the life and history of their people, they are an organic product of the development of their nation. That is why it is possible for them to create art of the highest quality while at the same time striking a chord which can and does evoke a response in the broad masses of the people” (Lukács 1980[1977]: 54).

Such banalities are nearly inconceivable following on the brilliance of Lukács’ stricter exegeses in for example *History and Class Consciousness* (1971[1923]).

The drastic shift in register between section six and seven of his essay are as if, from methodic Marxist literary criticism to party political demonization of the German social democrats and drum beating for Soviet Communism. Bertolt Brecht's response to Lukács¹³, in the same collection, draws attention to the incongruity of his thinking as it is expressed in this essay. "There is a whole series of abstract nouns ending in 'ity' which must be viewed with caution. Think of *utility, sovereignty, sanctity*; and we know that the concept of *nationality* has a quite particular, sacramental, pompous and suspicious connotation, which we dare not overlook" (Brecht 1980[1977]: 80).

Really it is unfair to take Lukács out of context, to cherry-pick the quotes that paint him as a completely naïve, logocentric indentitarian. When given a fair reading, his works aren't nearly so terrestrial as all that, but it is still useful to highlight these moments in Lukács that give voice to such a basic vision, because anyone may latch onto plain statements about the 'life and history of their people' for whatever purpose they choose, and 'we dare not overlook' them. The same is the case for Eagleton. Eagleton's apparent distaste for Barthes and Adorno cannot be downplayed, but his realism is not so basic as it seems. His own writing exhibits a certain immanent reflexivity which he would simply call good style but which, when contemplated in a state of non-identification, is just as de-centered as Derrida, just as rife with jouissance as Lacan, or the even at times just as vitriolic as Adorno.

2.2.2. Eagleton's immanent critique

For instance, Eagleton rightly notes that, for the expressionist poststructuralist approach to ideology critique, the problem of metalanguage is central, and despite his dim view of its textual preoccupation, his description of it is nevertheless instructive. It is a common mistake, to think that in poststructuralism the notion of metalanguage is relinquished altogether, when in fact, as explained in Chapter One, the poststructuralists employ an even greater concentration of metalanguage than their predecessors. The mistake would be more forgivable, were it not for the fact that it is upon this inaccurate judgment of the orientation of poststructuralism to the notion of metalanguage, that Eagleton continues to lay with them the blame, for the decline of interest in ideology critique. Once again, when Eagleton attempts to parody his targets, he often inadvertently makes them sound pretty reasonable.

For to determine that this language adequately measured the fit or non-fit between our concepts and the world, we would presumably need another language to guarantee the adequacy of *this* one, and so on in a potentially infinite regress of 'metalanguages'. Rather, objects should be considered not as external to a realm of discourse which

¹³ Famous is here the Werner Mittenzwei's article of 1967, printed in *Sinn und Form*, the title of which coined the term "Brecht-Lukács-Debatte". Cf. Mittenzwei 1967.

seeks to approximate them, but as wholly internal to such discourses, constituted by them and through them. (Eagleton 1991: 203)

Jameson in contrast underlines the importance of metalanguage for understanding the poststructuralist approach to ideology critique and speaks with much higher regard for the strategies of the early Frankfurt school and *Tel Quel*. Caricaturing the position, Eagleton merely exaggerates the relativising effects of the critique of metalanguage. “If there can be no meta-language to measure the ‘fit’ between my language and the object, what is to stop me from constructing the object in any way I want? [...] if metalanguage is an illusion, then there would seem no way of judging that any particular political perspective was more beneficial than any other” (Eagleton 1991: 205).

In the extension of semiology, there is no definite ‘fit’ between metalanguage and object language, and the regress of metalanguages is ‘potentially infinite’. However, this does not permit the construction of objects ‘any way I want’, and it is by attendance to the contradictions and incompatibilities between metalanguages that the connotative (ideological) functions of a ‘particular political perspective’ are put into relief. Eagleton is sensitive to this, but still agrees with Lukács that, “As ideologists, they stabilized both intellectually and artistically what was essentially merely a transitional ideological phase” (Lukács 1980[1977]: 51). The de-centered self, put on display in the stream of consciousness, montage, and cross-genre multimodal techniques of the high moderns, are dismissed by Lukács as portraying not reality in itself – which has its fixed character in class distinction, linguistic identity and nationality – but rather just the explosive transitional moment between political regimes. In the common reception, this judgment by Lukács reflects his overconfidence in the triumph of communism. At a more abstract level, the fixation by the expressionists upon the moment of flux anticipates the more lasting effects of new communication technologies. Derrida is the most perspicacious in connecting these de-centering textual effects with the event horizon of information technology transformation. Lukács’ disavowal of the expressionists’ interest in this flux, as a ‘merely transitional ideological phase’, appears misdirected, in the context of the contemporary situation.

But what if Lukács’ reality – a coherent, infinitely mediated totality – is not so objective after all? What if his conception of reality has failed to liberate itself completely from Classical systems? What if authentic reality is also discontinuity? Since Lukács operates with a closed, objectivistic conception of reality, when he comes to examine Expressionism he resolutely rejects any attempt on the part of artists to shatter any image of the world, even that of capitalism. Any art which strives to exploit the *real* fissures in surface inter-relations and to discover the new in their crevices, appears in his eyes merely as a willful act of destruction. He thereby equates experiment in demolition with a condition of decadence. (Bloch 1980[1977]: 22)

Some of the best descriptions of the experiment in demolition are in fact given by Eagleton himself, despite the fact that he ostensibly agrees with Lukács. Eagleton is pretty keen, in the way that he deconstructs the ideology of the expatriate. From

his early works the notion of exile has been central in Eagleton. He sees the downsides of Joyce's and Kristeva's silence, exile, and cunning as revolutionary strategy. Simply leaving one's native land is a luxury that most workers simply don't have, and Eagleton sees well ahead of time how the stateless expat identity is easily commodified by the new globalism, ultimately leading to a resurgence in nationalism. The below quote captures the high modern dream of stateless non-identity and then undermines that dream. The problem of non-identity is irreducible to the nationalist question.

The deracinated fate of the modernist exiles and emigres is a material condition for the emergence of a newly formalizing, universalizing thought, one which having spurned the ambiguous comforts of a motherland can now cast a bleak analytic eye, from its 'transcendental' vantage-point, in some polyglot metropolis, on all such specific historical legacies, discerning the hidden global logics by which they are governed. The modernists, as Sean Golden has suggested, were never greatly hamstrung by those vested psychological interests in a specific national culture which mark a more provincial art; instead, they could approach such indigenous traditions from the outside, estrange and appropriate them for their own devious ends, roam in the manner of a Joyce, Pound or Eliot across a whole span of cultures in euphoric, melancholic liberation from the Oedipal constraints of a mother tongue. If this powerfully alienating perspective on traditional pieties is one source of modernism's radical impact, it also betrays well enough its reluctant complicity with the world of international capitalist production, which is quite as nation-blind as *The Waste Land* or the *Cantos* and has the same scant respect for regional idiosyncrasy. (Eagleton 1991: 321)

To insinuate that the literature of Joyce is somehow complicit with monopoly capitalism (as Lukács does, but as Eagleton certainly does not do) would be so ridiculous as to not even merit further comment. A clarifying point made by the editor, in a footnote to Lukács' essay against expressionism, is useful here¹⁴. While the exile of the high modernists was self-imposed and in some respects made possible only by the privilege of being able to travel at all, it anticipated the subject fragmentation that is now commonplace, even for those who opt never to leave their homeland and their vested psychological interests. It is well-established that Joyce for instance even after the publication of *Ulysses* remained as poor as any of Lukács' realist author heroes. The case was different for some of the representatives of the Frankfurt school, who were indeed the product of unimaginable wealth. Some of the worst and most recent reductive historicizing on the topic of the Frankfurt school is without a doubt the late *Grand Hotel Abyss*, which spends an entire chapter called "Fathers and Sons, and Other Conflicts" (Jeffries 2017: 33–63), reducing the motivations of the Frankfurt school to a simplistic Oedipus complex and rejection of the father, and calling Adorno, Benjamin,

¹⁴ The footnote follows: "It appears that Eisler has failed to exhibit the pious reverence towards the cultural heritage expected from the executors of a will. Instead he just rummaged around in it and declined to take everything into his possession. Well, it may be that, as an exile, he is not in a position to lug so much stuff around with him" (Lukács 1980[1977]: 56).

Marcuse, and others, hypocrites for denouncing western imperialism while coming from wealthy families. This kind of non-semiotic historicizing puts paid to the fact that ideology critique is best undertaken formalistically and by making no recourse to the realistic object-referent, whether it be in the form of linguistic identity, national heritage, or other isolable historical tidbits from the lives of the authors in question.

Again, some of the best exemplars of this formalistic approach to ideology critique are just those who Eagleton and Lukács vilify as decadent expressionists (the poststructuralists), however it is argued later that Umberto Eco's approach to ideology critique is uniquely useful for developing a Marxist literary semiotics which does not fall prey to the basic problems discussed here. The immanent critical approach of Eagleton, which attempts to imitate the stylistics of the authors who are the periodic targets of his examination, sometimes confuses his case, where it becomes difficult to tell when he is endorsing a critical strategy, and when he is merely parodying that strategy only to then turn the blade. This is especially the case with his description of the dialectical textualist strategies of Adorno who, second only to Barthes, is singularly mocked by Eagleton.

Adorno has a kind of running solution to this dilemma, and that is style. What negotiates this contradiction is the crabbed, rebarbative practice of writing itself, a discourse pitched into a constant state of crisis, twisting and looping back on itself, struggling in the structure of every sentence to avoid at once a 'bad' immediacy of the object and the false self-identity of the concept. Dialectical thought digs the object loose from its illusory self-identity, but thereby risks liquidating it within some ghastly concentration camp of the Absolute Idea; and Adorno's provisional response to this problem is a set of guerilla raids on the inarticulable, a style of philosophizing which frames the object conceptually but manages by some cerebral acrobatics to glance sideways at what gives such generalized identity the slip. (Eagleton 1991: 342)

The description is accurate enough, and it is only by Eagleton's habitual Briticisms that one can be sure his parody of Adorno is meant derisively. Eagleton clearly advocates for a more matter-of-fact realism than expressionism and post-structuralism appear to employ. At the same time, his sympathy with high modernism, the ambiguity of his parodist treatments, and the way that his immanent critical style is in itself more or less consistent to the strategies of both the early Frankfurt school as well as *Tel Quel*, both leave space for a more integrated approach, that would be both semiotic and realist. This semiotic realism is closer to the reality described by Bloch, reality-as-discontinuity. As per the black pyramid schema, the referent is integrated to the sign function by means of retroactivity – the real as Lacan puts it, only manifests as a disruption at the level of the symbolic. Again it is difficult to reconcile this view to classical Marxism, but Jameson's treatment of semiotics in Marxism shows that it is not impossible – it also opens the non-identical approach to a possibly less sinister metaphysics, in Jameson's conception of semiotics-as-meditation.

2.3. Jameson's prison-house of logocentrism

Frederic Jameson was chosen to write the afterword of *Aesthetics and Politics*, and there he effectively deconstructs the terms of the realism-expressionism debate as they inform the anthology.

Meanwhile, poststructuralism has added yet a different kind of parameter to the Realism/Modernism controversy, one which – like the question of narrative or the problems of historicity – was implicit in the original exchange but scarcely articulated or thematized as such. The assimilation of realism as a value to the old philosophical concept of mimesis by such writers as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard or Deleuze, has reformulated the Realism/Modernism debate in terms of a platonic attack on the ideological effects of representation. In this new (and old) philosophical polemic, the stakes of the original discussion find themselves unexpectedly elevated, and their issues – once largely political in focus – lent metaphysical (or anti-metaphysical) implications. (Jameson 1980[1977]: 201)

In his early works, Eagleton wants to root out what he sees as a corrosive relativism that fragments ideology critique into identity politics. This is an admirable cause, given that poststructuralism itself is often enough glossed as exactly this, reducible to feminism, postcolonialism, and a watered-down psychoanalysis. His chapter on poststructuralism, in the otherwise laudable *Introduction to Literary Theory* (2008[1983]), bears this conflation out with no ambiguity. In this picture, identity politics is the main thrust of poststructuralism, and the various forms of de-centered textualism are merely ornaments, which undermine that which should remain the immovable ground of ideology critique in class distinction. Eagleton either disagrees with Derrida's thesis in *Of Grammatology*, or he missed the point: the defects of identity politics and the resulting precipitous decline of interest in ideology critique are a result of the failure to assimilate Hjelmslev's extension of semiology described in Chapter One. Fortunately, Jameson's treatment of poststructuralism does it better justice. Bloch's questions: "What if [Lukács'] conception of reality has failed to liberate itself completely from Classical systems? What if authentic reality is also discontinuity?" (Bloch 1980[1977]: 22) could be taken just as easily from the text *Of Grammatology*, and answered in the previous section by the articulation of the secondary semiotic systems. Jameson's *The Prison-House of Language* re-explains the enterprise of structural semiology in a way that does not reduce the techniques of de-centered arche-writing to the mere ornaments that Eagleton (and later Žižek) try to do. "Ultimately, if the process of thought bears not so much on adequation to a real object or referent, but rather on the adjustment of the signified to the signifier (a tendency already implicit in Saussure's original concept of the sign), then the traditional notion of 'truth' itself becomes outmoded" (Jameson 1974[1972]: 133).

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Jameson appreciates the importance of the Hjelmslevian extension, and the differentiation of the secondary semiotic systems, as integral for ideology critique. His description of the double structure of the signified makes unusually clear how the work of literature and its criticism

is not merely an object of interest for critique. The critique itself possesses a literary aspect, as the two modes of retroactivity work with and against each other. First, he notes that the interplay of aesthetics and politics is already the central concern in the early Barthes (Jameson 1974[1972]: 146); then he sums up in his own parodist style, the way in which the writing of Barthes articulates the connotative secondary systems against the metalinguistic ones.

Thus, in this sumptuous and perverse style, in which the ideas are not so much unfolded as laterally evoked by the very materiality of vocabulary itself, what comes into being are unstable conceptual entities, the very forms of the signified itself, as they darken the other side of language, constantly dissolving and reforming before our eyes. The very function of the style's artificiality is to announce itself as a metalanguage, to signal by its own impermanency the essential formlessness and ephemerality of the object itself. (Jameson 1974[1972]: 154)

Note how Jameson's style imitates Barthes's own, similar to Eagleton's parodist immanent treatment of Adorno, but without the sarcastic distancing that simultaneously disavows that style in favor of a more realistic one. Jameson signals, like Barthes, that the object of the analysis has no ground floor in any primary text: the object under consideration is the inevitable regress of the metatheoretic practice. And then, "The changeover in Barthes' general positions [...] may be identified by a replacement (although not a repudiation) of this limited theory of the literary sign by a more complex one derived from Hjeltslev's distinction between 'connotation' and 'metalanguage'" (Jameson 1974[1972]: 159).

Up to this point, Eagleton and Jameson describe poststructuralist ideology critique in more or less the same terms, the main difference being that, where Eagleton finds this self-referential textualism to compromise the revolutionary potential of the work, Jameson is able to assimilate it to his Marxism.

The de-centered approach serves the definite function of deferring its absorption by the connotative secondary system, but what then of the problem of relativism? He answers this question in a way that anticipates the same answer given by Umberto Eco's unlimited semiosis, with the difference that the latter integrates the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce to the equation. The way in which Jameson concludes the book, as it overlaps with Eco's own thought on the matter, ideally anticipates the Peircean turn. "Following the internal structure of the sign itself, we will distinguish those investigations that aim primarily at the organization of the signifier; those which take as their object the signified; and, finally, those which attempt to isolate the process of signification itself, the very emergence of an initial relationship between signifier and signified" (Jameson 1974[1972]: 111).

Barthes' work on the differentiation of the secondary semiotic systems is initially described in terms of the second classification, which takes as its object the signified, and where ideology is a matter of the signifieds of connotation, the Hjeltslevian stratification being the principal way by which the two planes are considered in isolation (Barthes 1977[1964: 92). Referring, by 'four-termed homology', obviously to the same Hjeltslevian stratification, Barthes details the paradoxical fact that thinking the signifier and the signified in isolation requires

first appreciating their inextricability, where “it is to respect the differential character of the system that one must always think of the relation between signifier and signified in terms, not simply of analogy, but of at least a four-termed homology” (Barthes 1977[1964]: 74). In other words, the ideological and non-ideological secondary systems can be distinguished, as the classical Marxist approach holds, but in contrast with that approach, this distinction does not rely upon an object-referent grounded in linguistic identity or a historical chronology. Rather, the object by which the distinction is grounded is introduced by means of a third term which designates the process of the emergence of signification itself.

The previous sections taught the lesson that in the long run it is impossible to separate *signifiée* from *signifiant* in any way that would be meaningful either methodologically or conceptually. With this realization, the third moment of Structuralism comes into being. This moment shifts its attention to the total sign itself, or rather to the process which creates it, and of which signifier and signified are themselves but moments, namely the process of signification. (Jameson 1974[1972]: 168)

Jameson and Eagleton both forecast the need for this third way, without directly identifying, in the texts presented in this chapter, the semiotics of Charles Peirce as a possible theoretic foundation for it. In the next chapter, texts from Umberto Eco show how this effectively poststructural integration of the external without a naïve object-referent is articulated through Peirce, via the notion of retroactivity (called there radical aesthetic invention). Jameson describes the third way as one oriented toward process in the sense of diachronicity (without historicity qua simplistic object-referent); then he introduces an unexpected element, which must be regarded with trepidation.

Now, indeed, the difficulty of keeping signifier and signified separate conceptually becomes a methodological advantage; for it is in that instant of separation, in that ephemeral void between the two which vanishes even as we stare at it, that signification itself as an emergence is to be found. Yet, inasmuch as the object is no longer a static one, to be studied in an external way, but rather a form of perception, an awareness of the interplay of the same and the other to be developed, the emphasis on signification takes the form of a mystery, the mystery of the incarnation of meaning in language, and as such its study is a kind of meditation. (Jameson 1974[1972]: 169)

Difficulty itself is a ‘methodological advantage’ – this is an odd proposal. And here follows the second part of the excerpt, where Jameson confirms what is before only alluded to, regarding the hermetic aspect of semiotics, anathema to the instrumentalists, functional suicide for the marketing consultants, poison to the product placement analysts, and dissolution for the whole board of trustees: “This is what accounts for the hermetic quality of the writers who deal with it. The sense of the esoteric may be understood, in Barthes’ sense, precisely as a sign, as a way of signifying ritual and the presence of mystery, of underlining through the very temporal unfolding of the ritual language the sacred quality of the object itself” (Jameson 1974[1972]: 169).

The displacement of the referential aspect of the object is a theoretic transposition that meets with resistance. It is not reducible to the uncertainty felt by epistemological skepticism, with which many already associate poststructuralism. Nor is that experience of privation reducible to a merely political discomfort. Here and in the next chapter, the most cryptic features are brought to the foreground. The problem of the referent may not be dealt with in a sterile, clinical setting, but brings with it messier problems that can't be avoided.

2.4. Žižek's sublime interpretant of ideology

Žižek has to be included in this discussion for three reasons. The first is that he is the living superstar of Marxist cultural criticism, outshining even Jameson by a long shot. The second reason is that Žižek gives the clearest explanation of the symbolic function by which system is established and value assigned to the elements of the system. It is Žižek who best shows how the general form of the commodity and its critique envelops a very specific set of theoretic domains, as the coordinates of its constellation. Like Monticelli, he gives pride of place to Marx, but where Monticelli privileges semiotics and deconstruction as the second terms, Žižek rather prioritizes psychoanalysis and Hegel. Each have their rightful place in what Žižek calls the *sinthome*, but Žižek insists that it is Lacanian psychoanalysis whose 'object' cannot be hypostasized, and thus (for Žižek) it is Lacan ultimately who answers the question, of how to refuse the static primary level while at the same time still accounting for the external. One might just as easily find the answer in Peircean semiotics, and Žižek's sublime object turns out to be a lot like Eco's interpretant. It should be no surprise that Žižek is a big fan of Terrence Deacon, and the pathway is indicated for later integration between Peircean semiotics and psychoanalytic ideology critique, developed somewhat in Chapter Five. The third reason is that Žižek takes his own stand on the debate, about the influence of poststructuralism on ideology critique. He makes his own claims about the issue of circulation and the hermetic textualism that results, and there are some serious contradictions in his argument, which mirror Eagleton's own contradictions almost exactly. Žižek disavows poststructuralism along with the structuralism that preceded it, but once again it is clear that he could benefit from deeper consideration of second-generation semiology, and the very retroactivity which he too would like to keep separate from the method and system of description, is everywhere in his work.

2.4.1. Sinthome coordinates

'Sinthome' is coined by Lacan as a generalized version of the symptom. The *sinthome* designates psychoanalytic transference at its most basic. Every signification – in language, in economy, in biology – involves transference, every signification realizes a node in the *sinthome*. *Sinthome* is the (retro)activity blending

form and substance and thus common to each of the different domains of semiosis – it is both the concrete object of the general analysis, as well a term designating the theoretic domain, as shown in Figure 5. It is a word for the coordinates of the theoretic constellation of semiotics. The sinthome acts as a pin that holds together sign function and sign production, which distinction is described further in Chapter Three.

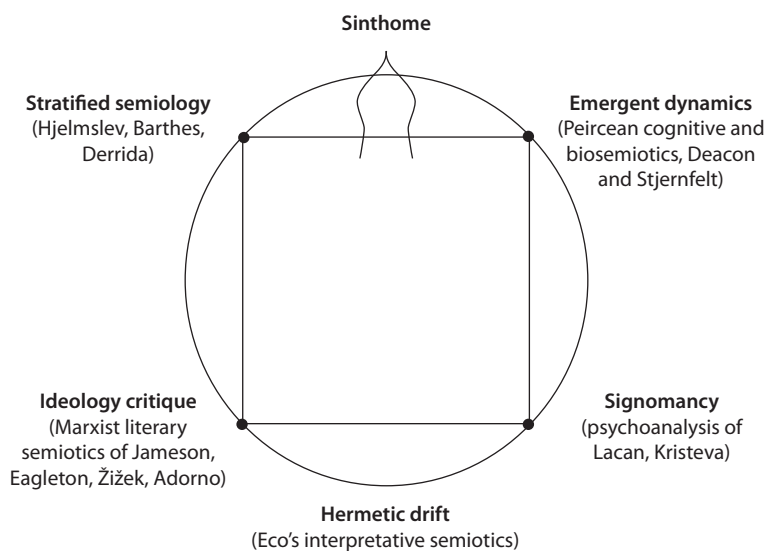


Figure 5: *The sinthome coordinates.*

The cross-disciplinary application of sinthome derives from its dematerialization, from symptom to sinthome. Where a symptom is conceived as having a definite substance and realization, with a traceable cause and pointing to a possible resolution, the sinthome is the general form. This is why the generalization of the commodity fetish may provide a starting point for its analysis, and why Žižek begins his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (2002[1989]) by discussing Lacan’s claim that it was Marx who invented the symptom, and thus how “there is a fundamental homology between the interpretative procedure of Marx and Freud – more precisely, between their analysis of commodity and of dreams” (Žižek 2002[1989]: 4). The sublime object, that is Lacan’s *objet petit a* and the jouissance of the disruptive presence of the Real (all of which are the objects and drivers of transference in the sinthome) may be understood in Eco’s use of the Peircean interpretant, but this last connection is only developed in Chapter Three¹⁵. The sinthome is a “neologism containing a set of associations (synthetic-artificial man, synthesis between symptom and fantasy” (Žižek 2002[1989]: 81).

¹⁵ As to the efficacy of Peirce for psychoanalytic ideology critique, Žižek refers fondly to Terrence Deacon, who in both of his major books uses the semiotics of Peirce to explain his

Lacan's retrospective reading of Marx's commodity confers upon it a generality that, while perhaps latent to his thought, was not fully there in the way that is later realized by Freud. The parallel innovation, that *the unconscious is not the drives and instincts*, which originates from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1965[1899]), and which is developed to its full cross-disciplinary generality toward the sinthome by Lacan and Žižek, should be the principal one, and this primacy of psychoanalysis even over Marx is something which Žižek clearly realizes. This primacy lay in the fact that unlike with Marx, there is no need to modify the original: there is no need to go into Freud and exculpate the primary object-level, in the way that use-value must be dealt with in Marx. According to Lacan's reading of Freud anyway, the unconscious never was the drives and instincts, and this is why psychoanalysis is the original anti-essentialism for Lacan and Žižek. "Psychoanalytic 'essentialism' is paradoxical in so far as it is precisely psychoanalysis – at least in its Lacanian reading – which presents the real break with essentialist logic. That is to say, Lacanian psychoanalysis goes a decisive step further than the usual 'post-Marxist' anti-essentialism" (Žižek 2002[1989]: xxvii).

Notwithstanding the way in which the dematerialized sinthome avoids the essentialist pitfall of use-value and other hypostasizing primary level object-languages, how then does it avoid the obverse dilemma of relativism? If the symptom has no definite cause or substantial correlate, how exactly may it be said that this theory manages to deal with the external? Where is the object-referent, in the sublime object of ideology? Žižek's Hegelian reading of Lacan's notion of the Real is the crux upon which he would assert that his theory and works diverge decisively from both poststructuralism and post-Marxism. He maintains that the notion of Real allows for the circulation between primary and secondary levels that prevents essentialism, while at the same time avoids the relativistic trap of deconstruction for instance, for which there is 'nothing outside the text'.

While at the end of the day his solution seems to ride on some pretty thin terminological distinctions, nevertheless the way he plays out the whole problematic fits surprisingly well with the modified Peircean approach that is deployed through the rest of this dissertation. At the very bottom there is a metaphysical and, one might say, cardinal difference in how to approach the 'object' or 'thing' – Žižek's inevitable Mandarin collar announces at once his side in this debate – and when Derrida talks about 'Western metaphysics' as a totality, that totality is secured by this one cardinal difference. But Žižek portrays this non-identity, or

own evolutionary theories. Directions of synthesis between Žižek and Deacon are discussed again in Chapter Five. "For Jacques Lacan unconscious is not some spiritual substance deep instinct, it's a very fragile virtual entity. It is what some intelligent contemporary evolutionary biologists like my favorite (cough cough, sorry) Terrence Deacon, call 'absentals'." Žižek, "Digital Technologies of the Human Mind". Žižek (2019): 41:15–2:00 <http://zizekpodcast.com/2019/06/27/ziz237-digital-technologies-and-the-human-mind-18-04-2019/>

as Hegel had it more specifically, the identity of identity and non-identity, in contradistinction with poststructuralism, deconstruction, and semiotics.

When Žižek explains the nature of the Hegelian-Lacanian real, he is unmatched in his ability to explain the internally contradictory idea in a way that is yet somehow comprehensible, but one sees immediately that the approach is not so different from those he later disavows. Moving beyond commonplace glosses of Hegel's absolute idealism, Žižek writes:

Hegel's position is, in contrast, that there is nothing beyond phenomenality, beyond the field of representation. The experience of radical negativity, of the radical inadequacy of all phenomena to the Idea, the experience of the radical fissure between the two – this experience is already *idea itself as 'pure', radical negativity*. Where Kant thinks that he is still dealing only with a negative presentation of the Thing, we are already in the midst of the Thing-in-itself – *for this Thing-in-itself is nothing but this radical negativity*. (Žižek 2002[1989]: 233)

When it is said that 'the Real is a disruption at the level of the symbolic' this is not the same as to say that there is no real. The whole fiasco of retroactive theorization that appears to some as 'fashionable nonsense' just constitutes what are the lengths to which need be gone, to deal with ideology. Ideology is so much the rule, rather than the exception, that the moment an object-signified is taken to be 'real' it is already absorbed by the symbolic. In post-industrial society, no sooner than something is perceived as 'useful' does that thing become capital.

The subject definitively overestimates their own ability to discern the real, but there is also the eastern characterization caught by Jameson earlier, when he said that semiotics is a kind of meditation. Behind false consciousness there is no original true consciousness, but only the index of the moment at which the converging sheets of false consciousness part, and in that moment is a 'sensation' of non-identity – this is the Real, although Žižek prefers to eschew all Orientalist metaphors and comparisons – and what (Žižek claims) distinguishes his approach from the 'relativistic' one proffered by Derrida and Foucault is that this non-identity isn't just an absence – this absence itself has a substance. Or according to the black pyramid schema, this absence just is the substance. Or more specifically, the Real is the retroactivity of the substance upon the form, in both the connotative and the metalinguistic directions. This is one way to understand the claim that ideology is just as 'real' as anything else, despite that it must be countered by metalinguistic retroactivity. But as the reader recalls, this same picture was already deployed in the language of second-generation semiology and deconstruction, in Chapter One.

2.4.2. Žižek's critique of poststructuralism

Žižek's disavowal of poststructuralism parallels that of Eagleton in the sense that they both, Žižek and Eagleton, employ the same textual strategies used by those they would criticize. In Eagleton's case it makes more sense because, while he

does parody the style of immanent critique and weave together some impressively dense metatheoretic treatments, particularly in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, by and large he manages to avoid the terminology of semiotics in his own literary criticism. But as discussed in the last section, in his drive to counter the effects of relativism and subjectivism in ideology critique, Eagleton makes recourse to simplifications and primary-level object languages that are clearly susceptible to the charge of essentialism: he does not attend to the problem of circularity and the issue of the undefinable use value. Žižek bypasses the problem of essentialism with ease, and claims that the way in which he bypasses this problem also protects him (and Lacan) from accusations of relativism. He is very clear in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that ‘poststructuralism’ remains guilty of this relativism, and seems to coincide with Eagleton here, on the position that the influence of post-structuralism upon ideology critique has led to the relativism and subjectivism that has brought its precipitous decline. But who are these poststructuralists?

When Eagleton attacks poststructuralism he clearly intends Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, and Kristeva, reserving special animosity for Barthes, and also tacking Adorno on to the group despite the latter’s chronological priority and outsider status. When Žižek knocks poststructuralism on the other hand, one can be sure that what he really means is Derrida and Foucault, plus a whole dispersal of unnamed and possibly non-existent practitioners of essentialist ‘identity politics’.

At the beginning of Part II of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Žižek grounds the critique of poststructuralism on the dispute over the concept of metalanguage, and within this narrow discussion one sees already how he exaggerates a small terminological distinction in order to opportunistically distance himself, Lacan, and perhaps the entire Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis, from poststructuralism qua Derrida and Foucault. His summary of the critique of the static opposition of object-language and metalanguage given by poststructuralism is actually pretty good, and one might simply take it as a guide, after removing its pejorative valence, and perhaps adding something about the positive substance of negation, which is what Žižek really wants to bring to the table.

In poststructuralism the classic opposition between the object-text and its external interpretative reading is thus replaced by a continuity of an infinite literary text which is always already its own reading; that is, which sets up distance from itself. That is why the poststructuralist procedure par excellence is not only to search in purely literary texts for propositions containing a theory about their own functioning but also to read theoretical texts themselves as ‘literature’ – more precisely, to put in parentheses their claim to truth in order to expose the textual mechanisms producing the ‘truth effect’. (Žižek 2002[1989]: 171)

This is where Žižek starts turning minor terminological differences into major divisive molehills. Žižek is supposedly more interested in truth, but ‘truth’ for Žižek is just like the Lacanian Real (Žižek 2002[1989]:171): that is, Žižek’s ‘truth’ bears no resemblance whatsoever to any commonplace understanding of truth. His reflexive notion of truth in the Real as disruption of the symbolic and the

substance of negativity, is useful and anticipates the adaptation of Peirce introduced through Eco at the end of this chapter, and continued later, however this trick he performs when he redefines truth is no different from what he claims are mere affectations when the poststructuralists (that is, Derrida and Foucault) do it. His claim is that, by means of saying that there is no difference between object-language and metalanguage, writers like Derrida and Foucault mix theory and practice uncarefully. They insert literary tropes to what should be clear analytic argumentation, apparently.

That is why poststructuralist poeticism is ultimately *affected*. The whole effort to write ‘poetically’, to make us feel how our own text is already caught in a decentred network of plural processes and how this textual process always subverts what we ‘intended to say’, the whole effort to evade the purely theoretical form of exposing our ideas and to adopt rhetorical devices usually reserved to literature, masks the annoying fact that at the root of what poststructuralists are saying there is a clearly defined theoretical position which can be articulated without difficulty in a pure and simple metalanguage. (Žižek 2002[1989]:174)

The Sublime Object of Ideology is many things, but it certainly does not have a clearly defined theoretical position which can be articulated in a pure and simple metalanguage. The above quotation would also suggest that Žižek does not employ literary devices in his own text, which is disputable.

Žižek’s real problem with what he calls poststructuralism is not its tendency to use literary tropes, or its critique of metalanguage. His problem with it, is that it sometimes uses these in order to avoid accountability to concrete political problems. As he sees it, Foucault’s discourse theory, biopolitics, and especially care of the self, have resulted in watered down, self-indulgent identity cults of presence, mindfulness, and me time, and there is no place for this narcissism during the situation of revolutionary upheaval. For him, the anti-essentialist necessity of circulation takes a back seat in priority to being accountable to the vision of a multi-vector acceleration: between immigration, bio-engineering, and ecology, there is no stopping the destruction of the global economic system, and this frankness is doubtless part of his mass appeal. The only disagreement here with the position of Žižek, is to assert that commitment to detotalization may be maintained in tandem with the de-centered textual practices of post-structuralism, and that this hybrid approach is one solution to the overall dilemma.

2.4.3. Tropes in Žižek

Žižek’s own writing is strewn with aesthetic excess – the point here is not to defame these excesses. On the contrary, they are the main event and the whole reason for reading. To articulate a paradox through logical contradiction, such as when Žižek says that ‘the thing in itself is nothing but a radical negativity’, or like when Monticelli un-ironically says that ‘emancipative politics as an impossible totalization by which the event universalizes itself through a non-completable procedure of subtraction’, how is this different from a literary trope? A metaphor

is nothing other than a partial non-identity. 'Juliette is the sun' is a metaphor exactly because Juliette is just not the sun. Statements such as these within the work of Žižek are just the attempt to present as logical that which escapes expression in conventional language.

Tropic non-identities such as those between subject and predicate in the metaphor, also happen at the macro-textual level: the placement of paragraphs about non-equivalent theories next to each other, without clear transition or connection between them, are just macro metaphors, just aesthetic non-identities at a different frame level, and these are the tropes that define Žižek's work, master of implicit transition and transposition that he is. So again, for him to defame poststructuralism for its use of literary tropes is literally calling the kettle black.

The third part of Žižek's book makes this contradiction more apparent and also points to how the terms of second-generation semiology in the black pyramid schema can explain some otherwise still ambiguous concepts in his book. The Real has already been described as a disruption at the level of the symbolic, and that this disruption is not a simple absence or negativity, but a positive substance, understood either as *jouissance*, the *objet petit a*, or the *sinthome*. Late in the book Žižek complicates the Real by showing how the concept acquires five different definitions through the career of Lacan. These definitions need not be reproduced in detail here. Only some parts need to be explained in order to capture how it is just the contradiction between these definitions that is the actual definition of the Real, and how this non-identical game can be seen as a deployment of tropes, or a literary device. Such portrayal anticipates Eco's claim discussed in the next section, that critique of the ideological system must proceed by the countermovement of an aesthetic one. This is shown by the basic movement of the black pyramid schema.

When Žižek writes that "this immediate coincidence of opposites or even contradictory determinations is what defines the Lacanian Real" (Žižek 2002 [1989]: 193), he means specifically the contradictions he is in the process of outlining, between the various definitions of the Real given by Lacan, and in outlining them he bodies forth the positive substance of the missing object. This is what makes it so difficult to both eschew the referential fallacy along with its primary level object languages like that of use value, while at the same time being accountable to the external – every painful attempt must take on a new form, every articulation is a fresh struggle: like Kant's sublime object, the Real is never captured by a preconceived concept, "and Lacan's whole point is that the Real is *nothing but* this impossibility of its inscription" (Žižek 2002[1989]: 195). Merely to paraphrase the thought of Lacan (or that of Hegel, or Marx) would not achieve the *sinthome*-object of their original inquiry. Instead, incompatible aspects of their respective theories must be transposed in a way never before conceived, and the misfit, the ways their edges do not overlap evenly and pieces have to be swapped for others, willful distortions, even and especially up to the point of exhaustion and futility without end, only then may the real *sinthome*-object be apprehended, and even this achievement is its own failure. Žižek's work is full of self-aware paradoxes, he just doesn't want to concede that these are the same

thing as literary devices. “To put it paradoxically: the subject of the signifier is a retroactive effect of the failure of its own representation; that is why the failure of representation is the only way to represent it adequately” (Žižek 2002[1989]: 198). The latter observation also goes some length to explain why Žižek so often refers to the literature of Samuel Beckett, because it is Beckett who will “*Succeed* in transmitting the dimension of subjectivity *by means of the failure itself*, through the radical insufficiency, through the absolute maladjustment of the predicate in relation to the subject. This is why ‘the Spirit is a bone’ is a perfect example of what Hegel calls the ‘speculative proposition’, a proposition whose terms are incompatible, without common measure” (Žižek 2002[1989]: 235), otherwise known as a metaphor.

The possibility of nonverbal, multimodal speculative propositions and inferences as tools for navigating the sinthome is yet another insight brought from Peirce in the notion of the dicisign and abductive inference, to be discussed further in Chapter Five. Also, as will be discussed later, Žižek is in good company with the other Marxist critics preoccupied with the texts of Beckett, and Beckett’s *Endgame* may be retroactively read to stage the very same dialectic between the refusal of the object-referent, and the pursuit of the sublime interpretant of the sinthome. Another word for this quasi-object, is what Eco calls the sememe, a useful compass for finding the way between the Scylla and Charbydis of essentialism and relativism, which still beset on both sides, the semiotic ideology critique.

2.5. Eco’s Ideological code switching

Umberto Eco’s *A Theory of Semiotics* (1979[1976]) is the major topic of Chapter Three and need not be dwelt over here in too much detail, other than mostly to say that his contribution to the idea of a semiotic ideology critique given there is completely ignored by all of the foregoing authors. The work was released too late for it to be of interest to the early Frankfurt School; later Tel Quel ignores Eco for the most part; Eagleton in his otherwise encyclopedic *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* as well as *Ideology: An Introduction* doesn’t even give him a mention; and Žižek also passes over Eco in silence, other than to use Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose* (2014[1980]) as an example of what he calls ‘spaghetti structuralism’: “a kind of simplified, mass culture version of structuralist and poststructuralist ideas (there is no final reality, we all live in a world of signs referring to other signs)” (Žižek 2002[1989]: 23).

In Chapter Three it is argued how Eco’s interpretative semiotics is far from being ‘simplified’ and his novels, particularly *Foucault’s Pendulum* (2001[1988]), illustrate in still unsurpassed fashion how intertextual play may expel the object-referent but still remain accountable to the external. Jameson gets a bit closer to Eco’s view of ideology critique when he quotes Greimas about “transcoding” on the last pages of *The Prison-House of Language* (Jameson 1974[1972]: 215–216).

Such a discipline, insofar as it takes the very production of a meaning as its object, finds itself obliged to come to terms with that infinite regress from signifier to signified, from linguistic object to metalanguage, which we have frequently had occasion to underscore in the preceding pages. It does so now, however, by including such an infinite regress in its very vision of the nature of meaning: “signification is thus nothing but such a transposition from one level of language to another, from one language to a different language, and meaning is nothing but the possibility of such *transcoding*”. (Jameson 1974[1972]: 216)

In Jameson’s words, Greimas parallels Eco’s Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid in a few notable ways: it adopts ‘semiotics’ as the umbrella term; it emphasizes the infinite regress of unlimited semiosis; and above all it conceives of signification as code plurality, and the connotative ideological operation as one of opportunistic code switching in which one semantic axis is emphasized by means of concealing others. On the same page Jameson observes that this approach is a genuinely hermeneutic if not a hermetic one, because it “would have little to do with the theological overtones” (Jameson 1974[1972]: 216) implied by the word hermetic.

Eco’s model of ideological code switching is also a hermeneutic-rhetorical one, making use of the concept of enthymeme – as to its possibly negative-theological (occult) undertones, and how this bears upon the relation of Eco to deconstruction, all of this is considered in detail in Chapter Three. Jameson’s transcoding is deployed in full in his later *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1992[1991]), but even there Eco’s contribution to the idea is not given detailed treatment. The question is posed again: why so little mention of Eco in the annals of ideology critique? The answer is simply that Eco’s work succeeds a bit too well. In what has transpired so far in this chapter, it has been argued that ideology and aesthetics are two forms at the same retroactive level.

Every critique of aesthetics entails an ideological countermovement, and every critique of ideology must have its own aesthetic element. The complications and pitfalls of this axiological interdependence have been enumerated at length, culminating in Žižek’s disquisition on the necessary incompleteness of what he finally calls the parallax object, in the later work *The Parallax View* (Žižek 2009 [2006]). But as it was shown, Žižek is a bit coy about the actual semiotics and deconstruction behind his thinking and would prefer to disavow them both, in order to shore up the singularity of his own position or that of his school. And this has been the recurring strategy of many of the thinkers discussed throughout the chapter, to disavow semiotics and/or poststructuralism, mostly for the alleged problem of relativism and subjectivism. Instead, Eco comprehends and embraces fully the analytical vocabulary of semiotics, in order to elaborate that same idea in Žižek, of a plenipotentiary innate multiplicity that, at the level of the symbolic, is apprehended only as negation.

It is this idea, which is also that of Derrida’s primordial *différance*, that is unspeakable in the sense that it cannot be exhaustively described by concepts, but which is also the concrete object of interest in each case. This is why it is useful to turn to Eco’s ideological code switching at this juncture, before going on to some case application with Beckett in the final section, because there is no ideology

critique quite so thoroughly semiotic as Eco's, and unlike how Eagleton puts it, the analytical vocabulary of semiotics, despite its inconsistency, makes it the most common-sense and intuitive, and this clarity is pretty important when what one is trying to talk about is some five-dimensional glyph hovering above the desert sands of a distant planet.

After a frank appraisal of what is really less than a twenty-page stretch of the third part of *A Theory of Semiotics* (Eco 1979[1976]) one is left facing the conclusion that the reason why it does not achieve wider dissemination has to do with the constitutive nature of ideology itself, and nothing to do with any deficit on the part of Eco. Ideology is the rule rather than the exception, and thus to pursue the popularization or dissemination of methods for its critique is in fact to misapprehend its very nature. To attack the construct of ideology is quite literally to attack oneself. This provides another link between semiotics and the occult, for which the idea of popularization and distribution is a pure misunderstanding. This connection is returned to in Chapters Three and Four.

Eco's analytical semiotic terminology is already as sophisticated as the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid given by Figure 1, although he does not label it in this way: the vectors of integration between the referent and the interpretant are not included, and the relations between the directions of retroactivity are not specified. He does get very close to this though – in addition to the stratification of the expression and content planes into form and substance, he also adopts the division of the connotative and the metalinguistic secondary systems given by Hjelmslev through Barthes, as described in Chapter One. As he puts it,

Such a superelevation of codes is what Hjelmslev defined as *connotative semiotics*, whose form is:

Expression		Content
Expression	Content	

There is a connotative semiotics when there is a semiotics whose expression plane is another semiotics. In the above example the content of the former signification (along with the units that conveyed it) becomes the expression of a further content. (Eco 1979[1976]: 55)

'The above example' refers to a specific case Eco uses to elaborate the notion of code. The case deals with a system of water dams and releases, where messages about the water level need to be coded and sent between the person monitoring the water, and the person who controls the dam. It is in order to explain the dam example, that Eco's improvises a diagram that becomes the embryo of the black pyramid schema. The black pyramid schema has its initial inspiration here:

Continuum	Expression Plane		Content Plane		Continuum
	Units	System	System	Units	
Light, electric phenomena	AB	1100	1111	danger level	the unshaped continuum of the position of the water along with everything one can think about it
	BC	0110	1110	alarm level	
	CD	0011	1100	security level	
	AD	1001	1000	insufficiency	
Non-semiotic matter					Non-semiotic matter

Figure 6: *Prototype of the black pyramid, adapted from Eco (1979[1976]: 51).*

Eco does not explain completely, how the ‘units’ here correspond to the Hjelmslevian substance, and the ‘system’ here corresponds to the Hjelmslevian form, nor how the expression plane constitutes the signifiers and the content plane constitutes the signifieds. The only Peircean element present at this stage is where the diagram shows how ‘tokens’ (sinsigns) refer to the level of the substance, and thus ‘types’ (legisigns) refer to the form. This is actually a pretty crucial feature, for understanding how Peirce’s 1903 classification of signs maps to the black pyramid schema, and it is discussed further in Chapter Five. The reader will note further, when comparing Figure 6 with Figure 1, how what are called here ‘continuum’, and ‘non-semiotic’ matter – what Hjelmslev calls ‘matter’ and ‘purport’ – in the black pyramid schema are extended outward as pyramidal faces toward referent and interpretant. Eco also does not explain how the ideological – which he does recognize as essentially connotative in the Hjelmslevian-Barthesian sense – has its counterpart in the metalinguistic; or rather, he does show how the ideological and the aesthetic are interdependent, but what he does not see is how their interdependence may be mapped to the above schema, as two different forms of retroactivity.

This formula: ideology (connotation) = retroaction of the substance of the signified upon the form of the signifier; and aesthetic (metalinguage) = retroaction of the substance of the signifier upon the form of the signified, is the basic insight of the dissertation, and when it is said here that Eagleton, Monticelli, and Žižek (and later Deacon and Stjernfelt as well), would all benefit from the more advanced analytical terminology of second-generation semiology, this specific insight is what would help them. The addition of the Peircean interpretant (an aspect of the schema which Eco is better at explaining) is what ultimately solves the dilemma of relativism – and this problem occupies the remaining chapters of the dissertation. Eco’s discussion of the enthymeme gives a really nice, simple explanation of how the connotative procedure works, and again it is surprising that it has not gained more traction in the popular discussion of ideology.

2.5.1. Enthymemes

The discussion of ideology in *A Theory of Semiotics* begins already in the sections on aesthetics from 3.7.7. (Eco 1979[1976]: 273), as both ideology and aesthetics deal with code switching, but a term from rhetoric helps Eco specify the difference. The aesthetic message would highlight a plurality of different interpretations or codes for navigating different semantic axes, whereas the ideological message would emphasize one code or axis in order to diminish or distract from other ones. Eco explains this in terms of the difference between (classical) dialectics, which studies reasonable conclusions from given premises, and rhetoric, which studies emotionally or pragmatically persuasive assertions and statements.

Syllogisms of the latter sort are called enthymemes (Eco 1979[1976]: 277). As Eco states “the discussion of accepted values becomes explicit when it assumes an enthymematic aspect. When enthymematic reasoning explicitly assumes that the premises from which it starts are probable (i.e. matters of opinion), the rules of the game are observed and straightforwardly persuasive intercourse results. But very little is needed to turn a straightforwardly persuasive argument into an ‘ideological’ one” (1979[1976]: 287).

Aside from its simplicity, one advantage of Eco’s model here is that it maintains a difference between the ideological and the non-ideological without grounding this difference in the referent as a discriminant parameter. By Eco’s view, the ideological code switch may be identified without concern for whether a statement is true or false. There is an index of persuasion given by the gesture of ‘mystification’ in the classical Marxist vocabulary – it doesn’t matter what’s being mystified. The need for some kind of apparatus for impartial ideology critique is desperately needed for situations in which constituents of opposed echo chambers have no communication across boundaries and are fully persuaded of their own righteousness.

One must direct the ideology critique upon one’s own people and upon oneself – ideology critique of the enemy may only succeed by example. Notions of Zen Marxism and Taoist-Confucian ideology critique approximate the idea given by Jameson, that semiotics is a kind of meditation, and this faux-Orientalist spin is discussed again in the context of the *I Ching*, in Chapter Four. The concrete example Eco gives of the enthymeme shows how the connotative procedure may be identified irrespective of the value judgment. Eco chooses an American dietary advertising campaign, in which codes regarding the health effects of artificial sweeteners are opportunistically switched to maximize profits.

Diet foods have long been marketed as a way to avoid obesity, cardiac and circulatory maladies. One way that diet foods are advertised is by having ‘low sugar’, and sometimes sugar is replaced with artificial sweeteners, or in this case cyclamates. After a study was released linking cyclamates to cancer, the health benefits of this artificial sweetener no longer served as an effective marketing strategy for the given dietary foods, and a different marketing strategy had to be devised.

Because good health, or simply ‘not dying’, is the feature of the product ultimately desired by the consumer, the marketer must find a way to satisfy this

interpretation without diminishing profits. This is achieved most efficiently through a code switch, in which the presence of sugar ('with real sugar') is now associated with good health, because it does not cause cancer, even though it still leads to obesity.

The one semantic axis must be highlighted and the other diminished, and the enthymematic statement achieves this, in contrast with the sememe discussed later, which would highlight the fact that both axes actually co-exist: sugar both leads to obesity and presumably does not lead to cancer. The connotative procedure obscures the former premise and highlights the latter so as to persuade the consumer to purchase the product. At base, the code switch merely plays to the laziness of the consumer and relies on the unlikelihood of their actually investigating the properties of the dietary food. Eco lays out the first set of semantic axes, when cyclamates are still viable:

sugar	=	fat	=	heart attack	=	death	=	(-)
vs.		vs.		vs.		vs.		
cyclamates	=	thin	=	(no heart attack)	=	life	=	(+)

Figure 7: *Semantic axes, adapted from Eco (1979[1976]: 287).*

and then he gives the alternative second set, when cyclamates are no longer viable and now sugar needs a positive connotation again (Eco 1979[1976]: 288). The terms of the middle column of 'heart attack vs. no heart attack' are switched with 'no cancer vs. cancer'. According to Eco: "What made the advertiser's argument into a typical example of propaganda and 'ideological' discourse was the fact that the positive status acquired by sugar when compared to cyclamates (the axis placing them in opposition being roughly 'ways of dying') was applied to an argument concerning dietetic foods (the axis in question being: 'ways of slimming')" (1979[1976]: 288)

The example is almost too simple – the definitive ideologies dividing cultures from each other and from within must be more sophisticated than this. But the simplicity of Eco's example here is its major virtue, and it is in this way even more effective than the heating example he gives toward the end of that part of his book, which is explained by means of a three-level pyramidal diagram that is more detailed, but which (in its complexity) should be consulted by the reader directly (Eco 1976[1967]: 290–297). Such simple code switching works because it appeals to the laziness, and to the vanity, of the receiver. Not only would the consumer probably prefer to just eat more sugar.

The vanity to which ideology appeals is more insidious than mere laziness at that level. It is rather that the receiver of the advertising message is flattered to think that what appeared to them as intuitively true, is in fact the case, and thus there is no reason to double check. Žižek gives a predictable example of how this works in party politics, where the voter identifies with the candidate not for their strengths, but for their weaknesses. His example is Hitler (Žižek 2002[1989]: 117), where he argues that it was not Hitler's positive traits that won him the vote,

but rather his irrational outbursts themselves, his inability to contain his own fury, in which people secretly saw a bit of themselves.

The voters tell themselves and others they endorse the candidate for all the right reasons, but in truth the voter's vanity is flattered by the fact that such an otherwise electable candidate could yet possess the very same weaknesses that they possess, and they are thus willing to 'overlook' them. An act of presumed charity conceals what is really the denial of the flaw in oneself. This is the elementary code switch, and the way that otherwise totally obvious enthymematic connotation is 'overlooked' by appeal to laziness in vanity.

The psychoanalytic and cognitive dimensions of connotation and code switching are discussed again, as ideological condensation in Chapter Four, and as the cognitive penumbra in Chapter Five. The comfort of this appeal to vanity that accompanies the ideological code switch, provides an inverse image of the raw, lethal discomfort of the unraveling subject-in-process confronted with the uneven plurality and incompatibility of two or more non-equivalent semantic axes. Žižek and Eco describe it in much the same way, Žižek with his Hegelian-Lacanian vocabulary, and Eco with his own nascent Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid. The center-point of Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* is just this uninhabitable nexus of plurality and incompatibility, which he calls the sememe.

2.5.2. Sememes

Sememe did not become an operational term in popular semiotics for many of the same reasons why Eco's book on a whole has not been splayed out to popular dissemination. The internal incompatibility at the heart of the idea does not lend itself to the kind of conceptual reduction and summary that is necessary for widespread appeal. In a way, every iteration of the meaning of 'sememe' must take a new form, every time. A more basic explanation for why sememe is not a popular term in semiotics is that it has been used in different ways by different semioticians.

For instance, Greimas and Courtés in their analytical dictionary (1982: 279) give a definition to sememe that is quite a bit more specific – it is not completely different from Eco's sememe, it derives partly from Hjelmslev, but it does not cite Eco's usage, which predates theirs considerably. Eco positions a series of arborescent branching diagrams throughout his book, all organized to explain the sememe. This is one of the more detailed ones:

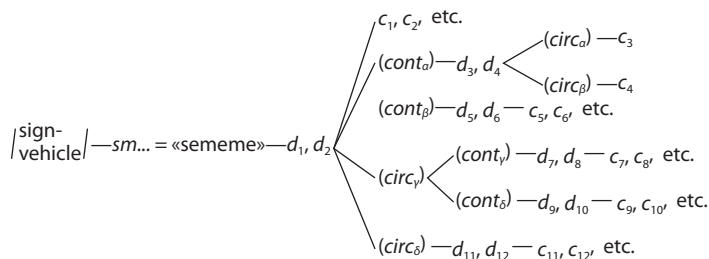


Figure 8: *Sememe, adapted from Eco (1979[1976]: 105).*

Eco doesn't explain it this way, but it may be understood like this: the 'sign vehicle' corresponds to the Peircean representamen, the branches are all possible semantic axes yielded and created by different interpretants, and the 'sememe' is the middle term that would link any one sign vehicle to any one semantic axis. In this way, the sememe is just the object, but the way that the many semantic axes branch away from it shows how the nature of the object (the way in which it links sign vehicle to semantic axis-interpretant) is non-referential. That is, an axis may be realized by a denotation (d), or it may be realized by a connotation (c), or by a number of other factors, but none of these guarantee the signification of the sememe in the fashion of some kind of referential discriminant parameter.

The sememe contains the multiplicity of incompatible semantic 'axes' – circumstantial selections due to particularities of the receiver, and contextual associations, are only two factors governing which semantic axis is realized. The point of the sememe model just is the dissociation of the object (sememe) from determination by a concrete referent, provided either by the linguistic identity of the sender, or by external factors of context. The sememe stands for the junction of multiple axes – the 'sign' is just this intersection of axes.

The sememe appears arborescent (like a tree) merely out of the necessity of the medium. The character of the sememe is itself multiple in the same way that Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome is multiple, however its explanation requires that it occupy a single point. In the same way, each term along each different semantic axis is also a sememe and may lead to different intersecting axes: the diagram would ideally be better given by a three-dimensional interactive depiction, however to realize the plurality of semiosis in this way is to move beyond semiotics: semiotics is all about how to describe this plurality *in verbal language*, how to use the constraints of verbal language themselves in order to 'model' constitutive plurality. It is in this sense that again semiotics remains stratified, and that Barthes had something very specific in mind when he said that semiotics is a part of linguistics and not vice versa. This fact, about the linguistic orientation of semiotics (despite its engagement with 'non-linguistic meaning'), also applies to the limits of the notion and use of 'diagrams' – hence the still arborescent character of Eco's diagrams – and this anticipates some critique of Stjernfelt's *Diagrammatology* (2007) discussed at length in Chapter Five. Nevertheless the sememe explodes outward in all three dimensions at least, every term of the tree becoming a new sememe, transected by multiple vectors, fully interactional and activated by attention. The reduction of the sememe to any one of its axes is an ideological procedure.

I shall define as an 'ideological' *inventio* a series of semiotic statements based on a previous bias (either explicit or otherwise), i.e. the choice of a given circumstantial selection that attributes a certain property to a sememe, while concealing or ignoring other contradictory properties that are equally predicable to that sememe, granted the non-linear and contradictory format of semantic space. (Eco 1979[1976]: 293)

The sememe is the same as the sublime interpretant of ideology, a Real unrepresentable kernel whose paradox and negation, despite the inability to present

them with symbolic closure, bear out some kind of substance. In the language of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid, they are just the retroaction of the substance upon the form, the way this induces reassignment between signifiers and signifieds, and how this reassignment constitutes an interpretant at the zenith of the pyramid. Eco: “A non-ideological statement would be a meta-semiotic one that showed the contradictory nature of its semantic space” (Eco 1979[1976]: 293). This meta-semiotic statement is the second form of retroactivity, from the substance of the signifier to the form of the signified, working with and against the connotative ideological ones.

In Chapter Three, these metasemiotic statements as they typify literary works are considered as what Eco calls acts of ‘radical invention’. There, Eco’s own writing demonstrates how the forms of retroactivity cannot be separated in the neat convenient fashion that Žižek of all people suggests they may.

Radical invention happens in Eco’s own writing just like it does in Eagleton’s and Žižek’s, except that Eco acknowledges and tracks the retroactivity in real time, and by some nascent use of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid. But he is not totally without precedent in this self aware creative critical writing.

Although Adorno does not make recourse to the advanced tools of second-generation semiology to delineate his labors, it must be said that his famous discussion of Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* is the premium example of this strategy, and its discussion – both of the play itself as well as Adorno’s writing about it – recapitulates many of the major themes already discussed here. It closes the chapter, before taking the next step toward the actual pyramid.

2.6. The vitriol of Adorno: “Trying to understand *Endgame*”

In the discussion of Marxist literary theory Samuel Beckett occupies a distinguished position. All of the critics discussed here have engaged Beckett at one point or another. Frederic Jameson has mentioned Beckett in countless books and articles, but for the most extended treatment one might turn to his *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present* (Jameson 2012).

From his earliest works, Terry Eagleton has troubled over the high modern Irish writers, for instance *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (1970). Žižek compulsively cites Beckett more than anybody. A good classical Marxist should be concerned with particularities, but in “Hegel with Beckett: the persistence of abstraction” (Žižek 2019), Žižek asserts that the absence of particularity in Beckett does not preclude a revolutionary reading.

The great writer of abstraction is Samuel Beckett, and to a partisan of the standard Marxist concrete historical analysis of the works of art in the style of Lukács, the way he practices abstraction in his work cannot but appear as resolutely “anti-Marxist.” [...] Why is Beckett’s abstraction from concrete social context not only psychologically [...] but also ontologically, with regard to social totality itself, more truthful than a “concrete” realist image of social totality? (Žižek 2019: 157)

Beneath the Hegelian-Lacanian vocabulary of Žižek’s explanation can be detected the same argument made by Bloch and Brecht, discussed already in this chapter. The ‘reality’ that is being produced through the abstract expressionist-subjectivist literature is just the experience of fragmentation itself, more real than the conventions handed down by tradition, within which environmental detail and sensory motor affect and emotion are supposed to be captured by literary prose. But for a detailed Marxist treatment of Beckett one must turn to Theodor Adorno, for it is Adorno’s work about Beckett that is without equal. His essay deals with most of the themes already discussed in this chapter, as well as many that arise in other chapters of this dissertation. For instance, the principle of non-identity and *ho trōsas iasetai* employed in this dissertation derive largely from Adorno.

Part of their inspiration comes from “The schema of mass culture”¹⁶ (see Adorno 2001[1981]: 61–97). Iain Macdonald has written perhaps the most definitive work on *ho trōsas iasetai*, called “‘The Wounder Will Heal’: Cognition and Reconciliation in Hegel and Adorno” (2000). He traces its source to “an esoteric allusion made by both Hegel and Adorno, who on various occasions invoke the oracular *ὁ τρώσας ἰάσεται* [*ho trōsas iasetai*] as a way of saying something about the operations of thought (or more specifically, the concept) and the reconciliation of spirit and nature” (Macdonald 2000: 133). He explains further,

Consequently, as Hegel says, this stage of schism must itself be sublated in turn, and spirit must return through its own agency to union with itself. This resulting union is a spiritual one [i.e., mediated as opposed to immediate], and the guiding principle of its return lies in thinking itself. It is thinking that both inflicts the wound and heals it again. (Macdonald 2000: 134)

Better than any work of theory, Beckett’s *Endgame* illustrates the operation of *ho trōsas iasetai* and “This feature of cognition, which Adorno calls non-identity” (Macdonald 2000: 135). *Endgame* is a play in one act. There are four characters. The first two characters are called Hamm and Clov. Hamm is bound to a wheelchair. They never leave the house. The other two characters are called Nagg and Nell. They are elderly and they have no legs. They live inside two old trash bins next to each other.

A great catastrophe has taken place, but no detail about this event, nor any other chronological or contextual anchor, is provided by the script. The characters shelter together in the room, telling each other the same old stories to pass the time. According to Beckett’s most well-respected critic Hugh Kenner, because of

¹⁶ Adorno’s “The schema of mass culture” was published as: Horkheimer, Max; Adorno Theodor W. 1981. Das Schema der Massenkultur. In: Adorno, Theodor W., *Gesammelte Schriften*. (Tiedemann, Rof, Hg./ed.). Bd. 3: *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 299–335. The manuscript, which comes however from the year 1942 has been found as appendix in the author’s legacy under the title “Das Schema der Massenkultur” with the subtitle “Kulturindustrie (Fortsetzung)”.

the high placement of windows on the back wall, the audience sees “the stage of *Endgame* as the inside of a skull” (Kenner 1968: 155).

NELL:
Why this farce, day after day?
(*Pause.*) (Beckett 1958: 14)

There are two directions of storytelling: Hamm tells his story to Clov, and Nagg tells his story to Nell. Each day the story is the same, but each day the teller makes little corrections and changes. The self-referential mirroring effect, in which the storytelling of the characters becomes a commentary on the act of authorship of the play, is mirrored again by the relation between the pairs of characters at the first level: Hamm has to beg Clov to listen to his story.

HAMM:
It’s time for my story. Do you want to listen to my story?
CLOV:
No. (Beckett 1958: 14)

Even after Clov accedes to listen to the story again, Hamm pretends to lose interest in re-telling it.

CLOV:
Oh, by the way, your story?
HAMM (surprised):
What story?
CLOV:
The one you’ve been telling yourself all your days.
HAMM:
Ah you mean my chronicle? (Beckett 1958: 47)

And Nagg insists on telling his story to Nell. Nell barely resists.

NAGG:
Shall I tell you the story of the tailor?
NELL:
No.
(*Pause.*)
What for? (Beckett 1958: 20)

The relational dynamic between the pairs is a perfect parallel in the way that the directionality of telling never changes for either pair, however the retroactivity of the listener at the second level introduces new features to the primary level, changing their dialog. In this way, the relation between the pairs may be conceived as a perpendicular one. Clov adopts the words of Nell:

CLOV:
 Why this farce, day after day?
 HAMM:
 Routine. One never knows.
 (Pause.) (Beckett 1958: 32)

The absence of particularity on Beckett’s stage, the way his dialogs subvert conventional notions of story and character and scene, the sense of futility and failure, these are all just clichés of Beckett scholarship at this point. But as far as they go, Adorno gets them best when he writes such vicious lines as “*Endgame* trains the viewer for a condition where everyone involved expects – upon lifting the lid from the nearest dumpster – to find his own parents” (Adorno 1982[1961]: 143). The plot is utterly basic, but even in its rudimentary skeleton, remains contradictory. The most elementary details about what has happened are ambiguous. This characteristic of Beckett’s writing has been noted time and again. Such ambiguities may pass unnoticed in a typical screenplay, but when a production is so minimalistic as this, minor inconsistencies are magnified to take up the entire concern, and this is what elevates Beckett’s drama above basic negation.

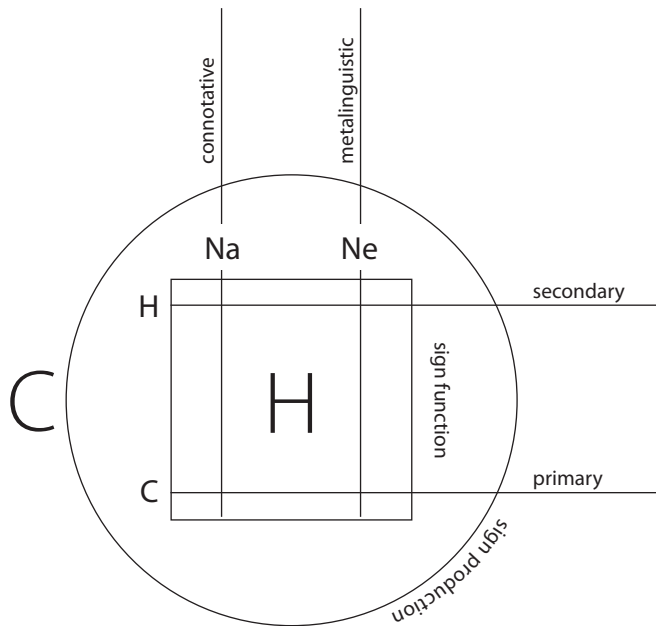


Figure 9: Beckett’s perpendicular pairs.

When Beckett scrubs the stage clean of particularity, he puts in relief the elementary features common to all. These are the “approximate geometrical forms” whose localization, Adorno warns, “teases the spectator with the suggestion of a symbolism which it – like Kafka – refuses” (Adorno 1982[1961]: 128). Ignoring Adorno’s warning: in Figure 9, Clov occupies the place of the primary semiotic system, and Hamm occupies the place of the secondary semiotic system. Nagg is

in the place of connotative-ideological retroactivity, and Nell is in the place of metalinguistic-aesthetic retroactivity. The relation of Hamm to Clov is perpendicular to that of Nagg and Nell in the way that the repetitions of the one are doubled by the repetitions of the other, and the recursion of this mirroring is itself reflected in a disruption at the primary level. Hamm and Clov also teach the audience about the distinction between sign function from sign production, explained in Chapter Three. Sign production is where semiotic theory is applied to concrete empirical matters, and typologies of the sign are developed for labeling environmental entities and sensory-motor affects and emotions. Clov is the master of sign production, in his preoccupation with measurement. Clov is the one who does the sensing, he is the one who pushes Hamm about the room in the wheelchair, he is the one who wields the limited array of tools: the steps, the glass, the gaff, the dog, the alarm clock. He is the one who looks through the glass, out the window upon the leaden sea and the zero sky. His name means glove (Adorno 1982[1961]: 145). Clov's applied semiotics realizes the purely self-referential semiotics of Hamm's storytelling (the sign function).

For Hamm there is no external object-referent, for Hamm there is nothing outside the text. Their dependency is mirrored at the perpendicular, by Nagg and Nell's reciprocal retroactivity, which produces an unexpected interpretant. It forces the reassignment of signifiers and signifieds at the primary level (it changes the story told between Hamm and Clov). As Nagg attempts to retell his favorite story for the 100th time, today Nell is strangely caught up in nostalgic reverie, about the occasion long past, when Nagg first told her this story, and it still had its charm. Today, as Nagg tells her the story again, she is teleported in her mind to the location of the first telling. What happens to Nell in this scene points down some interpretative axes that Beckett surely did not intend.

Nell:

It was on Lake Como.

(Pause.)

One April afternoon.

(Pause.)

Can you believe it? (Beckett 1958: 21).

In the adaptation of *Endgame* from the collection *Beckett on Film* (2002) the star ensemble includes Michael Gambon as Hamm, David Thewlis as Clov, Charles Simon as Nagg, and Jean Anderson as Nell. The stage direction is about as sparse as the script of *Endgame*, so it is difficult to infer much about this scene beyond what is directly written, but in the memorable performance something more is suggested. Toward the end of Nagg's retelling, the look on Nell's face (as portrayed by Jean Anderson) shows the agony of a wife who has heard her husband's old story one too many times. Her irritation with him is enough to drag her out of her reverie about Lake Como. But after he delivers the punch line and laughs, and Hamm commands him to be silent, Nell is back into the memory again, far more vivid than the present.

HAMM:

Silence!

(Nagg starts, cuts short his laugh.)

NELL:

You could see down to the bottom.

HAMM (exasperated):

Have you not finished? Will you never finish?

(With sudden fury.)

Will this never finish?

(Nagg disappears into his bin, closes the lid behind him. Nell does not move. Frenziedly.) (Beckett 1958: 23)

This last stage direction, *'Nell does not move. Frenziably'*, leaves open license for the performer. Jean Anderson's face – her head still just peaking above the rim of the trash bin – when she utters the words 'You could see down to the bottom', is that of someone having a hallucination. She can see Lake Como before her, she's totally inside the memory. But the memory is no longer a pleasant one. What was idle nostalgia turns into a kind of horror, like she doesn't understand how it is possible for her to be so transported back to Lake Como, even while she is trapped immobile in the bin, in this bunker with the others. But the depth of the lake and the whiteness of the sands is in high definition before her mind's eye. When Hamm orders Clov to put her back in the bin and get rid of them both, he doesn't realize that Nell is having a stroke or brain hemorrhage, that Nell is dying.

HAMM:

Clear away this muck! Chuck it in the sea!

(Clov goes to bins, halts.)

NELL:

So white.

HAMM:

What? What's she blathering about?

(Clov stoops, takes Nell's hand, feels her pulse.)

NELL (to Clov):

Desert!

(Clov lets go of her hand, pushes her back in the bin, closes the lid.)

As she's being shoved into the bin for the last time, Jean Anderson's Nell just barely stammers out the word "Desert!" to Clov, with desperate urgency (*Beckett on Film, Endgame* 24:06). She knows it's her last word, but she must communicate the vision. What is Nell seeing, in this last moment before her death? This is where over-interpretation is invited. In the total absence of detail, Beckett's conspicuous insertion points outward along a large but finite number of different semantic axes, from the singular sign vehicle of 'Desert!'

Nell sees her own relation to Nagg in the mutual dependence of the two forms of retroactivity; she sees how their relationship reflects and is reflected by that of Hamm and Clov, meeting perpendicular at the corner mirror, creating an imperfect recursion that looks like a spinning wheel; she sees the self-enclosure of the

relation of the pairs within the sign function, but also that the interaction of the two forms of retroactivity is what compromises its closure, by introducing an interpretant, the same as the impossible real kernel, perceived only as an inconsistency at the level of the symbolic. The insight blasts open apoplectic inside her head like explosive decompression in stellar cartography. As she begins to lose consciousness, the evacuation of detail returns her many-colored and striated childhood bauble-geode. She sees the pyramid, the way it looms out of a black abyss.

Inside the pyramid, she sees the rotating glyph of a universal but non-algebraic language: its radiation sears the stone walls with imperfect hieroglyphs. She sees how she is part of a story that is about storytelling, how this self-reference leads to what looks like infinite recursion, which reproduces the appearance of the randomness of nature. She sees the failure of self-referentiality as an artistic form. She can totally understand now the limits of Beckett's theater as a model for class struggle in literary criticism, but by the time she apprehends the insight she is already dead, bleeding out of her eyes at the bottom of the bin. Nell's death in the bin may support the savage reading by Adorno: "In order to undercut history and perhaps thereby to hibernate, *Endgame* occupies the nadir of what philosophy's construction of the subject-object confiscated at its zenith: pure identity becomes the identity of annihilation, identity of subject and object in the state of complete alienation" (Adorno 1982[1961]: 128).

Žižek's favorite line from Beckett is "Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (Beckett 1995[1983]: 101) because the *representation* of failure is the highest positivity and because, as Adorno puts it, self-transparent acknowledgment of failure is the moment when "consciousness begins to look its own demise in the eye" (Adorno 1982[1961]: 150). The skull-image of Beckett's stage, where Nell suffers her ignominious brain hemorrhage, is for Žižek the inverse image of the ultimate success and the last step in the psychoanalytic treatment. As he puts it in the final pages of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*:

The inert object of phrenology (the skullbone) is nothing but a positive form of certain failure: it embodies, literally 'gives body' to, the ultimate failure of the signifying representation of the subject. It is therefore correlative to the subject in so far as – in Lacanian theory – the subject is *nothing but* the impossibility of its own signifying representation – the empty place opened up in the big Other by the failure of this representation. (Žižek 2002[1989]: 236)

The vitriol of Adorno may be just chemical acid, or bitter criticism or malice, a substance that dissolves all metals other than gold. Or it may have its alchemical meaning, which begins from a Latin acronym: *Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem*, which translates into: 'Visit the interior of the earth, and by rectifying what you find there, you will discover the hidden stone'. Vitriol is the deadly elixir that dismantles personality, restoring the static

self to a dynamic subject-in-process. Adorno had no patience for occult metaphors¹⁷, but the dual meaning of the word serves to underline first, how critical theory and deconstruction for example are not purely negative in a destructive sense, and second, how even Adorno's catastrophic reading of Beckett – and the non-identical Marxist literary semiotics for which this reading is the arch-example – may lead to a golden interior.

¹⁷ See: "Theses Against Occultism" (Adorno: 1974[1951]).

III. ECO'S HERMETIC CHIASM IN BYZANTIUM

3.1. Sailing to Byzantium (the storm in the teacup)

As discussed in Chapter Two, in recent decades a lot of effort has been put into distancing semiotics from ideology critique. In general, this effort may be understood as an attempt to sanitize semiotics, to free it of its associations with inimical worldviews. Similar efforts are detected in scholarship surrounding Umberto Eco. Providing a relatively neutral picture of the situation, Martin Švanter's "About the storm in the teacup: C.S. Peirce, U. Eco and semiotic metaphysics of objects" (2014) gives it a cute name, while also trivializing the controversy.

The fevered attempts to prove that Eco 'got Peirce wrong' sometimes merely seek to expunge the notion of unlimited semiosis, and thereby eliminate any common point between the theory of Eco and those of structural semiology, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis; but at other times, the attempt is more straightforwardly geared to delegitimize Eco himself. This is what one finds in the writings of Terence L. Short (which are addressed here in some detail), as well as those of Frederik Stjernfelt (mostly discussed in Chapter Five).

Eco exploits the notion of unlimited semiosis as a way of drawing Peirce into his theorization of retroactivity, in order to show that hermetic semiosis in this way need not be conceived as naïve relativism; Eco's sympathies with deconstruction are obvious as long as, in the same way, deconstruction is not conceived as mere nihilist skepticism. On the contrary, the metaphysical signature of hermetic semiosis, especially as it plays into *Foucault's Pendulum* (2001[1988]), suggests something else entirely. Like the speaker in W.B. Yeats' poem "Sailing to Byzantium", at a certain point Eco's protagonist Casaubon invites intertextual communion with dead authors of the past, and is taken into their company.

*O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.* (Yeats 1928 in Finneran 1989[1983]: 193)

What *Foucault's Pendulum* appears to parody – eclectic intertextual pastiche, the deconstructive challenge to object-language metalanguage opposition, the labyrinthine multilayeredness of hermetic semiosis – *A Theory of Semiotics* illustrates explicitly. The principal chiasm of the book, that is the division of sign function and sign production, fractures and multiplies metatheory to absurd

levels. If Eco's theory constitutes an endorsement of hermetic semiosis as much as it does a challenge, then *Foucault's Pendulum* may be read differently as well. This does not warrant any-thing goes relativism in interpretation but, falling somewhat short of total destratification, it nevertheless does endorse a moderate form of deconstruction that is in principle open to any sort of theoretic hybridization. It is from this Eco-ist stance, that the critique of Eco by Short and others is challenged. On the basis of one allegedly wrong reading of Peirce by Derrida and Eco, Short proceeds to disavow the whole field of second-generation semiology and what comes after.

Continental writers, approaching Peirce from a background of Saussurean semiology, have systematically misinterpreted his semeiotic. For the two doctrines are fundamentally incompatible (chapter 1, section 5). The unholy union of Saussure's supposed conventionalism with the breadth of Peirce's mature semeiotic gave bastard birth to an extreme relativism and irrealism – a modern version of sophistry that Saussure and Peirce would both have rejected. [...] Peirce's theory of signs, or semeiotic, misunderstood by so many, has gotten in amongst the wrong crowd. It has been taken up by an interdisciplinary army of 'semioticians' whose views and aims are antithetical to Peirce's own. (Short 2007: xiii–ix)

One can be sure that, when Short speaks of the bastard birth – from the unholy union of semiology and Peirce – of relativism and irrealism, he is referring specifically to Derrida, "someone fearful of facing reality", whose "play invites totalitarianism" (Short 2007: 45). Even if one grants that Short is correct about Peirce finally renouncing unlimited semiosis, this small victory does not sanction the proclamation that Peirce may not be used in the way that Eco uses him. Further, hermetic intertextuality, regardless of its political and metaphysical associations, is no accident in Eco's work, and it can be neither neatly removed nor easily disavowed. It does not take much effort to demonstrate Eco's native orientation to the black pyramid.

3.2. Hermetic semiosis as retroactivity

In *The Role of the Reader* (1984[1979]), when Eco writes that with "the notion of unlimited semiosis, Peirce has reached the highest level of his realism" (1984 [1979]: 193), this view turns supposed realism on its head. Under the umbrella of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid, Eco brings together an assortment of conflicting descriptive languages. This gives rise to what Eco calls the 'Byzantine' character of his intertextual exposition. First, he describes Hjelmslev's initial model as "Byzantine" although still suitable for a theory of codes (Eco 1979 [1976]: 52); later he admits that his own model "sounds somewhat Byzantine" (Eco 1979[1976]: 163); that "this solution undoubtedly looks rather Byzantine" (Eco 1979[1976]: 164); and finally that it might appear that "to distinguish expression from referent is a rather Byzantine exercise, which is by no means the case" (Eco 1979[1976]: 226).

In this section three features of Eco's retroactivity are showcased. First, the elemental split of sign function and sign production provides the initial chiasm, which hews *A Theory of Semiotics* and multiplies its paths; second, Eco explains radical aesthetic invention as the counterpart of ideological code switching, and Eco's own text may be understood as an example of this kind of radical invention; third, this invention is discussed in terms of some legitimate parallels between unlimited semiosis and deconstruction. All of this prefaces 3.3, where Eco's use of Peirce is interrogated in more detail. Retroactivity in Eco takes the same form as it does in second-generation semiology: eclectic, hyperdense metatheory and the transposition of terms between different descriptive systems – the main innovation of Eco and the insight of his hybrid is, rather than denying the referent entirely (as deconstruction is presumed to do), he accounts for the referent in the very form of retroactivity itself. When substance retroacts upon form, it modifies the sign function, producing new ways of correlation between expression and content. The chiasm of sign function and sign production is a misleading one, in the sense that no concrete analysis may take place without treating both at the same time, but it is just this possibility for concreteness which hermetic semiosis challenges, and its realism consists in just this challenge.

3.2.1. The chiasm of sign function and sign production

A Theory of Semiotics is divided into two main parts: “2. Theory of Codes” (Eco 1979[1976]: 48–150) and “3. Theory of Sign Production”. “In doing so, the book has acquired a sort of ‘chiasmatic’ structure”. As Eco explains, on its own the elaboration of the theory of codes may hypothetically proceed by the simplest means possible.

It is the theory of sign production however which forces him to adopt an “anti-Ockhamistic principle”, where ‘entities *are* multiplied beyond necessity’ (Eco 1979[1976]: viii). Judging strictly from the journal article “Peirce’s notion of the interpretant” (Eco 1976), one might presume that Eco expurgates the realism of Peirce entirely, given his stated unwillingness there to confront the notion of the index. Some more modifications to the 1976 lecture as it is reprinted in *The Role of the Reader* give the same impression, one of disregard for the referent and the external in the sign relation.

As he states in no uncertain terms in the original text, “This methodological perspective excludes the possible objects (or referents) as the parameters of the meaning of the sign” (Eco 1976: 1458). However, from within the narrow parameters of the sign function, the influence of the referent may be demarcated. Barthes, Derrida, and Lacan make this demarcation also, when they theorize retroactivity, but they do not explicitly acknowledge retroactivity as the point where the extrasemiotic referent impinges upon and changes the sign function, nor do they enumerate the many modes this sign production may take.

My approach does not exploit all the complexity of a semiotic research; semiotics should also consider the way in which sign-functions are used in order to mention things or states of the world. But in my theoretical perspective the study of sign functions constitutes only a part of a general semiotics, that is, a theory of signification as complementary to a theory of communication [...] What I want to demonstrate is that within the framework of a theory of signification the Peircean notion of the interpretant reabsorbs the notion of object of a sign. (Eco 1976: 1459)

In the above, the ‘theory of communication’ refers to sign production. Communication entails concrete sender-receiver relations within a given substrate-channel, as well as correlations at the stratum of substance, not just at the stratum of form. When Eco writes that the ‘interpretant reabsorbs the notion of object of a sign’, what he means is that the referential aspect of the traditional object is displaced outside the sign function. In this way the Peircean object (now stripped of its referential aspect) may be cleanly mapped to the Saussurean signified, just as the representamen is mapped to the Saussurean signifier. This is the gist of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid. Eco wants to draw attention to the fact that what is most definitive of the notion of sign, is in fact precluded by substantial sender-receiver correlations in a given substrate-channel.

Actualized correlations lose all their dynamicity, unpredictability, incompatibility, and indeterminacy, whereas the sign function consists in its substrate-independent and multiple realizability. Signs as sign types are always described in terms of actually realized substantial correlations, and for this reason Eco prefers to relegate the whole notion of sign types to the domain of sign production, as types of said production, rather than as types of sign proper.

Therefore the classical notion of ‘sign’ *dissolves* itself into a highly complex network of changing relationships. Semiotics suggests a sort of molecular landscape in which what we are accustomed to recognize as everyday forms turn out to be the result of transitory chemical aggregations and so-called ‘things’ are only the surface appearance assumed by an underlying network of more elementary units. (Eco 1979[1976]: 49)

At the same time Eco understands that this radical formalism, when taken to extremes, would make all applied analysis impossible. To exclusively describe the sign function without any substantial examples is strictly impossible. In the phonological analyses of Saussure, Prieto, or Benveniste, while they insist that the signifier is not the phonological substance, they nevertheless are forced to make use of specific phonemes in comparison, even if this is only for the purpose of ‘tracing’ or ‘putting in relief’, the ideal form that lay behind all the substantial examples.

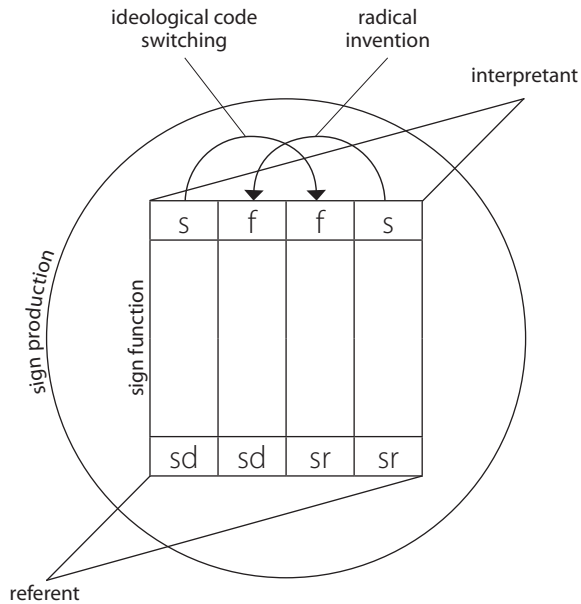


Figure 10: *The referent is the interpretant.*

The interpretant exists in this way as a bridge concept between sign function and sign production. Retroaction of substance upon form can be described purely formally, at the level of sign function; however, the positive change produced by that retroactivity is something definitely external and only accounted for at the level of sign production.

the interpretant is clearly a category that may suitably take its place within the framework of a theory of codes, but at the same time its usefulness goes beyond such a theory; thus the interpretant also has to be considered as a category that may suitably find a place within the framework of a theory of sign production, for it also defines many kinds of proposition and argument which, beyond the rules provided by codes, explain, develop, interpret a given sign. (Eco 1979[1976]: 71)

One way to marginalize Eco's theory is to say that he denies the existence of the referent entirely, and this accusation is understandable in the context of claims like "from the point of view of the functioning code (or many codes), the referent must be excluded as an intrusive and jeopardizing presence which compromises the theory's theoretical purity" (Eco 1979[1976]: 66). When taken out of context, Eco's interpretative semiotics is easily paired with deconstruction and labeled as vulgar relativism or worse. However, the above claims must be understood within the proper context. For example, Eco makes it clear that "*A semiotics of the code* is an operational device in the service of a semiotics of sign production" (Eco 1979[1976]: 129).

In other words, while the sign function does displace the referent, nevertheless ultimately theorization of the sign function is in the service of understanding the referent. The reason Eco prioritizes the sign function in the way that he does, is

because when the sign function is de-prioritized, and the referential aspect is emphasized instead, the semiotic procedure loses its critical orientation. A semiotics that adumbrates theorization of the sign function in favor of the empirical domain of sign production is easily appropriated by more instrumental domains – it should be no surprise why the rehabilitators, who would like to paint a picture of Eco that is appealing to grant awarding bureaus and social initiatives, want to amputate the theorization of the sign function.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the propensity of connotative secondary semiotic systems to crystallize into unchanging habits of interpretation must be consistently checked by metalingual retroactivity, which challenges and refreshes the descriptive system, but this is not a denial of the existence of the referent. So, to accuse Eco of relativism is simply to misunderstand or to ignore the importance of sign production in his theory, which accounts for the transformation of the sign function through the retroaction of substance upon form. But another way to marginalize Eco's theory is to say that his conception of sign production itself is incorrect.

In Chapter Five, it is discussed how Stjernfelt does this. By fixating on the word choice of 'production' Stjernfelt accuses Eco of employing some outdated Marxist theory. In that chapter, it is argued that the place of Marx in Eco's sign production is minuscule, and that Stjernfelt merely uses the name of Marx as a boogeyman to discredit Eco. But it is important to understand what Eco means by sign production, which is nothing if not a bit ambiguous in his work. Sign types, such as icon and index, are relegated to sign production because icon and index describe two of the (nearly limitless) ways a sign may be realized at the stratum of substance.

The labor performed in shaping the expression-continuum in order to produce the concrete occurrence of a given sign brings into immediate evidence the fact that there are different kinds of signs. If a general theory of codes, providing the notion of sign-function along with the notion of segmentation of both the expression and the content levels, seemed to offer a unified definition for every kind of sign, the concrete labor of producing these signs obliges one to recognize that there are different modes of production. (Eco 1979[1976]: 152)

Theorization of the sign function elaborates the definition of the sign as such. It is interested in what is common to all signs. It circulates around recursivity, devolves upon incompatibility and code duality, and the thread of its inquiry is unpredictable. Substance and sign production on the other hand concern practical work and the empirical constraints of the substrate. In Chapter Five, an important parallel is drawn between sign production and Terrence Deacon's notion of 'teleodynamic work', which in his words is all about preserving the material constraints of the substrate in conjunction with the form of the sign. But for here, the emphasis remains on production. Because all sign types, in so far as they are realizations of substance, are instantiated within a specific substrate, the study of sign types necessarily always includes sub-disciplines. As Jerzy Pelc describes it, sign production is a matter of 'SemioticsA' or applied semiotics, which entails

the connection of semiotics proper, with another discipline. Or as Eco puts it, “Many of these activities are already studied by existing disciplines; others will have to constitute the object of a new general semiotics. But those already studied by pre- or extra-semiotic disciplines will then have to be included as branches of a general semiotics, even if it proves convenient to preserve their present affiliation for the time being” (Eco 1979[1976]: 152).

Because of its necessary interface with sub-disciplines, the domain of sign production is open to an unlimited number of different considerations. The proper tools for inquiry into sign production are no more exclusive than the entire span of the physical sciences, and beyond. Eco’s chaotic and somewhat unhelpful ‘Table 31’ (Eco 1979[1976]: 154) is meant to demonstrate the limitlessness of sign production, and thus to inversely stress the importance of cleaving to the sign function, and the role of theorization of semiotics before empirical application. What would differentiate the study of sign production then, from the study of any old thing, would be that it also remains concerned with theorization of the sign function, which remains restricted. Needless to say, any applied semiotics that does not also concern itself with the sign function is not semiotics at all. In other words, for a kind of inquiry to qualify as semiotics, it is not sufficient for the researcher to merely call something a sign. Rather it is the burden of the researcher to develop the theory of the sign first, and only afterwards to apply that theory to some empirical domain.

The enduring value of *A Theory of Semiotics* springs from its inner chiasm and the fact that while it presents itself as clearly and consistently as possible, the work is internally riven, the work lacks a definite center, and the work refuses absolute closure, largely because of the essential incompatibility first of Peirce and Hjelmslev, and second of sign function and sign production as organizing principles. What marks it out is that again, while Eco does everything he can to present the theory with internal consistency and an air of scientificity, he does not deny the fact that semiotics is no exact science.

To pin down semiotic theory with absolute closure would be to lose forever that which defines the sign. In this way, the deferral of closure is a sort of realism that refuses to confuse the descriptive system with the object-referent. The hyperdense intertextual braid that results is Eco’s inverse approach to ideology critique, which he calls radical aesthetic invention.

3.2.2. Radical aesthetic invention

By dividing his book into the two sections of sign function and sign production, Eco does not impart final closure to what is semiotics and how to do it. Lending some clarity in parts, and disambiguating some previously imbricated concepts, the chiasm of sign function and sign production also contributes to the byzantine profusion, pages and leaves multiplying shoots with nets, intertextuality compounding regress to inaccessible subbasements. A clarifying device serves also as an unpredictability generator.

In Chapter Five, sign production is employed in its clarifying capacity, to elaborate the quasi-signs doctrine, but here the retroactive capacity of the chiasm is emphasized. Eco does not merely mention aesthetic texts as tools for ideology critique. The way that Eco constellates theories from different sources and transposes their terms between each other is meant to demonstrate the retroaction of substance upon form, producing its own interpretants. In attempting to explain how given theorists conduct their ideology critique through theoretic detotalizations, Eco both explains and demonstrates this tactic with his own writing, justifying its byzantine detours and chiasmatic structure. In Chapter Four, the randomizing effect of this recursivity is explained as signomancy, but in *A Theory of Semiotics* Eco simply calls it radical aesthetic invention without yet indicating its hermetic-occult inspiration.

We may define as invention a mode of production whereby the producer of the sign-function chooses a new material continuum not yet segmented for that purpose and proposes a new way of organizing (of giving form to) it in order *to map* within it the formal pertinent element of a content-type. [...] but since no previous convention exists to correlate the elements of the expression with the selected content, the sign producer must in some way *posit* this correlation so as to make it acceptable. (Eco 1979[1976]: 245)

This is a clear formulation of the retroaction of substance upon form. Consider: the words of the above paragraph are put into a bag, shaken up and poured back out upon the page. From that new profusion a new order is detected, and the paragraph is reconstructed with that order in mind. No convention yet exists to correlate expression and content in this new distribution, and so a new convention is conjured that is the interpretant. In its most extreme forms this retroactivity is found in surrealist word games – signomancy is the term given for such ‘surrealist’ approaches when they are applied to semiotic theory. Eco’s argument is that in a more moderate form, this kind of retroactivity is operational in all instances of creativity and sign production.

Every act of creation involves this retroaction. More importantly, retroactivity does not just entail the new correlation, but also the necessary destruction of the old one. Only by shaking the bag may the new dispensation commence. This is the sense in which Eco’s radical invention is the basis of semiotic ideology critique. The previous order is the crystallized ideological system according to which correlations were previously made, the shaking of the bag is the retroactive impingement upon that order, and the construction of the new correlation is the production of the habit-changed interpretant.

The interpretant doesn’t just come out of nowhere. Like natural selection, evolution doesn’t just depend upon the elimination of the old forms, but requires the continual generativity of the substrate. As to the biological analogy for retroaction, it will be discussed further in Chapter Five. Moderate aesthetic invention is involved in all acts of creation, and there are any number of different approaches to its theorization. Peircean abduction for instance is just another way of approaching the notion of moderate aesthetic invention. What is being discussed

here is somewhat more specific, and its radicalism is meant to get a better grasp on what specifically is involved in retroactivity, so as to more securely differentiate it from the regular activity of the primary system “The case of *radical inventions* is rather different, in that the sender more or less bypasses the perceptual model, and delves directly into the as yet unshaped perceptual continuum, mapping his perception as he organizes it” (Eco 1979[1976]: 254).

Bypassing the perceptual model is no simple procedure – detotalization does not happen all on its own. The equiprobable distribution of the thermodynamic system assures its own order, unless it is interrupted. Slight deviations from the system are moderate aesthetic inventions which don’t noticeably detotalize the system. Radical aesthetic inventions on the other hand require special techniques and are prone to elicit strong resistance.

In such cases what takes place is a radical code-making, a violent proposal of new conventions. The sign-function does not as yet exist, and indeed sometimes fails to establish itself at all. The sender gambles on the possibility of semiosis, and loses. In one or two cases it is only centuries later that the gamble comes off and the convention is established. (Eco 1979[1976]: 254)

Here Eco probably alludes to those posthumous thinkers in history who were so far ahead of their time that their innovations were not recognized, or were repudiated as heresies. The sender is likely to lose at this game because what he proposes is definitely against the established order. As Eco puts it, radical aesthetic invention “produces a new type of *awareness about the world*” (Eco 1979[1976]: 261), and it is in this that its ideology critique consists. It is possible that Eco saved himself much trouble by clothing his own work in the fashion of the time, instead of making its actual intentions more obvious.

In *A Theory of Semiotics*, instead of naming his hermetic signomancy for what it is, he saves that revelation for the fictional format of *Foucault’s Pendulum*, managing once again to disguise the actually radical nature of his thought, but this time under the label of ‘fiction’. Terence L. Short famously castigates Eco’s Derridean reading of Peirce. Just what is the status of Eco’s reading of Peirce? After that discussion, Short’s accusations may be addressed in directly.

3.2.3. Unlimited semiosis and deconstruction

Derrida’s reading of Peirce in *Of Grammatology* (1974[1967]) is so brief that it would not even be worth mentioning, were it not for the ‘storm in the tea cup’ to which it has led, and at the outset it is admitted that this non-referential reading is also against the grain. When Derrida argues that the Peircean object has no analogy to or causal relation with the referent, and that thus one can construe Peirce as an early de-structor of the transcendental signified, he is aware that this is not the only way to read Peirce. Short correctly observes that Derrida’s appropriation of Peirce is performed in spite of Peirce’s prevailing “unambiguous reference” to reality (Short 2007: 45).

But Eco's unlimited semiosis does not make of Peirce some kind of cultural relativist or postmodernist. Unlimited semiosis is barely mentioned in *A Theory of Semiotics*, and the reading of Peirce from Derrida, upon which unlimited semiosis is based, is also little more than an idle mention in the pages *Of Grammatology*. The profusion of commentaries on unlimited semiosis, both in Eco's own work and in work about him, are reams of paper shooting out from a tree that has no center, like the apocryphal text at the heart of some occult conspiracy, the non-existent motivator that moves mountains. Although the exact words 'unlimited semiosis' are not used there, *A Theory of Semiotics* is the first place in English that Umberto Eco suggests the notion of unlimited semiosis.

In the major English language publications of Umberto Eco, "unlimited semiosis" comes up by name for the first time in "Peirce's notion of the interpretant", originally a lecture and then printed (Eco 1976: 1457, 1465, 1471), much of which is then reprinted in *The Role of the Reader* chapter seven: "Peirce and the semiotic foundations of openness: Signs as texts and texts as signs" (Eco 1984[1979]: 175–199).

It is from thereafter that unlimited semiosis as a catchword profuses throughout Eco's texts and the abundant secondary literature. In *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984) unlimited semiosis is mentioned in a variety of contexts. In the introduction to that work, Eco's concepts of the encyclopedia and the labyrinth are described as topological models, which can be taken also as metaphors "for the nonmetaphoric Peircean notion of *unlimited semiosis*" (Eco 1984: 2); and the "metonymical substitutions and their metaphorical results" (Eco 1984: 117), which define the encyclopedic procedure of internal cross-referencing, depend on the notion of unlimited semiosis.

In chapter 4 of the same book, Eco describes the hermeneutics of the Holy Scriptures and of the cabala as a "beautiful case of unlimited semiosis [...] What the first exegetes understood was that, at that point, the Scriptures were in the position of saying everything, and everything was too much, for any exegesis looks for a translatable Truth" (Eco 1984: 149), and "In any case, behind every strategy of the symbolic mode, be it religious or aesthetic, there is a legitimating theology, even though it is the atheistic theology of unlimited semiosis or of hermeneutics as deconstruction" (Eco 1984: 163). Also, in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984), deconstruction is mentioned again in this connection.

The intertextual play of unlimited semiosis has an ideology-critical function: this observation again parallels that of the Frankfurt School and *Tel Quel*, as discussed in Chapter Two, for whom aesthetics and ideology comprise an inextricable unity, as the two forms of retroactivity (Eco 1984: 24–25); the crucial difference for Eco has to do with the explicit non-identity of his Marxism, constituted by the notion of circularity: primary level and secondary level are in constant circulation, and thus the basic oppositions that inform classical Marxism are destabilized. Eco's semiotic theory, particularly in the notion of code switching and radical invention, constitute perhaps the most definitive solution to problem of the circularity of oppositions in Marxist critique, and it would be odd for this reason that Eco does not occupy a more prominent position in Monticelli's

work, were it not for the fact of how effectively Eco has been falsely rehabilitated against just this application.

Unlimited semiosis is next mentioned in direct connection with Derrida's deconstruction, in Eco's Indiana University *Distinguished Lecturer Series 1* address: "Drift and Unlimited Semiosis" (Eco 1989), which is reprinted and popularized in *The Limits of Interpretation* as "Unlimited Semiosis and Drift: Pragmaticism and Pragmatism"¹⁸ (Eco 1990: 23–43). Both versions of Eco's text state that unlimited semiosis "has been frequently quoted in order to characterize another form of drift [besides the medieval notion of hermetic drift], namely that extolled by deconstruction" (Eco 1989: 8; 1990: 32).

Other than the revised subtitle, the two texts are nearly identical, absent a series of incidental changes to the latter: two examples of "metaphysical realism (let us say, the one advocated by Aquinas or by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* are added (Eco 1990: 24); the addition is made of a list of rhetorical practices under the rubric of similarity by Giulio Camillo Delminio (Eco 1990: 25); one reference to Proust's madeleine is added (Eco 1990: 30); a lengthened version of the Richard Rorty quote on page 9 of the original is inserted (Eco 1990: 33); an additional paragraph is added about "zero-degree meaning" (Eco 1990: 36); three more quotes from Peirce supporting unlimited semiosis on pages 37–38 are given; another quote from Peirce about the meaning of propositions is considered on page 40; and a comment is made about the role of the community of inquirers in the process of knowledge on page 41.

The most substantial discrepancy between the two texts is the extended conclusion of the later one, where he amends the closing qualification of the earlier text ("It could be objected that I have insisted too much on the differences between Peirce's positions and various forms of drift" (Eco 1989: 15), by adding that "to reach an agreement about the nature of a text does not mean either (a) that the interpreters must trace back to the original intention of its author or (b) that such a text must have a unique and final meaning" (Eco 1990: 41).

Unlimited semiosis in Eco is applied to literary theory and textual interpretation, and is consonant with Barthes's anti-intentionalist 'death of the author', where the status of author/sender as a factor in the determination of the meaning of the text is suspended. Remember that the sender has no place in Eco's interpretative semiotic. Regarding the death of the author and its place in deconstruction, in the below excerpt Eco expresses clear sympathy with both Barthes and Derrida, while maintaining that the exclusion of the sender from the sign model need not entail any kind of basic relativism.

To affirm that a sign suffers the absence of its author and of its referent does not necessarily mean that it has no objective or literal meaning. But Derrida wants to

¹⁸ The appropriateness of this revision to the subtitle is borne out by the importance of Peirce's MS318 for the dispute over the legitimacy of unlimited semiosis. The manuscript has two drafts, the first titled "Pragmatism" (EP 2: 398–432), and the second titled "A Survey of pragmaticism" (CP 5.467–496).

establish a practice (which is philosophical more than critical) for challenging those texts that look as though dominated by the idea of a definite, final, and authorized meaning. He wants to challenge, more than the sense of a text, that metaphysics of presence both of an interpretation based on the idea of a final meaning. He wants to show the power of language and its ability to say more than it literally pretends to say. (Eco 1989: 8; Eco 1990: 33)

This passage and those surrounding it express a certain indifference regarding deconstruction which, given the ascendancy of Derrida at the time of their publication, can be read in different ways. Paolucci (2018) for instance describes unlimited semiosis as more of a rejection of deconstruction than an endorsement. The central qualifier of the quotation, this conspicuous ‘But’, suggests a disagreement between Eco and Derrida. If there is one, it is highlighted in the first sentence, and has to do with the absence of the referent. And here it is proper to emphasize the actual difference between deconstruction and Eco’s interpretative semiotics. In a theory that only considers the sign function, neither sender nor receiver are included in the discussion: when discussing correlations of expression and content strictly at the stratum of form, there is no concern for sender or receiver. But in addition to the sign function, Eco brings to consideration the domain of sign production, and here the stratum of substance is integrated to the model by considering the receiver.

Retroactivity, in its two forms, are the way in which the stratum of substance is integrated to the sign-function: signs are produced by means of this retroactive integration. Retroactivity is considered by deconstruction and second-generation semiology; however, within those approaches, its product is not given a definite name or privileged domain. In Eco, the product of retroactivity is given a name: its name is the interpretant, and its domain is sign production.

The interpretant is the basic concept that constitutes the ‘Peirce’, within the ‘Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid’. By giving a positive name and domain for the referent, Eco markedly differs from his predecessors in what will be called the ‘old semiotics’, and this positive name-giving does guard his doctrine from accusations of relativism. But this moderate realism of retroactivity is not the realism demanded by the Peirce nouveau: it is not a realism that would subordinate the textual practices of semiotics to the empirical sciences, for instance. And recall that Eco presents this moderate strain of realism alongside his critique of iconism and the typology of signs: the ‘sign types’ remain outside the sign function. It is also presented in tandem with a hermetic intertextuality that consistently erodes the primary level upon which any simplistic realism would be based.

3.3. Peircest rather than Peircean

Notably, in “Peirce’s notion of the interpretant” (Eco 1976) Eco remarks, “I do not dare outline here a theory of reference which would also take into account the psychology of perception and the possible semiotic definition of perceptive acts. Nor do I dare approach the Peircean theory of indexicality” (Eco 1976: 1465).

Interpretative semiotics leaves aside questions of real contiguity and causality, because any exhaustive account of these would open semiotics to the entire array of the physical sciences. This sentiment is repeated by Daylight as one of the virtues and defining characteristics of Saussurean semiology, as compared with the approach of Peirce.

To form an indexical sign, such as between smoke and fire, or between symptoms and their disease, a causal or ‘factual’ connection between signifiers and signifieds must be established. Culler comments on the unlikelihood of such a connection falling within Saussurean explanation:

Indices are, from the semiologists’ point of view, more worrying. If he places them within his domain he risks taking all human knowledge for his province, for all the sciences which attempt to establish causal relations among phenomena could be seen as studies of indices. (Culler 1975: 17) (Daylight 2012[2011]: 93)

In essence, this is just what applied semiotics does when it appends semiotic theory to any given secondary theory, but the discussion of the sign function purposefully postpones the enumeration of the latter, saving them for the specialists of their respective fields. Daylight and Culler repeat the critique of indexicality given already by Umberto Eco. In their opinion, notions such as icon or index are all-purpose, practical devices just as are the notions of ‘sign’ or ‘thing’. They can undoubtedly be used for normal purposes, but no satisfactory definition can be found for them in the present context.

Index as an all-purpose device carries a heavy load in Stjernfelt’s *Natural Propositions* (2014), where the notion of co-localization serves the purportedly indexical function of linking subject-icons to predicate-indexes, solving in one fell swoop the entire problem of the synthetic a priori in Kant: a generalization about an object can be made with certainty, but you just had to be there. Indexes and co-localization do not solve the problem of how to validate the universality of inferences, but merely bypass it. This matter is raised again in Chapter Five, but suffice it to say, Daylight and Culler’s skepticism about the all-purpose use of the index is well founded. As Eco puts it, “The reason is simple: such a trichotomy postulates the presence of the referent as a discriminant parameter, a situation which is not permitted by the theory of codes proposed in this book” (Eco 1979[1976]: 178).

Stjernfelt’s problem with Eco there, among other problems, is his ‘anti-scientific’ attitude, that would demarcate semiotics from empirical science. Stjernfelt also sees this as a problem in the formalism of Hjelmlev – the advantages of this demarcation are obvious, for preserving the disciplinary identity of semiotics, but if the sign function is so restricted, the question remains to what extent this theory aligns with the evidently more expansive notion of semeiotics envisaged by Peirce, and championed by Short and the rest of the Peirce nouveau. Is Eco’s adumbration of Peirce’s sign, such that it moderates the place of the referent, so contrary to Peirce’s own aims that it should be condemned? Eco is earnest in the question: “Is this interpretation of Peirce philologically, and philosophically,

correct? I understand how ironical my question can sound. If Derrida assumed that his interpretation is the good one he should also assume that Peirce's text had a *privileged meaning* to be isolated, recognized as such and spelled out unambiguously" (Eco 1989: 11; 1990: 335).

Eco does not license any-thing goes free-wheeling interpretation, and this moderation applies to the texts of Peirce also. But at the same time, it is clear that Eco does not feel the same obligation for total fidelity to the presumed intentions of Peirce himself, as Short and Stjernfelt seem to do. Another omission between the text of "Peirce's notion of the interpretant" (Eco 1976) and its reprinting in *The Role of the Reader* (1984[1979]) is instructive in this regard. In the former, Eco begins the article by distinguishing the "Peircean" from the "Peircest" in terms of their differing degrees of fidelity to Peirce's texts:

I hope that the work of the "Peirceans" may give us more and more information about the "authentic" thought of Peirce and its historical development; but I want to make explicitly clear that my present approach has to be labelled "Peircest". In other words, utilizing some categories provided by Peirce, I will show how they can be inserted into the framework of the present semiotic discussion in order to solve contemporary theoretical problems. (Eco 1976: 1458)

In the later version of this text, Eco opted to remove this part, but he probably should have left it where it was. This dispute about fidelity is repeated in Chapter Five, where Stjernfelt's critique of Deacon's use of Peirce is discussed. There, it becomes clear that Stjernfelt's main problem with Deacon is not that Deacon's use of Peirce is inconsistent or unproductive; his problem is only that Deacon does not demonstrate the familiarity with the writings of Peirce that Stjernfelt would like to see. Because Deacon has not personally inspected the unpublished writings of Peirce, his interpretation is dismissed, regardless of the fruit of its application. It is the same situation with Short's critique of Eco's use of Peirce. Short's argument against unlimited semiosis rides almost entirely upon claims made in one of Peirce's unpublished manuscripts, which itself has two versions.

It is shown later how the second version of this manuscript may indeed be read to support unlimited semiosis. In other words, expertise and fidelity are invoked provincially, allegedly to protect the intention and integrity of Peirce's work, but this provincialism is unwarranted. In the case of Short's critique of Eco, not only does he ignore the fact that Eco does not care about total fidelity to Peirce, he also makes sweeping assertions about the 'correct' interpretation of Peirce that prove to be unsubstantiated. Therefore, the argument of the section is two-fold: the first is that the matter of unlimited semiosis is not so cut and dried as Short wants to portray it; and the second is that even if Eco's reading of Peirce is somewhat selective, it remains valid anyhow in the context of hermetic intertextuality.

3.3.1. The dynamic object is not the thing in itself

The answer to the question “Is this interpretation of Peirce philologically, and philosophically, correct?” cannot be answered definitively in the negative. Eco defends Derrida’s reading of Peirce; Eco notes additional passages from Peirce supporting unlimited semiosis that are not cited by Derrida; Eco strongly disagrees with John Searle’s assessment that “Derrida has a distressing penchant for saying things that are obviously false” (Searle 1977: 203, discussed in: Eco 1984: 11; 1990: 36); Eco compares Derridean undecidability with Peircean indeterminacy;¹⁹ finally, and most importantly, Eco defends Derrida against the now commonplace accusations of relativism and nihilism. Unlimited semiosis is not an attempt to foist upon Peirce some kind of culturalist postmodernism.

Derrida would be – and indeed was – the first to deny that we can always use language as an instance of drift and the first to reject the claim that there are no criteria for verifying the reasonableness of a textual interpretation. In *Grammatology* he reminds his readers that “without... all the instruments of traditional criticism... critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything”. (Eco 1989: 12; 1990: 37)²⁰

¹⁹ In the reprinted version of Eco 1989 a quotation from Peirce is added pertaining to vagueness and indeterminacy: “A sign is objectively vague insofar as in leaving its interpretation more or less indeterminate it reserves for some other possible sign or experience the function of completing the determination (4.505)” in: Eco (1990: 37–38). Uwe Wirth’s “Derrida and Peirce on indeterminacy, iteration, and replication” (2003) goes into this comparison in some detail, noting that Peirce’s indeterminacy and Derrida’s undecidability are inequivalent but complementary terms. Mihai Nadin (1980) also explores Peircean indeterminacy.

²⁰ On the topic of the common dismissal of Derrida and the Frankfurt School as postmodern relativist nihilists, Terry Eagleton puts it even more eloquently in his debate with conservative philosopher Roger Scruton in 2012: “I think there *was* a period, between perhaps the 1970s and 1980s, when the left was *too* negative, deconstructive in the bad, in the negative, sense, and not socially *affirmative* about culture. But you see I think there is also a very important leftist tradition *of* that affirmation. You mentioned the Frankfurt school Roger, but as it were in connection purely with dismantling structures of domination. The Frankfurt school of course also has a very positive tradition of utopian thought about culture, and so I think that the left in general... I mean Fred Jameson, the greatest Marxist critic in the United States certainly, is very much concerned with that, and one part of the problem I think for me is to get those two approaches into some sort of reasonable alignment. I don’t, I mean *of course* I don’t agree that Marxism or the left is only in to debunking, nor the point that that is something to be approved of, nor actually do I think that deconstruction is purely negative. That’s a rather, if I may say so, *clichéd* view of it. I mean, Derrida himself always insisted – and as we used to say, you have to be *Parisian* to say this: deconstruction says ‘yes!’ And he was a man who actually on his deathbed left a note, read by his son at his funeral, saying that life must be *affirmed*, and asking his friends to smile upon him, as he was smiling upon them. These were not the words of a nihilist, or a debunker, as those who *disgracefully* tried to refuse him an honorary degree at the University of Cambridge seemed to think.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOdMBDOj4ec> (16:25–18:35)

At the same time, there is more credibility to Derrida's deconstruction of Peirce than initially meets the eye. The matter of the realism of Peirce is not so rock solid as it is portrayed by Short. It is now sufficient merely to contest some of Short's main points about Peirce, to defend Eco's usage, and this means confronting directly the topics that seem most contrary to hermetic and unlimited semiosis. Eco concedes, "But there are other ideas in Peirce that seem to undermine Derrida's reading. [...] We cannot disregard the realistic overtones of Peirce's idealism. [...] Semiosis is unlimited and, through the series of interpretants, explains itself by itself, but there are at least two cases in which semiosis is confronted with something external to it" (Eco 1989: 13; 1990: 38).

In fact, there are really three cases, if iconism may be treated on its own terms. Eco's critique of iconism (and Stjernfelt's response to Eco's critique) is discussed in Chapter Five, and here only the first two cases of the Peircean external are addressed.

The first case is the one of indices. I am eager to challenge Peirce's idea that indices, in order to be understood as signs, must be connected to the object they designate. (I think it is possible to define the meaning of an indexical sign without making recourse to its actual referent; see Eco 1976: 2.11.5).²¹ But it is irrefutable that in the act of indication (when one says *this* and points his fingers toward a given object of the world), indices are in some way linked to an item of the extralinguistic or extrasemiotical world. (Eco 1989: 13)

Once a system of code and signification is established, icons and indexes can be described independently of a referent; however, because their difference from symbols consists precisely in the motivation of the relation between sign and referent, one cannot speak of the genesis of icons and indexes without also implying a referent of some kind. So when one takes signification in isolation from communication, one can define icons and indices without referents, but when one takes communication and signification together, the presence of the referent does indeed bear upon the sign. Ultimately, both the problem of the index as well as the reality of icons and similarity can be reduced to what Peirce calls the dynamic object, the second case in which semiosis is confronted with something external.

The second case²² is due to the fact that every semiotic act is determined by a Dynamic Object which "is the Reality which by some means contrives to determine the sign to its representamen" (4.536). We produce representamens because we are compelled by something external to the circle of semiosis. [...] It is true that for Peirce the Dynamic Object can never be attained in its actual individual identity but is known only through the Immediate Object, and it is as an Immediate Object that the representamen offers it to further interpretations. (Eco 1990: 39)

²¹ In *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990) the preceding sentence is included as a footnote.

²² Regarding the second case in which semiosis is confronted with something external to it, there are some incidental differences between the 1989 version and its reprint in 1990. The second "one" (Eco 1989: 13) becomes the second "case" (Eco 1990: 38) and what is called the "Dynamical" object (Eco 1989: 13) is later called the "dynamic" object (Eco 1990: 38).

The dynamic object is the object insofar as it is external to the sign relation – but one cannot apprehend the dynamic object other than by means of the immediate object, which is the object insofar as it is expressed by the sign. Due largely to the prodigious efforts of John Deely (2001; 2009; 2013), when it comes to the philosophical inheritance of Peirce, today it is commonplace to emphasize Duns Scotus and John Poinsett above all others. But as Eco says in *The Role of the Reader*, “The so-called Peircean medieval realism, with its taste for individual and concrete *realia*, should not be overestimated and should be always dialectically set against [Peirce’s] pragmatism” (1984[1979]: 193). This formulation is especially illuminating in the context of the two versions MS318: in the first version, what is called pragmatism entirely supports T.L. Short’s condemnation of unlimited semiosis; however, in the second version what is called pragmatism, in the formulation of habit-as-habit-change, supports Eco’s notion, and the possible fusion of Peirce with deconstruction. This is however not to say that there is no place for the referent in Eco’s reading of Peirce, or even Derrida’s. To understand Eco’s claim – that with unlimited semiosis Peirce developed the highest form of his realism – it is necessary to consider the notion of habit. The hard and fast epistemological break, which categorizes Peirce with realism and science on the one side, and Eco-Derrida with skepticism and nihilism on the other side, appears for what it is: a too-convenient generalization, which serves not much purpose other than disavowal. When the dynamic object is considered in this light, it becomes ambiguous at best whether Eco’s (and Derrida’s) deconstructive reading of Peirce is correct or not, and what it actually means to displace the referential aspect from the object to the interpretant becomes more clear.

I am simply repeating with Peirce that “an endless series of representations, each representing the one behind it [and until this point Derrida could not but agree with this formula], may be conceived to have an absolute object as its limit (1.339). Here appears something that cannot find a place within the deconstructive framework: outside the immediate interpretant, the emotional, the energetic, and the logical one – all internal to the course of semiosis – there is the final logical interpretant, that is, the Habit. (Eco 1990: 39)

Eco admits that there is something outside of the sign function, even something which impinges upon it, that may even change the sign function – as it factors into the sign, it is understood as the habit. Substance retroacts upon form in cyclical patterns of reactivity that may be called habits. From the late manuscripts of Peirce, Short produces a reading of habit that contradicts unlimited semiosis, and forms one cornerstone of the wedge driven between the Peirce nouveau and ‘the wrong crowd’. Short calls this wedge the ‘three flaws’. The three flaws are considered in the following, before deconstructing Short’s specific argument regarding the ultimate interpretant as a concrete habit of action.

3.3.2. Short's three flaws

Short's argument hinges primarily on one manuscript, on the basis of which he establishes a hard break in Peirce with the early 'thought-sign' doctrine and with unlimited semiosis. The change in Peirce's doctrine, decidedly away from mentalism and towards something closer to realism, is not in dispute. What is in dispute is Short's claim that the changes presented in the late manuscript call for the repudiation of unlimited semiosis; i.e., one can accept nearly everything Short says about Peirce's mature theory, and still accept unlimited semiosis as well as the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid upon which it is based. This fusion is, after all, precisely what Eco called for, in contrast with the way he is portrayed, as attempting to suborn Peirce's theory of signs to the interests of deconstruction and cultural relativism.

The 'first flaw' in early Peirce is the contention that thought lacks objects not constituted by thinking. The correction of this flaw, such as it is, is certainly necessary for upholding any Peircean semiotic realism. The charge from Short is that Eco and Derrida read Peirce in the register of his early 'thought-signs' doctrine such that this flaw remains unaddressed. Short would go so far even as to say that this flaw – the basic Kantian claim of the unknowability of *Ding an sich* – is integral to the concept of unlimited semiosis. Leaving aside Derrida, in the first place it is clear all the way from *The Role of the Reader* that Eco was well aware of how Peirce overcame of this flaw. Eco was obviously aware of Peirce's postulations of the index, and also of the dynamic object. Secondly, unlimited semiosis does not deny the place of mind-independent things and referents. On the contrary, when Eco asserts that unlimited semiosis is the highest manifestation of Peirce's realism, he does so exactly in the context of the 'ultimate interpretant', which is not another thought-sign, but a concrete habit of action where "unlimited semiosis stops" (Eco 1984[1979]: 194). The importance of indexes and dynamic objects is not lost on Eco. Eco's and Short's respective descriptions of the dynamic object do not differ substantially, but their conclusions differ in such a way that reflects the latter's rejection of unlimited semiosis, and the former's endorsement. Referring to the second and third 'flaws', Short notes that the these

two problems both derive from the doctrine that every thought-sign is interpreted in a subsequent thought-sign. The infinite *progressus* thus engendered is not itself a problem, implausible though it be. Problem the second is that, if a sign's significance depends on its actually being interpreted, then those interpretants cannot be mistaken. As a sign signifies what they say it signifies, significance may be assigned arbitrarily. Problem the third is that if significance depends on interpretants, actual or potential, being signs, then we have no noncircular account of what significance is. (2007: 43)

Short maintains that 'unlimited semiosis', as a Derridean reading of Peirce, is accurate to the early phase of Peirce labeled as 'thought-signs', but inaccurate to

the mature Peirce of, for example, that of MS318, whereafter and upon which basis unlimited semiosis is utterly refuted by Short. To what extent does MS318 so resolutely deny the place of unlimited semiosis? And are there no dissenters in the reading of this manuscript? Before answering these questions, Short's description of the modification of the 'thought-signs' doctrine deserves more attention. He cites Peirce to mark what he sees as the decisive change in his doctrine: "To satisfy our doubts, it is necessary that a method should be found by which our beliefs may be caused by nothing human, but by some external permanency – by something on which our thinking has no effect. (W3:253)" (Short 2007: 46). As he further adds, "To use the word 'external' to mean what is not at all constituted by thought – and yet without any qualification of its being an ideal limit of cognition or an unknowable thing-in-itself – is stunning" (Short 2007: 47).

The argument from Short is that Derrida and Eco read Peirce in a way that, although perhaps consonant with his early thought-signs doctrine, does not align with the later Peirce, after which he explicitly includes within the model of the sign a place for the referent. However, it is clear that at least Eco was aware of the later changes in Peirce's doctrine, and simply chose to interpret them differently. Eco allows for the referent, but incorporates it only by means of retroactivity, and demarcates the product of that retroactivity by separating sign function from sign production. While this seemingly slight displacement of the referential aspect of the object seems innocuous, Short is actually pretty shrewd to identify it for what it is, because it really is a way of reading Peirce that covertly opens him to worldviews and ways of thinking that are evidently inimical to Short's own way of seeing things. One should not downplay the radicalism of this displacement. Those who would downplay it would at the same time legitimize Short's disavowal, as if to suggest that Eco needs rehabilitating, and should be distanced from deconstruction, and that semiotics has nothing to do with all that unsightly business. But despite all the protestations, semiotics remains deeply implicated in hermetic deconstruction, with all its divisive political and metaphysical associations. Semiotics resists appropriation and instrumentalization on this basis. The only question is whether Peirce may be read into this vision of semiotics, or if it really is a distortion of the texts of Peirce, to portray it this way. The following section argues the former, and sides with Eco in the project of using Peirce for ideology critique, on the basis of a closer look at MS318. Chapter Five returns to the problem of detotalizing Peirce from a broader perspective.

3.3.3. MS318 – Habit change and the ultimate interpretant

In the context of the above observations, a quote from Short bears repeating. "It was not until 1907, at the age of sixty-eight, seven years before his death, that [Peirce] made the final decisive change in his semeiotic." The quote continues, "That was within a manuscript, MS318, that consists of labyrinthine multiple

drafts of an unfinished article; it has never been published in its entirety.”²³ Short’s discussion of MS318 is under the sub-chapter “10. 1907: The Last Flaw Corrected” (Short 2007: 56). The last flaw is the circular definition of the sign, implicit to the contention under the ‘thought-signs’ doctrine where, “until 1907, (Peirce) had supposed that a logical interpretant (not so named except in MS318) is always another intellectual sign”. But in MS318: “I do not deny that a concept, or general mental sign, may be a logical interpretant; only, it cannot be the ultimate logical interpretant, precisely because, being a sign, it has itself a logical interpretant” (cited by Short as: NEMIII/1: 493–494). It is here that the ultimate interpretant is introduced, a term which is only used briefly by Peirce, but which has served to entirely reconfigure his semiotics. The ultimate interpretant itself is not a sign and constitutes the end of the chain of semiosis. According to Short’s reading of Peirce, there must always be an ultimate interpretant, which suggests that unlimited semiosis is a fiction. As he says: “That is a stunning reversal of his earlier view. Meaning is not an endless translation of sign into sign. There must always, in every case, be an interpretant that is ultimate in the sense of not being yet another sign” (Short 2007: 57).

The ‘meaning’ of the sign as the ultimate interpretant, and the ‘signification’ of the sign as the (pursuit of) the final interpretant, can be paired with the opposition of pragmatism and pragmaticism. Pragmatically (or for all practical purposes), the meaning of the sign consists only in the habit of action to which that sign gives rise, and which does not depend on any further interpretation.

Pragmatically (or in principle) however, that terminus in the chain of semiosis is no sign until it is articulated in signification and contributes to the modification of future habits of sign production. Think: ‘ultimately all of our recycled bottles end up in the landfill’, but ‘in principle recycling is a good habit to maintain.’

Parsing the matter along the lines of pragmatism and pragmaticism seems true to the manuscript in question (MS318) because, as Winfried Nöth points out, there are in fact two variants of this manuscript, one titled “Pragmatism” (EP 2: 398–433) and the other “A Survey of Pragmaticism” (CP 5.476–96). Nöth’s article “Habits, habit change, and the habit of habit change according to Peirce” (Nöth 2016: 35–63) presents a complementary reading of MS318 to Short’s reading. Where Short stresses the aspect of the unchanging habit as the terminus of semiosis, Nöth points out a seeming contradiction in the doctrine of the ultimate interpretant, in the postulation of habit as habit change: “Peirce was aware of the apparent self-contradiction inherent in the notion of the habit of habit change. While habit implies continuity, habit change implies discontinuity. Both at the same time, seem to imply a paradox” (2016: 40).

In the first place, Nöth is here sensitive to the dialectical character of Peirce’s thought, even up till his final days, refractory to ongoing attempts to impose closure on the system or to establish definitive breaks or ‘stunning reversals’ within

²³ The parts published in the *Collected Papers* are in 1.560–2, 5.11–13, and 5.464–496. Other parts are in NEMIII/1: 489–494 and EP2: ch. 28. But not all the parts have as yet been published, much less published together [Short’s original footnote].

it. Nöth does not openly disagree with Short's somewhat different construal of the notion of the ultimate interpretant, but points out that within the two variants of the same manuscript Peirce willfully presents two contradictory views about the determination of the sign, one of which seems to make recourse to an object-referent (as a concrete habit), and one which seems to displace that role to the place of the interpretant (as habit change and unlimited semiosis): "One solution to this paradox [...] is the uncertainty of mental action, which forbids habits to become an absolute necessity and accounts for the plasticity of habits, which in turn is the root of intellectual life" (Nöth 2016: 40).

For Nöth, the ultimate interpretant cannot be the source of all meaning. Short describes the ultimate interpretant as the fixation and crystallization of significance into a definite and unchanging habit, after which there is no need for further interpretation. Short uses the ultimate interpretant as a bulwark against deconstruction and indeterminacy, but Nöth says this bulwark would terminate meaning entirely. According to Nöth's reading of Peirce,

Habits would become wooden and ineradicable and, no room being left for the formation of new habits, intellectual life would come to a speedy close. Thus, the uncertainty of the mental law is no mere defect of it, but is on the contrary of its essence. [...] There always remains a certain amount of arbitrary spontaneity in its action, without which it would be dead (CP 6.148, 1891). (2016: 41)

Without a doubt, Peirce is deeply interested in extension, concrete reference, and empirical reality, and to read Peirce with a special interest in indeterminacy and unlimited semiosis is to read Peirce against the grain. If Eco were not so clear that this is just what he is doing when he calls himself 'Peircest' rather than 'Peircean', this reading could be seen as opportunistic, yet it is the opposite which is the case.

It is rather opportunistic of Short to privilege the one reading of MS318 over the other, and assert that any readings to the contrary are wrong. Eco, Short, and Nöth all agree that the revision of the 'thought-signs' doctrine is important. Nöth notes the importance of the correction as it is described by Short: "With this shift from a semantic to a truly pragmatic theory of meaning, Peirce succeeds, as Short put it, to 'break out of the hermeneutic circle of words interpreting words and thoughts interpreting thoughts'" (2007: 59) (Nöth 2016: 60). But the three flaws corrected and the modification of the 'thought-signs' doctrine do not preclude the translation of sign into sign as intrinsic to the sign function. Again, this point is best borne out by the contradictions between the two variants of MS318. Nöth describes the difference between the two manuscripts in this way:

Another version of the same MS, published in CP 5.476–96 under the title "A Survey of Pragmatism" seems to display a significant difference in the definition of habit involved in the ultimate logical interpretant of an intellectual concept. While "Pragmatism" offers a version of MS 318 according to which the ultimate logical interpretant of a concept is the cause of a habit living in the "kind of action to which the concept gives rise" (EP 2: 418), the "Survey" characterizes the same habit as a habit of habit change. (Nöth 2016: 60)

It is noteworthy that, having just cited Short on page 59 of his article, Nöth on page 60 goes ahead to compare the notion of habit as habit change with none other than Derrida himself. Nöth writes, “In an almost, but not entirely, Derridean vein, Peirce’s evolutionary pragmatism postulates that the ultimate meaning of a concept lies in a distant future, and that its discovery is always postponed” (Nöth 2016: 60).

No doubt Eco had to read Peirce selectively at great lengths in order to find just what he was looking for, and spin it back out into the intertextual braid that constitutes *A Theory of Semiotics*. In the metalinguistic retroactivity that happens there, the presumed primary object-language falls through the floor, the concrete referent recedes into the horizon, and metalanguage piles upon metalanguage to absurd regress – only sustained non-identity with the belief system gives access to reality here. Though Eco finds what he’s looking for in Peirce, this does not mean that what he finds has anything to do with what Peirce wanted. When described in this way, the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid does begin to sound like the sort of unholy union Short is worried about. Indeed, the danger may be more grave than he realizes.

3.4. Signomancy in *Foucault’s Pendulum*

The storm in the teacup also rages around Eco’s most byzantine novel. As usual, the most popular interpretation is the one which allows the reader to say something about the book that sounds smart, without actually being accountable to the text. It is especially tempting in the case of *Foucault’s Pendulum*, where one finds it taxing to give any persuasive summary of events. One approach is to say that the critique of hermetic semiosis allegedly given in the novel parallels the critique of deconstruction allegedly given by Eco elsewhere. Peter Bondanella’s (1997) review of *Foucault’s Pendulum* toes a moderate line, citing *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* to the effect that “while the intention of the work cannot be reduced to a pre-textual intention of the Empirical Author (thereby agreeing with both New Critics and Deconstructionists), an understanding of this Empirical Author’s intention nevertheless may serve to assist the Model Reader [...] in excluding or discarding certain unlikely, improbable, or even impossible interpretations of a text” (Bondanella quoted by Capozzi 1997: 286).

The stigma associated with deconstruction and psychoanalysis is strong, and finds expression also in the discussion of the novel. Following the above quotation, Bondanella goes on to infer that the occult self-financing authors featured in the novel are meant to be parodies of literary deconstruction, “best reflected by the crack-pot theories held by many of the ‘diabolicals’ in *Foucault’s Pendulum*” (Bondanella quoted by Capozzi 1997: 286).

That Eco views self-publishing occultists with some disdain is a reasonable assertion. That he holds deconstruction and psychoanalysis at the same level is hardly credible, and statements that the content of *Foucault’s Pendulum* “involves a devastating value judgment [...] upon certain contemporary trends in literary

theory associated with Jacques Derrida, Deconstructionism, and Michel Foucault” (Bondanella quoted by Capozzi 1997: 298) must be openly challenged. To gloss the massive work that is *Foucault’s Pendulum* as merely a critique of deconstruction is pure disavowal, in its failure to perform any real exegesis of the text itself, to reconstitute any of its main plot points, or to address any of the major questions posed in the novel regarding its main characters, such as: what was the real cause of Diotallevi’s death? Was Casaubon’s girlfriend Amparo really possessed by a demon in Brazil? And was Lia right that the Ingolf document was just a laundry list, and not the key to the mystery of the Knights Templar?

The novel does not yield concrete answers to these questions, but honest interrogation of these central issues leads the model reader to infer a certain cautious open-mindedness on the part of Eco himself regarding for example the actual status of the Gnostic Templar plan, which is the central object of the novel. The aporia left by these unanswered questions also puts the reader into confrontation with the absent center of Eco’s work, and into an uncomfortable position as a critic trying to write about the work, to draw suppositions against a novel that has no tangible core, much like the apocryphal manuscripts at the heart of the Plan.

Linda Hutcheon (1992) approximates the book with more eloquence, when she observes that “With the proliferation of apt intertextual echoes like these, Eco enacts both what he has called ‘hermetic drift’ and Peirce’s ‘unlimited semiosis’” (Hutcheon quoted by Capozzi 1997: 319). But any such theoretic glosses still do an injustice to the novel, which must be dealt with through direct exegesis, for them to have any persuasive bearing upon the questions at hand.

3.4.1. “It was then that I saw Amparo”

After Casaubon completes his thesis on the Knights Templar in Milan, he travels to Brazil with his new love, and takes up a lecture position in Italian. He observes a schism of beliefs among her social group. While the majority are Marxists, they are more divided on spiritual matters. Some of them view the religions of Brazil as revolutionary tools, and others see all religion as a way in which the aristocracy keeps down the worker by funneling their angst into primitive rituals and away from organized political action. Amparo herself cleaves to the classical Marxist view of religion as the opiate of the masses, and in this she is at one with Casaubon. Casaubon is led to investigate the Brazilian religious rites out of curiosity inspired by coincidences he observes, between his study of the Templar and the syncretic icons that litter Rio de Janeiro. The hybrid tradition of the Brazilian spiritual landscape does not seem so different to him from what he has seen of the actual traditions of Europe. “Suddenly it all seemed to come together: Satanic and Moorish rites in the Temple of Jerusalem, African witchcraft for the sub-proletarians of the Brazilian Northeast, the message of Provins with its hundred and twenty years, and the hundred and twenty years of the Rosicrucians” (Eco 2001[1988]: 171).

At one of the first rituals, Casaubon and Amparo encounter the singular character of Signor Agliè, an impresario of all things esoteric. Agliè later assists the trio in their occult publishing venture, and finally turns out to be the villain of the novel, the leader of the real secret society, and kidnapper of Casaubon's colleague Jacopo Belbo. From their first meeting it is implied that Agliè is either immortal or at least long-lived beyond the span of normal human life. It is raised only as a joke at first, in the context of esoteric banter. "Agliè replied modestly: 'Only what little I've seen of them'. Amparo tried again: 'But wasn't it two thousand years ago?' 'I'm not as young as you are', Agliè smiled" (Eco 2001 [1988]: 175). What begins as a joke gradually becomes more serious. "When we were home again, Amparo said to me: "Did you see his hand? Instead of the life line, he has a series of broken lines. Like a stream that comes to a stone, parts, and flows together again a meter farther on. The line of a man who must have died many times" (Eco 2001[1988]: 188).

Agliè is unsurprised that Casaubon is an expert in the Templars, and one is led to believe that their meeting is no accident, although no further comment is made upon it. Casaubon and Amparo are totally oblivious to Agliè's suspicious consideration and endless knowledge. Agliè describes the difference between the two principal types of ritual, the *candomblé* and the *umbanda*. "The *umbanda* must not be confused with the *candomblé*. The latter is completely indigenous – Afro-Brazilian, as they say – whereas the former is a much later development born of a fusion of native rites and esoteric European culture, and with a mystique I would call *Templar*..." (Eco 2001[1988]: 176).

The early rituals they attend in Bahia on the recommendation of Agliè are of the *candomblé* variety, and they have no dramatic effect. The ritual that strikes them all, but especially Amparo, is the syncretic *umbanda* ritual on the outskirts of Rio. Casaubon assumes the trance effects experienced by many participants have something to do with the incense that is used during the rituals: "Pungent fumes filled the hall and dazed both worshipers and observers, somehow hitting everybody – me included – in the stomach. But the same thing had happened to me at the *escolas de samba* in Rio. I knew the psychological power of music and noise, the way they produced Saturday night fevers in discos" (Eco 2001[1988]: 211).

The same incense is used at the Alchemists' party in Piedmont (Eco 2001 [1988]: 343–347), when Casaubon sees the homunculi, as well as at the final tribunal at the end of book, when the white foam spilling from the alembics "grew vaguely human in appearance" (Eco 2001[1988]: 590–591); the effect of the hallucinatory incense is vividly described after Casaubon escapes the tribunal at the end of the book. He staggers through the streets of Paris projecting the whole phantasm of his esoteric learning onto the sides of buildings and the faces of passersby, culminating in his sinister vision of the Eiffel Tower at the center of the Plan, that "misshapen emblem of useless strength, [...] absurd wonder, meaningless pyramid, guitar inkwell, [...] criminal!, sinister pencil sharpener!" (Eco 2001[1988]: 609). In both cases, at the tribunal as well as the alchemists' party, the hallucinations attend on what appears to be the creation of artificial life. Neither protagonist nor reader can be sure just how to describe the difference.

The account of the umbanda ritual in Rio is taken directly from Eco's own experience in Brazil, printed in the early *Travels in Hyperreality*, as "Whose Side are the Orixà on?" (Eco 1986[1973]: 103–112). It includes some of the descriptions of ritual history and difference, the German sociologist unable to achieve ritual submission no matter how many times she tries, as well as pieces of the account of Amparo's possession. To the skeptic Eco warns, "I have seen visiting nonbelievers, particularly susceptible, fall into a trance like ripe fruit" (Eco 2001 [1988]: 109). Eco records conversation with a "pai-de-santo" before the ritual, a male priest of the religion. The priest tells him that in the umbanda ritual "Exù and his mate, the lascivious Pomba-Gira, possess human bodies in trance" (Eco 1986[1973]: 105). It is presumably Pomba-Gira who occupies the body of Amparo when she falls under the trance. Eco records his own experience in *Travels*, how he saw it all himself, as one after another devotee fell into such trances.

And meanwhile, one by one, many of the initiated make the physical and mystical leap; you see them suddenly stiffen, their eyes glazed, their movements automatic. Depending on which of the Orixàs visits them, their movements celebrate his nature and powers: soft gestures of the hands, waved, palms down at the sides, as if swimming, for those possessed by Yemanjá; slow bent movements, those of Oxalá will be covered with special veils, because their fortune has been great and exceptional. (Eco 2001[1988]: 109)

The incense is already heavy before the Rio umbanda starts, and Amparo steps outside for a moment to get some air, while Casaubon tries to immerse himself in the event. He pours sweat, and someone hands him an agogô, "a small gilded instrument like triangle with bells" (Eco 2001[1988]: 212). He strikes the agogô and moves to the music. Casaubon intellectualizes the affair all the while that his senses are assaulted. He observes as more mediums fall into trance, while others who are denied the trance pay homage to the vessels. He sees as the German sociologist is once again denied the experience. The sentence is separated into its own paragraph, for emphasis: "It was then that I saw Amparo" (Eco 2001[1988]: 213).

I saw her fling herself into the midst of the dancing, stop, her abnormally tense face looking upward, her neck rigid. Then, oblivious, she launched herself into a lewd saraband, her hands miming the offer of her own body. "A Pomba Gira, a Pomba Gira!" some shouted, delighted by the miracle, since until then the she-devil had not made her presence known. (Eco 2001[1988]: 214)

The possession is brief, after which Amparo appears not to know where she is, and the usual aids and supplicants approach her. "They led her to a chair. She was soaked with sweat and breathed with difficulty. She refused to welcome those who rushed over to beg for oracles. Instead, she started crying" (Eco 2001[1988]: 214). The whole ordeal constitutes a serious blow to Amparo herself, and the very next day is the last time that Casaubon ever sees her. Theresa Coletti gives an insightful interpretation of Amparo's possession, in her article "Bellydancing:

Gender, silence, and the women of *Foucault's Pendulum*" (discussed by Capozzi 1997: 285–299).

First, Coletti restates the common interpretation of Eco's book as little more than a parody of hermetic semiosis. Then she makes the extension, that according to this reading, one should receive the Amparo episode with some disinterest, in the same way that the intertextual activities of the publishing trio that take place later, should also be viewed with rational skepticism, or even as what the character Lia later calls "a nasty joke" (Eco 2001[1988]: 540).

While Coletti seems to more or less agree that this reading just is what Eco intended, she also keenly observes that such a skeptical reading decidedly diminishes the role of women in the novel. In other words, to read the Plan as a fabrication entirely, is simultaneously to dismiss the account of Amparo – the same reader who finds the Gnostic Templar conspiracy theory too wild to imagine must also assume that Amparo's possession was a hallucination caused by the heavy incense and nothing more. As some have noted (Coletti 1997: 307), when compared directly with the account from Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality*, it is clear that Amparo's possession was based entirely on actual events.

In our party there is a fifteen-year-old European girl with her parents. They told her beforehand that if she wanted to come she would have to follow everything with close attention and respect, but with detachment, exchanging opinions with the others, not allowing herself to become involved. [...] Now the girl is sweating; she feels nausea, wants to go outside. [...] the girl clearly has mediumistic qualities, she has reacted positively to Ogùn, she must be cultivated. The girl wants to leave; her parents are frightened. (Eco 2001[1988]: 109)

If one is to take Coletti's "women of *Foucault's Pendulum*" seriously, one is forced to ask again in earnest the basic questions about *Foucault's Pendulum*. The most pressing questions must be posed directly: was Lia right? was the Ingolf document just a laundry list? And: what was the real cause of Diotallevi's death? The naïve reader finds easy answers to these questions that parallel the disavowal of deconstruction, but the model reader performing actual textual exegesis comes away from the book with more questions than answers.

3.4.2. The curse of Abulafia

The Ingolf document is the hypothetical first text in the series of texts that becomes the Plan as the trio of publishers conceive it. Before Project Hermes is even initiated, the men at the vanity publishing house in Milan are approached by a veteran named Colonel Ardeni, who recounts to them an incredible story. In France he has recovered a copy of a text that was found by a man named Ingolf, which allegedly presents evidence regarding the surviving lineage of the Knights Templar. He wants to publish a work about this text in order to draw the attention of the secret societies in hiding, who are still in search of the surviving Templars. Jacopo Belbo works in the publishing house and initially invites his friend

Casaubon because of his expertise in Templar history; Casaubon is skeptical of the authenticity of the text, and he learns that the publisher Belbo works for specializes in taking advantage of self-financing authors. Belbo makes Ardeni an offer. That same night, they learn that Ardeni has disappeared. After some interrogation the matter passes, and Belbo travels to Brazil. It is only years later that the whole matter of the Ingolf document is raised again. The actual status of the Ingolf document and its role in comprising the absent center of the Plan is an eloquent symbol of the hermetic aspect of unlimited semiosis. When Ardeni first offers to produce the document, he admits he does not have the original, but only a copy.

“Gentlemen, I will now show you this text. Forgive me for using a photocopy. It’s not distrust. I don’t want to subject the original to further wear.”

“But Ingolf’s copy wasn’t the original,” I said. “The parchment was the original.”

“Casaubon, when originals no longer exist, the last copy is the original.” (Eco 2001 [1988]: 131)

Long after Ardeni’s disappearance, the Ingolf document is reintroduced to the plot. In recent years the readership for occult and esoteric topics has skyrocketed, therefore a new publishing branch would be started, which would specialize in these topics. The owner of the publishing house has difficulty explaining at first just what the specific topic of the new branch is going to be.

“...in the shops I’m talking about they sell the authors who believe and the authors who say it’s all a fraud, provided the subject is – what do you call it?”

“Hermetic,” Diotallevi prompted.

“Yes, I believe that’s the right word. I saw at least a dozen books on Hermes. And that’s what I want to talk to you about: Project Hermes. A new branch...”

“The golden branch,” Belbo said.

“Exactly,” Garamond said, missing the reference. (Eco 2001[1988]: 268)

A master of ironic puns and allusion, Belbo obviously refers to James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Magic and Religion* from 1890. Without delay, they are inundated with manuscripts from potential self-financing authors with occult interests “and, by their very nature, they were legion” (Eco 2001[1988]: 268). But demand nevertheless outpaces supply. No matter how many diabolicals they manage to recruit, the readership for occult and esoteric pulp is unquenchable. There is perhaps no topic which finds a more avid audience than that which “says the opposite of what they read in their books at school”, as the owner puts it (Eco 2001[1988]: 261). The trio must find a way to produce more material, and this problem is what involves the talents of the third member of their group. Diotallevi is a computer-savvy cabalist. If the Ingolf document itself does not constitute the absent center of the Plan, then Abulafia, as they fondly name Diotallevi’s computer, suffices to fill this void with its text randomizing algorithms. Nearly at his wit’s end with demand, Casaubon requests another document from the stacks. Belbo

“found the one he was looking for and tried to slip it out, thus causing the others to spill to the floor. Folders came open; pages escaped their flimsy containers. [...] “Gudrun won’t be able to put them back together,” I said. “She’ll put the wrong pages in the wrong folders.”
“If Diotallevi heard you, he’d rejoice. A way of producing different books, eclectic, random books. It’s part of the logic of the Diabolicals.” (Eco 2001[1988]: 374)

In brief, Diotallevi rejoices. They use Abulafia to randomize the contents of the Ingolf document. From this randomization they devise a reconstructed Templar lineage which posits a 600-year schedule of meetings of the different sects, held once every 120 years. The new Plan inspires endless reams of fresh publications for Project Hermes. One key feature of the reconstructed plan is that somewhere in the line of meetings, one meeting was missed. The calamities of the twentieth century are supposed to be understood in terms of the failure to protect, transmit, or discover the Templar secret, which is some kind of ancient power source or evidence of a super-advanced ancient civilization. A more restricted summary of the Templar conspiracy theory is given in Eco’s collection of essays titled *Serendipities* in the opening essay “The force of falsity”, a lecture he gave at the University of Bologna in 1994 (Eco 1998: iix).

After their destruction by Philip the Fair, the Templars transformed themselves into a secret society to destroy the monarchy and the papacy. In the eighteenth century they took over the Masons and created a kind of academy whose diabolical members were Voltaire, Turgot, Condorcet, Diderot, and d’Alembert. From this little group originated the Jacobins, themselves controlled by an even more secret society, that of the Illuminati of Bavaria, regicides by vocation. The French Revolution was the final outcome of this conspiracy. Never mind that there were profound differences between secular and enlightened masonry and the masonry of the “Illuminati,” which was occultist and Templar; never mind that the myth of the Templars had already been exploded by a fellow traveler, who had traveled in a different direction, namely, Joseph de Maistre. The story was too fascinating to be derailed by fact. (Eco 1998: 14)

It is not completely clear how much Abulafia is involved in the production of further texts, or if it is merely the initial randomization of the Ingolf document that provides inspiration to the trio. At some point in the line of unlimited hermetic semiosis, the real master in hiding, Signor Agliè, notices a discrepancy in the trio’s accounts, a detail in their occult chronology which he cannot explain. Agliè decides that Belbo knows something he doesn’t, and this is what leads to the tribunal in Paris, where they attempt to extract the secret information from Belbo, killing him in the process. Somewhere between unleashing the curse of Abulafia and the climax of the book in Paris, Casaubon’s current girlfriend Lia notices that he has lost his characteristic cool. Casaubon confesses the whole plot of Project Hermes and the role of Abulafia to Lia. “Lia said: ‘Pow, I don’t like your story’” (Eco 2001[1988]: 33).

The argument with Lia is like one Eco may have had with a lover while writing his novel. Given the erudition and detail of his narrative, it seems likely that Eco

finds at least some elements of the reconstructed Templar lineage to be persuasive. For instance, what was the real source of the Templar's wealth and power after returning from the crusades? In the process of exploring all possible answers to this question, Casaubon appears to emerge ambivalent at best, and one might imagine Eco coming out of his research for writing *Foucault's Pendulum* with the same battered skepticism with which Casaubon left Brazil. The one certainty, however, is that because answers to these questions are so elusive, their pursuit can be a dangerous obsession. The disputable extent of this danger is illustrated by Diotallevi's sudden death from cancer, which he blames on the cabalistic activities of the Plan. But Lia is certain that "Your plan isn't poetic; it's grotesque. [...] I don't like it. It's a nasty joke" (Eco 2001[1988]: 540).

An interpretive stance that sides with the character of Lia would also discount the record of Amparo, not because there's no truth to it, but because it's simply safer to do so. To this extent she is probably right, but by the same argument, Eco should never have written this book. Lia snidely compares the hermetic activities of the publishing trio to the methods of psychoanalysis:

Imagine that a Viennese prankster, to amuse his friends, invented the whole business of the id and Oedipus, and made up dreams he had never dreamed and little Hanses he had never met...

And what happened? Millions of people were out there, all ready and waiting to become neurotic in earnest. And thousands more ready to make money treating them. (Eco 2001[1988]: 533)

Radical aesthetic invention appropriates an expressive substance for which there is no pre-existing content-form. This is the same procedure advised by Freudian dream interpretation, in which the signifiers of the dream are supposed to be divided from their contents and permuted in free association. Freud even went so far as to suggest that one may collect a number of recorded dreams and rearrange the pieces by theme and topic in order to construct a new picture of the personal unconscious. This is the derivation of one example of radical invention given in the appendix.

It is this sort of fabrication which Lia finds so reprehensible about psychoanalysis, the nasty joke she sees in Casaubon's plan. The way that Lia uses psychoanalysis broadly as a symbol for all that is unwholesome also reveals her misapprehension of the discipline. If a patient reports a dream that never happened, but the analysis still serves to differentiate critical latent thoughts, is that analysis still valid? Lia says no, but it is because Lia, in her attempt to marginalize psychoanalysis and the Plan, does not properly apprehend its critical insight.

As Theresa Coletti writes, the account that sides with Lia is also the one that marginalizes the women of *Foucault's Pendulum*. "For if, as Hutcheon suggests, the ironic vision of *Foucault's Pendulum* in the end keeps it from being simply an exemplar of the very hermetic semiosis it aims to critique, the novel's representations of women can only uneasily and incompletely be explained by that vision" (Coletti quoted by Capozzi 1997: 29). Casaubon gives Lia a copy of

the Ingolf document, and she spends a couple of days deconstructing it. In the end she concludes, “It’s a laundry list I tell you”, and she nearly persuades Casaubon of the same. “My God,” I said. “I think you’re right.” Lia prefers not to address some of the simpler questions, such as “Then why did Ingolf disappear?” (Eco 2001[1988]: 536). But to insist upon this point is to miss the real one. Let one assume that the Ingolf document really was just a laundry list. Does this make “the Plan” any less significant? The signomantic approach to radical invention says no.

According to Signor Agliè at least, the unique reasoning of hermetic semiosis is not concerned with the causal origin of the original text at all. Understanding why is the key task of Chapter Four. At their second meeting in Brazil, some time before Casaubon’s rational skepticism suffers its first blow, he challenges Signor Agliè’s magical thinking. Agliè rejoins,

“The knowledge I am talking about is diffuse and disjointed; [...] The trouble is that even the nineteenth-century occultists fell victim to the spirit of positivism: a thing is only true if it can be proved. [...] The belief that time is a linear, directed sequence running from A to B is a modern illusion. In fact, it can go from B to A, the effect producing the cause” [...]

“But at this point...”

“It is the whole idea of a ‘point’ that is mistaken.” (Eco 2001[1988]: 235)

In Chapter Four, the origins and history of this non-linear and a-causal logic are developed in more detail in the context of psychoanalysis. Specifically, the strategies of free association that happen in hermetic semiosis may be given more precise operational parameters. When those parameters are set, even the rationalistic paradigm of cognitive and biosemiotics may prove susceptible to the diabolical logic of signomancy.

The disavowal of retroactivity in all its forms – not just the disavowal of semiology, critical theory, and psychoanalysis – is like an immunological response. Lia’s instinctive condemnation of the Plan may not indicate that she doesn’t see what Casaubon sees, but rather that her drive for self-preservation remains intact, unlike his. Amparo’s possession in Brazil may have been legitimate – this does not mean one should get on the first plane to Brazil. In the same way, the radical aesthetic invention and retroactivity described here are not also a blind endorsement.

If taken seriously, the circumstances of Diotallevi’s death near the end of the book also spell out the dangers of signomancy, in that unnerving reconstructed cabalistic language that unravels the lives of all three of the men.

3.4.3. Destratification on Diotallevi’s deathbed

What draws the antagonism of Agliè down upon the trio is not the initial randomization of the Ingolf document by Abulafia, nor is it any ‘legitimate’ discovery of a lost secret. It is instead a willful distortion of Casaubon’s occult

chronology, the insertion of a detail that is known to be false. Agliè does not identify it as such; he does not recognize it at all, and this is what gives him the impression that the trio knows something he does not. It is after this point that he starts spending more time at the publisher. “Working like a machine for a week, I drew up a bewildering list of sects, lodges, conventicles. I occasionally shuddered on encountering familiar names I didn’t expect to come upon in such company, and there were chronological coincidences that I felt were curious enough to be noted down. I showed this document to my two accomplices” (Eco 2001[1988]: 421).

The list is a pretty comprehensive chronology of significant occult and hermetic orders, stretching from page 421 to 426. The chronology includes such well-established events as “1868: Bakunin founds International Alliance of Socialist Democracy” and “1909: From the Golden Dawn is born the Stella Matutina, which Yeats joins” (Eco 2001[1988]: 424–425), among other more dubious entries. Out of spite, or purely from the ingrained signomantic will to disorder, Belbo suggests, “Let’s add a sect that doesn’t exist. Founded recently.” They name the sect Tres, for “Templi Resurgentes Equites Synarchici” (Eco 2001[1988]: 426). When they show the chronology to Agliè, it is this item over which he pauses.

Then he stopped abruptly.

“Tres... Where does this come from? Which manuscript?”

Good, I thought, he’s noticed the interpolation. I answered vaguely: “Well, we put together the list from so many texts. Most of them have already been returned. They were plain rubbish. Do you recall, Belbo, where this Tres comes from?” [...]

We were terribly sorry, we didn’t remember.

Agliè took his watch from his vest. “Heavens, I have another engagement. You gentlemen will forgive me.” (Eco 2001[1988]: 434)

At this point Diotallevi is still healthy, Belbo is still in Milan, and one may assume Agliè is merely bothered that the trio is inventing things, but it is not long before the whole arrangement is unsettled. Agliè suspects the trio of possessing legitimate occult secrets, even the location of the next Templar meeting; he implicates Belbo in a train bombing and puts him under occult tribunal in Paris; Diotallevi’s terminal cancer is diagnosed and he is hospitalized; after his argument with Lia, Casaubon goes to Diotallevi’s deathbed to seek answers.

What Diotallevi tells Casaubon may be interpreted as nothing more than the deluded words of an anesthetized cabalist, ready to pursue any confirmation of his own vision. At the same time, Diotallevi is consistently portrayed as the rational one. While the others drink whiskey and wine, Diotallevi drinks only tonic. Whether a result of medication or of hermetic obsession, Diotallevi tells Casaubon that Belbo’s disappearance, as well as his own terminal illness, are the direct result of trio’s hermetic activities.

“Give me a little water. No, not the glass; wet that cloth... Thanks. Now listen. Rearranging the letters of the Book means rearranging the world. There’s no getting away from it. Any book, even a speller. People like your Dr. Wagner, don’t they say

that a man who plays with words and makes anagrams and violates the language has ugliness in his soul and hates his father?”

“But those are psychoanalysts. They say that to make money. They aren’t your rabbis.”

“They’re all rabbis. They’re all saying the same thing.” (Eco 2001[1988]: 565)

Intertextual experiment could reasonably have led to Belbo’s disappearance. Words may move mountains, in the simple sense that man may be motivated by words, and with enough men, any mountain may be moved, but words cannot cause cancer. Here one is dealing with fundamentally different levels – there is the level of mind and of culture, and then there is the level of matter, biology and the body.

What still informs scientific thinking today, is that this barrier remains inviolable, that the tools of science may not explain the creations of culture and vice versa, that the tools of culture have no purchase on matters of science. Terrence Deacon’s *Incomplete Nature* (2012a) rolls out a new approach to surpassing the nature-culture opposition in a non-reductive way, by bridging the discussion through self-organizing systems. It is argued in Chapter Five, that Deacon’s textual and aesthetic eclecticism is no mere ornament to the discussion of the origins of life, but actually an indispensable feature of that discussion. In the same way, Diotallevi pleads with Casaubon to understand how the transpositions and rearrangements of their retroactive dabbling may have a more than metaphorical link to what is happening in his own body as it destroys itself.

“And what are cells? For months, like devout rabbis, we uttered different combinations of the letters of the Book. GCC, CGC, GCG, CGG. What our lips said, our cells learned. What did my cells do? They invented a different Plan, and now they are proceeding on their own, creating a history, a unique, private history. My cells have learned that you can blaspheme by ana-grammatizing the Book, and all the books of the world. And they have learned to do this now with my body. They invert, transpose, alternate, transform themselves into cells unheard of, new cells without meaning, or with meaning contrary to the right meaning. There must be a right meaning and a wrong meaning; otherwise you die.” (Eco 2001[1988]: 566)

In his desperation Diotallevi forgets what the Rabbis knew, which was that whether or not there is a right meaning and a wrong meaning, you die either way. Clinging to a right and wrong meaning is rather the classic way to go on pretending like death will never come. The more interesting question for the rabbis was, how may the hermetic permutation of meaning during this life influence what happens after death? Against Lia’s interpretation, Linda Hutcheon concludes her essay on the *Pendulum* with an insight to hermetic deconstruction as ideology critique: “In both showing and ironizing the process of construction within the novel itself, Eco has produced an aesthetically self-reflexive mise-en-abyme of his own novelistic act and, at the same time, an ideologically de-naturalizing allegory of the structuralist insight that language constructs reality, rather than reflecting it” (Hutcheon quoted by Capozzi 1997: 321).

But it is important not to downplay the dangers involved in these procedures. The radical inventive intertextuality of *A Theory of Semiotics* constellates disconnected theories in order draw unexpected inferences, but does so in a way that is strictly guided and controlled, or so it is presented.

The hermetic practice of the publishing trio in *Foucault's Pendulum* on the other hand applies intertextuality in such a way as may be demonized, as the free-wheeling relativism and nihilism of bad deconstruction. Or so it seems. How much of the reconstructed Gnostic Templar plan might be true? Like the myth of the lost continent of Mu, it could just as well turn out to be the case, that what was inside the Ark of the Covenant was some kind of ancient power source, or that the dimensions and placement of the pyramids at Giza is a message to the future from a super advanced ancient civilization.

The model reader in any case cannot say for certain what Eco really thought about this, and for the same reason Eco's texts may be interpreted as much as an endorsement of hermetic semiosis as they are a critique. This aligns with Eco's basic theory of interpretation: the hopes and targets of the author are just one factor in the calculation of meaning. For instance, when Yeats makes his closing bargain with the gods in the last stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium", a number of associations may arise which he did not intend.

*Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.* (Yeats 1989[1983]: 193)

The reference to Frazer's book is once again obvious, but why does Yeats capitalize the "Emperor", and why is the Emperor drowsy? Tarot card instruction was central in the teaching of Stella Matutina, the hermetic order to which Yeats belonged. In the Major Arcana IV The Emperor symbolizes, among other things, the age of Osiris and patriarchy, the age which Aleister Crowley said supposedly came to an end during the twentieth century.

In Chapter Four, the use of Tarot cards as devices for intertextual constellation is developed in more detail. The substance of the poem is also repurposed in this direction. The signomantic argument is that the fact that Yeats did not intend the association makes it no less significant; but signomancy may go too far, and moderate aesthetic invention may become a stained-glass bead game, whose players end up destratified on their deathbeds like Diotallevi.

IV. SIGNOMANCY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

This chapter deals with dream interpretation, *I Ching*, and Tarot, from the perspective of psychoanalysis, and concludes by reviewing literature that deals with the comparison of psychoanalysis and the semiotics of Peirce. It is argued that retroactivity is best understood from the psychoanalytic viewpoint. In deconstruction, in ideology critique, and in hermetic semiosis, there is randomization. Retroaction happens in every detotalization, but a unified terminology for its description is still lacking. Retroactivity resists conceptualization even at this stage – only the most direct examples give sufficient indication of the measures required to regulate the universalizing movement of the connotative systems. Dream interpretation, *I Ching*, and Tarot are tools that utilize randomization directly, to facilitate free association and reassign the signifieds of memory. Thus, signomancy is the word used, for the quintessential non-identity of the black pyramid as it is described on the model of divination understood by psychoanalysis.

In the displacement of the referent described by the black pyramid schema, there is still a primary level and a secondary level. Naïve realism presumes that the regular action of the primary level gives direct access to the referent, however the schema shows how even the primary level is already divided from the perimeter of sign production, which is the domain of the referent.

The passage between the two levels of the schema is described in this chapter as the double distortion, and the schema shows how access to the referent is not made downward by a direct route, but rather upward through the distortion, towards the habit-changed interpretant. To move through the double distortion from referent to interpretant is to achieve a non-identical state of meditation in which the concrete object of semiotics appears.

The meaning of the sign is not determined by its fidelity to a presumed referent, but through the permutation of its different signifiers. When dream interpretation, *I Ching*, and Tarot are approached in this way, they are freed from the usual transcendentalist reading – the contents of the dream, the lines of the hexagrams, and the icons of the cards, have no special status; the act of shuffling cards or of throwing coins does not give voice to any supernatural power. Instead, it enacts the initial separation at the primary level, between sign function and referent. When that distortion is doubled at the secondary level it facilitates new connections and associations through retroactivity, producing a habit-changed interpretant, and this is the only means of achieving the referent.

When dream interpretation, *I Ching*, and Tarot are conceived in this formalistic, non-transcendental way, as tools for the differential articulation of the signifieds, it is called signomancy, and the strategies of signomancy help to explain the retroaction that happens everywhere in semiotics.

The non-identical conception of signomancy is captured best by the Lacanian assertion that the unconscious is not the drives and instincts, and this assertion is explored at length in the first subchapter. In the second subchapter, it is discussed how Herman Hesse uses the *I Ching* as a metaphor in his novel *The Glass Bead*

Game, for the signomantic act and its subversive application, the way it works against the connotative ideological systems. In the third part, Inna Semetsky's treatment of Tarot for semiotics education is discussed, and some Tarot cards are used to literally constellate the theoretic remainders. The chapter closes with a review of literature on Peirce and psychoanalysis.

4.1. Signomancy and the interpretation of dreams

In Figure 11, the Freudian psychoanalytic approach to dream interpretation is plotted to the black pyramid schema. In this application, the actual conditions and history of the dreamer as well as the prospective interpretation of that dream are located outside of the sign function. Freud's primary process as latent content or 'dream thought' is mapped to regular action, and the secondary process as manifest content or 'dream work' is mapped to retroaction.

Through the retrospective action of the secondary semiotic systems, the expression-content correlations informing the primary level dream thought are distorted and reconnected, signifiers reassigned to signifieds with new codes via the generation of a habit-changed interpretant, exiting the sign function at the top and moving toward the upper point of intersection with sign production, later providing the material for future hypostatizations and future dream thoughts in unlimited semiosis (Tamminen 2017). The way by which the interpretant is later recycled into the ground as the referent of the next sign is an empirical matter, multiply describable in the terms of any number of different typologies.

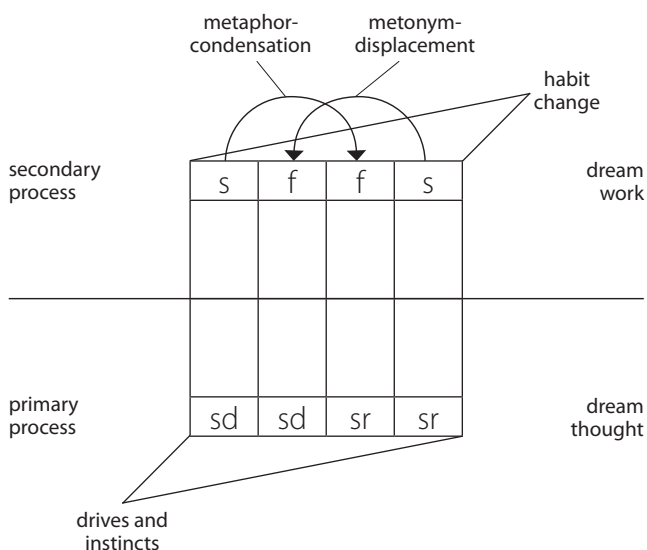


Figure 11: Dream interpretation on the black pyramid.

As Lacan has it, properly Freudian psychoanalysis is of no use for rehabilitating patients toward better socialization, but is meant to radicalize them against a society that is the ultimate source of their personal disorder. For instance here, Lacan emphasizes the radically non-identical implications of the primary distortion in Freud:

If we ignore the self's ex-centricity to itself with which man is confronted, in other words, the truth discovered by Freud, we shall falsify both the order and methods of psychoanalytic mediation; we shall make of it nothing more than the compromise operation that it has, in effect become, namely, just what the letter as well as the spirit of Freud's work most repudiates. (Lacan 2005[1977]: 130)

And here, he stresses that it is the failure to comprehend the primary distortion that leads to the misapprehension of the goals of psychoanalysis, and to what he considers to be the abomination of psychotherapy and ego psychology:

The academic restoration of this 'autonomous ego' justified my view that a misunderstanding was involved in any attempt to strengthen the ego in a type of analysis that took as its criterion of 'success' a successful adaptation to society – a phenomenon of mental abdication that was bound up with the ageing of the psychoanalytic group in the diaspora of the war, and the reduction of a distinguished practice to a label suitable to the 'American way of life.' (Lacan 2005[1977]: 234)

Leaving aside Lacan's attitude about the specifically American popularization of psychoanalysis, his insistence on the radically non-identical goal of psychoanalysis sets it worlds apart from the commonplace conception of the practice as a way for helping people become better, more responsible citizens. The specific view of psychoanalysis suggested by Lacan is what is later taken up as the leading principle of Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis, and it is this principle also, which gives psychoanalysis its place in the greater sinthome coordinates of detotalization.

4.1.1. The double distortion

Lacan's claim is that Freud anticipates Saussure, in the way that the interpretation of dreams recapitulates Saussure's claim that the signifier is not the phonological substance – the same point which Daylight belabors in such detail (Chapter One). For Lacan, it is the fact that so many miss this detail about Freud, which leads to the instrumentalist-psychiatric and the transcendentalist misapprehensions of psychoanalysis generally. The corollary Lacanian assertion, that the real only manifests as a distortion at the level of the symbolic, extends to every level of the psychoanalytic procedure, and it is this insight which explains the place of signomancy in the sign function.

There is no possibility of *explaining* dreams as a psychical process, since to explain a thing means to trace it back to something already known, and there is at present time no established psychological knowledge under which we could subsume what the psychological examination of dreams enables us to infer as a basis of their explanation. (Freud 1965[1899]: 549)

The method involves a double distortion, in which the latent content of the dream thought itself already has no connection whatsoever to the life situation of the dreamer. To begin with, the method is organized by the division of the secondary level manifest content from the primary level latent content. “Two separate functions may be distinguished in mental activity during the construction of a dream: the production of the dream-thoughts, and their transformation into the content of the dream” (Freud 1965[1899]: 544); the second assertion is that the latent content dealt with by the primary process does not constitute a motivated or causal indexical object-referent of the psychic life of the patient. It is in the formalistic exclusion of the object-referent that Lacan’s emphasis on this point bears out the general principle given in the black pyramid schema. The dream thought is apprehended by the primary process as a cohesive, undifferentiated whole possessing its own symbolic closure. Its laws remain unclear, but its closure and completeness are secured by its externally presumed center as a primary system. The secondary process breaks this unity by separating the whole into new parts and reassigning their signifier-signified correlations independently through free association. The reassignments necessarily assume the appearance of randomness, precisely from the fact that these new correlations deviate from the given conventions that lend closure to the primary system as such. This is the signomantic shuffling which decides that subject1 at the referent of the sign does not equal subject2 at the interpretant. De-centered subjectivity and non-identity are the basic alterity at the core of Lacan’s reading of Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and this feature defines the other examples of signomancy in the next two subsections as well, distinguishing them from their alternately instrumentalist and transcendentalist versions.

Even prior to Lacan’s treatment, Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* already appreciates the non-identity of the sign function. For instance, although in his earlier writings Freud did imply a neurological substrate for the “psy-systems” (Freud 1965[1899]: 575), already in *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud made very clear that the composition of the psy-systems and their spectra cannot be mapped to material or neurological coordinates, and the spatial character of Freud’s depiction of their organization is merely a descriptive necessity, or what can be understood as an inevitable result of the basic stratification of the sign.

In the editor’s introduction to the English translation of the eighth edition, it is noted that “in the seventh chapter of the present book [...] the neurophysiological basis was ostensibly dropped” (Freud 1965[1899]: xviii). Not only is it dropped, but Freud stresses the non-material basis of the psy-systems, as well as the operations of the unconscious, for proper understanding of the psychoanalytic procedure.

We may, I think, dismiss the possibility of giving the phrase an anatomical interpretation and supposing it to refer to physiological cerebral localization or even to the historical layers of the cerebral cortex. It may be, however, that the suggestion will eventually prove to be sagacious and fertile, if it can be applied to a mental *apparatus* built up of a number of agencies arranged in a series one behind the other. (Freud 1965[1899]: 81)

At best, the homology with the neurological substrate is a metaphorical one, no less illustrative for that reason, so long as a causal or determining relation is not presumed between these levels, only a provisional descriptive relationship of differential articulation. In “The Scientific Literature Dealing with the Problems of Dreams” given by Freud at the beginning of the book, he cites a number of different scholars regarding the non-physicality of the dream and its a-causal relation with the waking state, among them Paul Haffner²⁴, according to whom “the first mark of a dream is its independence of space and time, i.e. the fact of a presentation being emancipated from the position occupied by the subject in the spatial and temporal order of events” (Freud 1965[1899]: 84).

Likewise in Freud’s method, it is implied that the position of the subject (or the identity of the sender in the terms discussed in Chapters One and Two) has no determinate bearing upon the content of the dream. “Detachment from the external world seems to thus be regarded as the factor determining the most marked features of dream-life” (Freud 1965[1899]: 85). He cites also Ludwig Strumpell²⁵ regarding the effect that feelings, interests, and judgments of value are also suspended in the dream (1965[1899]: 87), and on pages 96–97 reviews the detachment of dreams from temporal conditions as well as moral sense.

Despite his observation of their limited relevance to the construction of dreams, many of these logics of the physical world, and the descriptive oppositions derived therefrom, recur in Freud’s method, such as past-future and subject-object. Such a question as: how does the subject-object opposition manifest at the level of textual methodology? does not yet really occur to Freud. Another way to understand Lacan’s use of Freud, is to say that Lacan considers the answer to this question and attempts to realize it in his own textual strategy, in a way that Freud had scarcely anticipated.

Lacan starts from the analogy given by Freud early on, of the comparison of the method of dream interpretation with hieroglyphs and the decipherment of a rebus. Dream as “hieroglyphic scripts” is only mentioned in passing by Freud (Freud 1965[1899]: 377). The idea of the dream as a rebus is somewhat more fully developed, before Lacan takes it even further toward the radical formalization.

The rebus is composed of familiar pictorial elements with semantic content, but whose syntax is disordered. That is, despite the presumed closure of the dream thought, as it is given to the primary system it collocates signifiers in combinations that do not lend themselves to symbolic closure by means of any pre-

²⁴ Haffner, Paul 1884. *Schlafen und Traumen*. Frankfurter zeitgemäße Broschüren.

²⁵ Strumpell, Ludwig 1877. *Die Natur und Entstehung der Träume*. Leipzig.

existing code. The key to deciphering the dream is the same as that of deciphering the rebus: the elements of the dream must be broken apart into non-signifying units and allowed to find alternative, independent signifieds, between which newly established correlations a new habit of interpretation is established.

What the rebus demands is the assignment of elementary non-signifying elements where such a syntax is definitely lacking – this is one of the definitive structural semiological aspects of Freud’s method of dream interpretation, which Lacan finds to be so fundamentally Saussurean. As will be shown later in the context of dream-distortion, the conferment of a second articulation to the manifest content of the dream is what breaks the closure of the dream thought and allows for the new assignation of signifiers to signifieds, toward the construction of the habit-changed interpretant. This is the first aspect of Freud’s method of dream interpretation which parallels semiology. The second is the translinguistic status of metaphor and metonymy; this contention is integral for Freud, and both of these factors specify the elementary non-identity of the dream with the life situation of the dreamer.

Signifier and signified may have an iconic relation of resemblance to each other, but the apprehension of the object-referent depends on the detachment from this motivatedness. Lacan characterizes the iconic-pictographic method of interpretation as a “mental vice” (Lacan 2005[1977]: 122) on the order of Umberto Eco’s “referential fallacy” (Eco 1979[1975]: 58). The initial remove from the analogical approach already posed by Freud is doubled by Lacan, when Lacan asserts that it is not sufficient to conceive of the interpretation of dreams merely in terms of the decipherment of a hieroglyphic script, but that this script should be thought of as one in a “lost language” (Lacan 2005[1977]: 122) – there is no originary bond between the pictographic elements of the script and the percepts and memories of the creators of that script. In the first pages of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Slavoj Žižek stresses the same point, for the purposes of his formal psychoanalytic ideology critique. In his view,

the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the ‘content’ supposedly hidden behind the form: the ‘secret’ to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, *the ‘secret’ of this form itself*. The theoretical intelligence of the form of dreams does not consist in penetrating from the manifest content to its ‘hidden kernel’, to the latent dream-thoughts; it consists in the answer to the question: why have the latent dream-thoughts assumed such a form, why were they transposed into the form of a dream? (Žižek 2002[1989]: 11)

The answer to this ‘why?’ ultimately has to do with the revelation of the unconscious wish, but the wish itself, like the rest of the conditions of the identity and life situation of the dreamer, remain outside of the sign function. As per Figure 11, both the wish itself (as the referent of the sign), as well as the habit change that would constitute the resolution of the repression of that wish (as the interpretant), remain divided from the sign function. If the sign function is stratified by the primary and secondary processes, the wish-referent and the sublimation-

interpretant comprise a third element. According to Žižek, “the structure is always triple; there are always *three* elements at work: the *manifest dream-text*, the *latent dream-content* or thought and the *unconscious desire articulated in a dream*” (Žižek 2002[1989]: 13), but because the unconscious wish is divided from the sign function, the recommended interpretative approach to it is by means of the differential articulation of the manifest content alone. “It is therefore not ‘more concealed, deeper’ in relation to the latent thought, it is decidedly more ‘on the surface’, consisting entirely of the signifier’s mechanisms, of the treatment to which the latent thought is submitted. In other words, its only place is in the *form* of the ‘dream’: the real subject matter of the dream (the unconscious desire) articulates itself in the dream-work, in the elaboration of its ‘latent content’” (Žižek 2002[1989]: 13).

The dream work proceeds initially through the severance of the elements of the manifest content from the totality with which they are presented at the primary level. The basic point is that not only is the secondary process divided from the identity of the dreamer, but that even the primary process itself – which does indeed borrow images from the memory of the dreamer as its material – has no motivated bond with the object-referent, either as the unconscious wish or as the sublimated habit-changed interpretant.

Freud’s non-referential derivation of the primary process is sophisticated enough to shed light on the whole breadth of applications, from deconstruction to Marxist literary criticism, from mythopoetic hermetics to cognitive and bio-semiotics. The primary process pointedly eschews such percepts and their associations in assembling its materials, and this selectivity underlines the radical disconnect of the primary process from referent and unconscious wish. The latent content is assembled only from the most random and inconsequential details of recent memory. As Freud maintains:

[P]reconscious ideas which have already attracted a sufficient amount of the attention that are operating in the preconscious will not be the ones to be chosen to act as covers for a repressed idea. The unconscious prefers to weave its connections round preconscious impressions and ideas which are either indifferent and have thus had no attention paid to them, or have been rejected and have thus had attention promptly withdrawn from them. (Freud 1965[1899]: 602)

One implication drawn from this by Freud is that impressions which *have* attracted considerable attention and become associated with other ideas tend to resist the alteration of these connections. The quote closes on the observation: “It is a familiar article in the doctrine of associations, and one that is entirely confirmed by experience, that an idea which is bound by a very intimate tie in one direction, tends, as it were, to repel whole groups of new ties” (Freud 1965[1899]: 602). This resistance to re-assignment of signifier-signified relations is a theme raised again later on the topic of condensation and connotative secondary semiotic systems, in the application of psychoanalysis for ideology critique.

4.1.2. Secondary process: condensation and displacement

Condensation and displacement are the principal mechanisms by which the unconscious censors the repressed wish, by the initial distortion of the dream thought. “Why is it that dreams with an indifferent content, which turn out to be wish-fulfillments, do not express this meaning undisguised? [...] Let us describe this behavior of dreams, which stands in so much need of explanation, as ‘the phenomena of distortion in dreams’. Thus our second problem is: what is the origin of dream-distortion?” (Freud 1965[1899]: 169).

Dream distortion is the expressed censorship of the unconscious wish. The distortion is “calculated to conceal the true interpretation of the dream” (Freud 1965[1899]: 174–175) because the dream-thought contains something against which the subject struggles, an uncomfortable and often embarrassingly simple truth. The more uncomfortable the truth, the greater the extent of distortion and the greater the lengths to which the censorship will go to disguise this truth. “Dream-displacement and dream-condensation are the two governing factors to whose activity we may in essence ascribe the form assumed by dreams” (Freud 1965[1899]: 343), and these are the two “chief methods” by which distortion is achieved (Freud 1965[1899]: 343).²⁶ Displacement and condensation at the secondary level pulverise the logical and causal connections between the elements of the dream. “Its elements are turned about, broken into fragments and jammed together. [...] The restoration of the connections which the dream work has destroyed is a task which has to be performed by the interpretative process” (Freud 1965[1899]: 346-347). The restoration itself, which takes the form of the habit change and interpretant, remains divided from the sign function and thus outside of the method proper, belonging to the level of sign production. The method consists in firstly accepting the non-identity of the latent content with the life situation of the dreamer, thus rejecting the false coherence and totality with which the dream is presented, and secondly by breaking apart the already fundamentally broken manifest content once again. It is only after this double distortion that the division into non-signifying units, and then their reassignment through free association, can take place.

However much displacement and condensation have come to be associated with metonymy and metaphor in later literature, this connection is in fact not even suggested in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It is Lacan, Derrida, and Barthes really who take this comparison, along with its fruitful implications for the synthesis of structural semiology and psychoanalysis, and run with it, so to speak. The procedure of separating the dream into non-signifying units is not the only

²⁶ Because the initial dream thought at the primary level is already ‘distorted’ it is not clear from Freud’s text whether the types of distortion that are displacement and condensation are strictly applicable to the secondary process, or if the construction of the dream thought at the primary level also takes place by these two mechanisms. To maintain the heuristic simplicity of Figure 11, the distortion of the primary level consists merely in its non-identity with the referent, whereas it is only the distortion of the secondary process and manifest content, which consists of displacement and condensation.

one which Lacan sees as Freud's proto-semiology. The other is that within the dream Lacan discovers the structure of language: specifically, the oppositions of *langue* and *parole*, signifier and signified, as well as the principal tropes of metaphor and metonymy. Lacan groups all the basic figures and tropic forms as derivatives of the basic opposition of metaphor and metonymy.

The initial mapping of metaphor and metonymy to Freud's notions of condensation and displacement is discussed further; Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, in addition to Lacan, all formulate this mapping in different ways.

As established in Chapter One on the topic of retroactivity, it is Lacan himself who gives the distinction to the secondary systems of retroactivity. What gives the primary process (and the primary semiotic systems generally) their impression of closure and coherent totality, however, is just their *non-tropic* character; that is, the action of the primary level is described as 'regular' because it is just that of the inference and proposition. Hence, the regular action of the form of the signifier upon that of the signified is simply deduction, and the form of the signified upon that of the signifier is induction, albeit in the generalized sense that applies to all forms of discourse and is not restricted to a particular language. In other words, the operations of the primary level are definitively *not* tropic, not metonymic nor metaphoric, because there is no disjunction or non-identity between subject and predicate.

At the same time, the primary process does still recapitulate the structure of language as Lacan puts it, in the way that signifier-signified correlations remain independent of the object-referent and thus arbitrary, however much their action is in this case 'regular'. As part of the unconscious, the primary process is not the drives and instincts, however much the inferential movement at this level may present itself as rationally coherent and possessed of internal closure. In this way, by the Lacanian view, all regular forms of inference are at base metaphorical (even though their action is taken as regular and given, in the same way that the latent content presents itself as having rational closure), because of their fundamental disconnect from the object-referent. This anticipates one of the final assertions of the work, that metaphor may be considered a more basic unit of analysis than either proposition or diagram, to be discussed at length in Chapter Five and in the Conclusion.

In Roman Jakobson's *Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances* (1956), metonymy and metaphor are used to differentiate the two types of aphasia and, mapping these to the opposition of syntagm and paradigm, combination disorder describes the first, and selection disorder describes the second (Jakobson 1987[1956]: 99). Jakobson anticipates the later claim of Lacan, that this basic opposition is intrinsic to the sign function itself, and preexists its realization in the substance of any particular language. That is, combination (metonymy/displacement) and selection (metaphor/condensation) are operations in all languages and thus preconditions for language as such, aspects of the trans-linguistic articulatory matrix. "The fundamental role which these two operations

play in language was clearly realized by Ferdinand de Saussure” (Jakobson 1987 [1956]: 99).

As per the implications of Figure 11, the faculty of selection (and its impairment) applies to the connotative secondary semiotic system (metaphor/condensation), and the faculty of combination (and its impairment) applies to the metalinguistic secondary semiotic system. Once again, these oppositions, although labeled somewhat differently from how Lacan labels them, are taken to be general translanguistic conditions of the sign function itself, independent of the substance of any specific language, independent of the identity of the sender, and independent of the interpretant, referent, and the domain of sign production generally. As he states, “The dichotomy discussed here appears to be of primal significance and consequence for all verbal behavior and for human behavior in general” (Jakobson 1987[1956]: 112). The question remains when discussing the truly primal character of these oppositions, whether to attribute any one term specifically to the divisions of the sign function is not to hypostasize the specifically linguistic nature intended for these terms, whether to append terms derived from linguistics to operations which are upheld to be translanguistic is not to submit to the naïvely logocentric impulse.

The proliferation of the different terms for what are fundamentally the same operations, such as for the group of paradigm–metaphor–condensation–selection–substitution–association, and for the group of syntagm–metonymy–displacement–combination, gives some expression to the doubts confessed later by Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, that making recourse to the vocabulary of structuralism, even under erasure, compromises psychoanalysis by turning it into a structuralist parking lot; i.e., for these thinkers even the initial division of signifier and signified is already too much of a compromise. For semiotic inquiry to remain systematic it must also remain stratified, even though this stratification entails contradictions and inconsistencies.

For instance, Jakobson concludes his article on aphasia by noting, “A competition between both devices, metonymic and metaphoric, is manifest in any symbolic process, be it interpersonal or social. Thus in an inquiry into the structure of dreams, the decisive question is whether the symbols and the temporal sequences used are based on contiguity” (Jakobson 1987[1956]: 114).

In the article, contiguity is the name for the disorder in which metonymy is impaired, so with reference to dream interpretation, does Jakobson mean to ask whether temporal sequences in dreams are an example of displacement as dream distortion? Or is he rather asking whether temporal sequences in dreams are an example of a deficiency of metonymy, that is an inability to construct temporal sequences? Or rather, does he mean contiguity in the more literal sense, to ask whether temporal sequences in dreams actually reflect temporal sequences of memories from the waking state? Each question yields a widely divergent answer, and this is the only mention of ‘the structure of dreams’ in Jakobson’s piece. These questions go unanswered, and the value of the oppositional terms and structuralist stratification in general may be disputed on the grounds of such persistent ambiguity. In the end, the black pyramid approach may remain stratified, so long as

the sign function itself is still divided from sign production and the identity of the sender.

The metatheoretic work of spelling out the different usages of these terms in the articulation of the sign function is meant to suspend or defer closure on the matter, without jettisoning entirely the semiotic approach to systematic description. As to the proliferation of these terms for the distinction of primary from secondary processes, as well as the distinction of the types of secondary processes themselves, Barthes deconstructs the matter even further, without abandoning the project entirely to de-stratification.

It is probably Barthes who best captures the mere exigency of stratification, for the description of sign systems, when he concedes that “there exists a general category *langue/speech*, which embraces all the systems of signs; since there are no better ones, we shall keep these terms language/speech, even when they are applied to communications whose substance is not verbal” (Barthes 1976[1964]: 25). Understanding Lacan as non-logocentric depends entirely on understanding Barthes’ assertion that, just because terms from linguistics are accepted for labeling the functions and oppositions of the sign function as such, this does not imply that particular verbal languages are the only instances of sign – the signified may never provide a definite bond with the referent.

Already in Freud, condensation in the secondary process of dream distortion takes an ideological character. Unlike displacement, which swaps the ‘natural’ signified of a signifier for a different one, condensation compresses whole signs with other signs into composites which then require parsing and reassignment in the secondary process.

4.1.3. Condensation and ideology critique

Dream thoughts and the repressed infantile wishes they conceal always exceed the signifiers that are cobbled together in the dream, and this excess is the basis of condensation. The fact that any one signifier in the dream points always to a number of different related thoughts and wishes, that no signifier is selected by the dream thought without having a number of different sources and origins, is referred to by Freud as overdetermination. “Each of the elements of the dream’s content turns out to have been overdetermined – to have been represented in the dream-thoughts many times over” (Freud 1965[1899]: 318).

Unconscious wishes that apply to a wide number of personal memories and individuals from the repertoire of the experience of the dreamer are compressed into single individuals and single events in the dream. In the secondary process these compressions as signifiers are dissociated from their immediate signifieds and may be reconnected to a vast web of interconnected associations. “These new connections are only set up between thoughts which were already linked in some other way in the dream-thoughts. The new connections are, as it were, loop-lines or short-circuits, made possible by the existence of other and deeper-lying connecting paths” (Freud 1965[1899]: 314).

When the condensation of the signifier happens in the form of individual people in the dream, Freud calls it identification. “The construction of collective and composite figures is one of the chief methods by which condensation operates in dreams” (1965[1899]: 328). Every individual that appears in the dream is like a hidden shape-shifter, a protean creature embodying the transference common to many different individuals applicable in the dream-thought, and “preference is given to elements that occur several times over in the dream thoughts, how new unities are formed (in the shape of collective entities and composite structures), and how intermediate common entities are constructed (Freud 1965[1899]: 330).

Constructed entities may be individuals as well as ‘things’: events, places, words, and other inanimate objects. “Identification is employed where persons are concerned; composition where things are the material of the unification. Nevertheless composition may also be applied to persons. Localities are often treated like persons” (Freud 1965[1899]: 355).

Displacement takes place also within condensation, where inanimate signifiers stand for animate signifieds and vice versa, and in the sense that the common feature which unites the multiple condensed entities tends to indicate the very wish that is being censored or distorted. In this way, the deconstruction of the compressed signifier reveals the common element of “similarity, consonance” (Freud 1965[1899]: 356), and it is just this common element that gives the hint as to the censored aspect of the repressed wish. Sometimes these condensations are indicated within the dream through linguistic play. Freud gives special attention to moments of linguistic condensation that indicate censored conceptual condensation.

The work of condensation in dreams is seen at its clearest when it handles words and names. It is true in general that words are treated in dreams as though they were concrete things, and for that reason they are apt to be combined in just the same way as presentations of concrete things. Dreams of this sort offer the most amusing and curious neologisms. (Freud 1965[1899]: 331)

Freud proceeds to give a number of amusing examples of these neologisms. Probably the most suggestive here is one he gives from a dream of his own regarding a paper written by a medical colleague, in which Freud felt that the colleague overestimated the value of a recent physiological discovery. After observing this exaggeration on the part of his colleague, Freud proceeds to have a dream in which he says distinctly about the paper:

‘It’s written in a positively norekdal style.’ The analysis of the word caused me some difficulty at first. There could be no doubt that it was a parody of the [German] superlatives ‘*kolossal*’ and ‘*pyramidal*’; but its origin was not so easy to guess. At last I saw that the monstrosity was composed of the two names ‘Nora’ and ‘Ekdal’—characters in two well-known plays of Ibsen’s. [*A Doll’s House* and *The Wild Duck*.] Some time before, I had read a newspaper article on Ibsen by the same author whose latest work I was criticizing in the dream. (Freud 1965[1899]: 331)

The process by which these condensations are constructed into signifiers in the dream, such that the common element between them is concealed, and the repressed wish censored beneath the totality given by the dream, is instructive for parallel unconscious processes of censorship and categorization that take place in the waking state. At base, it is Freud's contention that one of the ultimate goals of dream interpretation is the rendering conscious of these waking state acts of censorship. Freud holds that,

Our waking (preconscious) thinking behaves towards any perceptual material with which it meets in just the same way in which the function we are considering behaves towards the content of dreams. It is the nature of our waking thought to establish order in material of that kind, to set up relations in it and to make it conform to our expectations of an intelligible whole. [Cf. pp. 60 f. and 76.]. (Freud 1965[1899]: 538)

Perceptual day-to-day material which does not lend itself to easy interpretation according to pre-conceived cognitive biases is either distorted in a way that makes it fit our expectations, or it can be literally blanked out by the waking state censorship, and this for Freud is a commonplace, even the most common subjective stance toward new percepts, and one which presents a vulnerability so to speak.

In fact, we go too far in that direction. An adept in sleight of hand can trick us by relying upon this intellectual habit of ours. In our efforts at making an intelligible pattern of the sense-impressions that are offered to us, we often fall into the strangest errors or even falsify the truth about the material before us. [...] The evidences of this are too universally known for there to be any need to insist upon them further. (Freud 1965[1899]: 538)

This relates back to the claim made by Freud, and cited earlier, that one reason why the dream thought selects as its signifiers the percepts from recent memory which specifically did not attract directed attention, is that the percepts and memories which did attract conscious reflection already have well established associations formed to them, because "there are obvious difficulties involved in supposing that one and the same system can accurately retain modifications of its elements and yet remain perpetually open to the reception of fresh occasions for modification" (Freud 1965[1899]: 577).

In other words, irrespective of their fidelity to the empirical situation, established associations resist percepts that would demand the alteration of these associations. This is the basis of an approach to dream interpretation that has application to ideology critique. Such systems of associations, or cognitive biases, that effectively block out contrary percepts, are just that: ideologies. "These are the paths which have been laid down once and for all, which never fall into disuse" (Freud 1965[1899]: 597).

The character of such systems according to Freud "would lie in the intimate details of its relations to the different elements of the raw material of memory, that is – if we may hint at a theory of a more radical kind – in the degrees of conductive resistance which it offered to the passage of excitation from those elements"

(1965[1899]: 578). He concludes with the even more radical observation that, “A most promising light would be thrown on the conditions governing the excitation of neurons if it could be confirmed that in the psy-systems memory and the quality that characterizes consciousness are mutually exclusive” (Freud 1965[1899]: 578).

Ideology resists the excitation of associations contrary to established pathways, in order that those pathways remain operational and need not be modified. What is meant precisely by this word ‘radical’ in Freud’s text remains uncertain, however the word choice is most suitable for the applications of dream interpretation made by Lacan and Žižek, where the differentiation of the secondary processes of distortion is the fundamental procedure of ideology critique, which just is radicalism in its purest form, but whose ultimate result Freud barely anticipated.

To reiterate, these processes of condensation are easily mapped to the connotative secondary semiotic system as the latter are described by Roland Barthes and later by Daniele Monticelli, as those which delete the inconvenient remainder in order to preserve the totality of the abiding system, and are specifically labeled as ideological or ‘connotative’ as discussed in Chapter One. In a classic and now iconic formulation, Freud calls waking state acts of condensation the ‘ostrich policy’: “This effortless and regular avoidance by the psychical process of the memory of anything that had once been distressing affords us the prototype and first example of *psychical repression*. It is a familiar fact that much of this avoidance of what is distressing – this ostrich policy – is still to be seen in the formal mental life of adults” (Freud 1965[1899]: 639). Condensation as a mechanism in ideology formation is discussed again at length in Chapter Five, using the vocabulary of Peirce, under the heading of the tardo-sign.

In summary, signomantic dream interpretation entails firstly the recognition of the non-identity of the primary process and dream thought with the identity of the sender. Secondly, and following on that recognition, it entails the detachment and dissociation of the signifiers of the dream with their presumed signifieds and the free re-association of those signifieds with new ones, leading to the construction of a fundamentally new symbolic whole in the form of the habit-changed interpretant.

The signomantic procedure renders explicit the double remove of the sign from its object-referent. Its methodology is the apparent randomization procedure that happens in dreams and makes possible the reassignment of signifiers to signifieds *prior to* a governing symbolic whole convention by which these assignments may be made. The departure from the initially given totality of the dream, and the reassignment made possible by the secondary distortion, are fundamentally ideology-critical procedures, and the method of dream interpretation as Freud makes clear, is instructive for the waking state in this way. The *I Ching* and the Tarot also activate the double distortion and impose their own randomization and reassignment of signifiers to signifieds; like dream interpretation, they may also be understood as signomantic tools for ideology critique.

4.2. The *I Ching* in *The Glass Bead Game*

Following on dream interpretation, the *I Ching* is discussed in this subchapter as another example of signomancy for illustrating the non-identity of the sign function. Specifically, it is discussed how Herman Hesse uses some hexagrams of the *I Ching* in his novel *The Glass Bead Game* (1969[1941]). In the same style as the analysis of passages from Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (Eco 2001[1988]) in Chapter Three, where parts of semiotic theory are interspersed to the narrative of Eco's novel in order to explain the retroactive distortions that happen there, here Hesse intersperses reference to the *I Ching* as a way of accounting for synchronicity, free association, and other retroactive affects that organize his text. Signomancy is best understood not by direct access to the oracle, but by the double distortion of its presentation in these great works of fiction.

The *I Ching* is an ancient Chinese book used for divination. The version referred to in this subsection is the Richard Wilhelm translation from Chinese to German, translated to English from German by Cary F. Baynes, with an introduction written by Carl Jung (1985[1950]). For relevant background regarding the translation and the history of the *I Ching*, see the companion work written by the same author, *Understanding the I Ching: The Wilhelm Lectures on the Book of Changes* (1995 [1956]). Wilhelm's translation had a singular impact on the twentieth century wartime high modern writers. "Wilhelm maintained almost continuous contact with such well-known writers as Martin Buber, Herman Hesse, and Carl Gustav Jung" (1995[1956]: 142). Wilhelm was also himself steeped in the psychoanalysis of Carl Jung, which is reflected in his translation. "It is quite likely that Wilhelm's interest in psychology, particularly Jungian psychology, led him to see the *Changes* as currently relevant" (Wilhelm 1995[1956]: 145). All these factors are nicely woven together in the discussion of *The Glass Bead Game* (1969[1941]). No comprehensive overview of the *I Ching* is offered here, but some basic details follow before engaging Hesse's book. The *I Ching* is composed of sixty-four hexagrams, each built of six lines, or two trigrams, and their descriptions.

In the *I Ching* reading, the querent does not simply choose whichever hexagram seems most appropriate to the life situation or the question being posed. Rather, the selection of the hexagram or hexagrams is randomized, either by the traditional method of sorting the yarrow stalks, or by the tossing of three coins six times, each toss yielding either a solid unchanging line, a solid changing line, a broken unchanging line, or a broken changing line.

If no changing lines are thrown, the reading consists of a single hexagram. If there are one or more changing lines, the reading yields two hexagrams (for a detailed account of the yarrow stalk method see Wilhelm, 1985[1950]: xlix–lxii). As with dream interpretation, the structure of the *I Ching* reading is mapped onto the black pyramid schema. The *I Ching* recapitulates the non-identity of the sign function and imposes a double remove or distortion between the sign and the

object-referent. At the level of the regular action of the primary system the hexagrams of the *I Ching* are already fundamentally divided from the identity of the sender by the principal signomantic act of randomization.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida describes the hexagrams of the *I Ching* and their non-phonetic, ideogrammatic composition. He notes the quasi-hieroglyphic aspect of their pictographic but still strictly conventional definition, in its radically non-logocentric capacity (Derrida 1976[1967]: 24–26).

At the retroactive level of the secondary system, the distortion and remove from the identity of the sender is doubled by the internally heterogeneous and contradictory character of the hexagrams themselves. In this non-transcendentalist view of the *I Ching*, the book is used strictly for the reassignment of signifiers to signifieds or, in the language of the early chapters of this dissertation, the differential articulation of the secondary semiotic systems, with no pretension whatsoever of giving access to any transcendental causality or supernatural agency, as is frequently assumed about systems of divination.

Herman Hesse puts the *I Ching* to just this instructive purpose, in his magnum opus *The Glass Bead Game* (1965[1941]). There, the *I Ching* is used literally by his main character Joseph Knecht, and the signomantic function shows up throughout the book and informs the definition of the glass bead game itself. In this way some prominent themes from the dissertation are brought together in the discussion of the *I Ching* as it appears in *The Glass Bead Game*.

4.2.1. Transcendentalism in Jung's introduction to the *I-Ching*

The depth psychology or analytical psychology of Carl Jung tends to be presented in direct contrast with the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, because of how it lends itself to transcendentalist interpretations. Ideas like the archetypes of the collective unconscious are portrayed as possessing definite universal content, and Jungian synchronicity in this view is a technique for accessing a deeper, hidden causality, whether that hidden force is thought of as the will of god or aligned with any other particular theism. As to the non-transcendental, formalist reading of synchronicity, this is discussed in the comparison of psychoanalysis with Peircean semiotics at the end of this chapter. Jung's introduction to the Wilhelm-Baynes translation of the *I Ching* bears out all the tensions of the transcendentalist question of psychoanalysis. Some exegesis of this introduction is used here to play out further the complications of signomancy in application to the *I Ching*.

As to the functionality of the *I Ching*, Jung repeats that there is no causal deterministic relation between the life situation of the querent who throws the coins and the hexagram which results. That is, there is no spiritual agency or transcendental force that decides the result. In the signomantic view generally, it is not just that this absence of causal determination does not render the hexagram meaningless for the querent. It is just this non-identity of the hexagrams with the object-referent that makes possible the new signification and habit-change that

results, and to presume that causal determinacy must be at play in order for meaningful correlations to arise is only the prejudice of the ‘western mind’.

In contrast, as Wilhelm exposes while quoting Jung: “The Chinese mind, as I see it at work in the *I-Ching*, seems to be exclusively preoccupied with the chance aspect of events. What we call coincidence seems to be the chief concern of this particular mind, and what we worship as causality passes almost unnoticed” (1985[1950]: xxii). More than that, according to Jung “The manner in which the *I-Ching* tends to look upon reality seems to disfavor our causalistic procedures” (quoted by Wilhelm 1985[1950]: xxiii). Moreover, in Jung’s belief “It is obviously not a procedure that appeals to a critical mind used to empirical verification of facts or to factual evidence” (quoted by Wilhelm 1985[1950]: xxv).

The hypothesis of signomancy is that it is only through the suspension of causal determinacy that the sign function is activated and new interpretants developed, and that this extends through all applications of semiotics, even those aspiring to the highest levels of scientific rigor, such as those of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics. Special mechanisms of non-identification are required in all these domains, which tend to take the form of the metalinguistic regress characteristic of semiotic theoretic procedures, whose methodology always makes explicit the fact that the object language of primary level of description is yet another metalanguage and gives no verifiable or certain bond to the object-referent of the external world.

In signomancy, the presumption is that preconceived habits of thought and action as unconscious schemas and cognitive biases are the rule rather than the exception, and conscious choice is something that has to be fought for and gained only through special measures, in much the same way as Freud describes the nature of unconscious acts of condensation and their resistance to alteration, once sufficiently strong associations are established, even in the face of contrary stimuli.

I Ching, like the unpredictable terrain of the dream, is supposed to work like a training ground of non-identification, and in this way serve as a basic template of substrate-independent ideology critique. This instruction of the *I Ching* for semiotics and ideology critique is explained in detail by Sheldon Lu, in his article “The I Ching and the origin of the Chinese semiotic tradition” (Lu 2008).

The question remains: if the sign typologies being discussed in this chapter (the sixty-four hexagrams, the seventy-eight cards of the Tarot) possess no necessary metaphysical or transcendental status and have no universal content; if, in principle, any old typology will do for facilitating the signomantic procedure, such as the flipping of a single coin, then what is so instructive about these signomantic systems *per se*? The answer is this: in a semiotic typology, each term of the typology itself must recapitulate the non-identity of the sign function. That is, every sign type – let one say in this case Sebeok’s (1975 and 2001[1994]: 174) approach to signal, symptom, icon, index, symbol, and name (discussed further in Chapter Five) – while each is possessed of its own unique characteristics, each must also have the common characteristic of non-identity: internal contradiction and incompatibility. The definition of every term must contain its own contradiction, and this indeed is profoundly the case, such as for example in the

definition of the symbol, which is at once defined in the literature as being specifically arbitrary/conventional/unmotivated, and then alternately defined as being exactly the opposite: intentional/analogical/motivated.

Across the literature, the symbol both does, and does not, have an actual bond with the object referent, and the same goes for the other types. This discussion is taken up again in Chapter Five with regard to the Peirce-derived typologies of signs and their many, contradictory developments in semiotic applications. But it is even more profoundly the case with the terms of the signomantic devices: the sixty-four hexagrams of the *I Ching* and the seventy-eight cards of the Tarot. What they all have in common is internal contradiction.

Some examination of specific hexagrams in the following demonstrates the simultaneous uniqueness of the hexagrams and the common element of internal contradiction within them all. In Herman Hesse's magnum opus, the *I Ching* represents the secret non-identical center of the inconceivable glass bead game itself; just so does the idea of signomancy supply the elusive definition of semiotics, in all its kaleidoscopic variations and applications.

4.2.2. Retroactivity in the game

Hesse's use of the *I Ching* in *The Glass Bead Game* is discussed here for more reasons than just the fact that his description of the *I Ching* is useful for understanding the place of signomancy in the broader black pyramid model. It is suggested by Hesse's final and greatest novel that the *I Ching*, and other ancient forms of divination as well, hold the secret to understanding the glass bead game itself. Despite being the central idea of the book, and despite its accrual of a number of different colorful depictions in the expiration of its some five hundred pages, the game consistently eludes concrete description. "It was with full artistic consciousness that Hesse described the Game in such a way as to make it seem vividly real within the novel and yet to defy any specific imitation in reality" (Hesse 1969[1941]: xi).

What the reader does get of its description is that it is multimodal and interdisciplinary, and that it preserves and organizes meaning between these modes and disciplines, and even furthers this meaning through its cross-platform homologies and transpositions of terms between descriptions. In the end, the glass bead game itself is upheld here as a metaphor for semiotics, and the *I Ching* at the heart of the game occupies the place of signomancy in the sign function. In this way, exegesis of Hesse's book is meant to clarify the relation of signomancy to semiotics while at the same time developing the signomantic aspect of the semiotics of literature, its deconstructive, ideology-critical, and psychoanalytic dimensions. Semiotic literary criticism expresses the non-identity of the sign function in the way that it furthers the literary act of creation, rather than merely describing the work under analysis.

Hesse's own Jungian psychoanalysis is noted in the introduction to the English translation, written by Theodore Zilkowski, and the work bears the mark of this

treatment. “A lengthy psychoanalytic treatment at the hands of a disciple of Jung in 1916 and 1917 completed his disillusionment with his present state and the process of psychic re-evaluation” (Hesse 1969[1941]: xiii).

The narrative follows the early studies of its protagonist Joseph Knecht, his entry to the school of the game at the Castalia academy, his induction to the order of the game at Waldzell, his eventual appointment as the *magister ludi* or master of the game and head of the institution, his ultimate decision to abandon the game, his tragicomic death after taking leave of the institution, and finally a collection of poems and short stories composed by Knecht and published after his death. All of this is related by his anonymous biographer on the basis of Knecht’s posthumous writings and those writings about him composed later by his students.

In the fifth chapter Knecht is assigned an ethically suspect mission with far-reaching political consequences. He is commanded to persuade Father Jacobus, the real leader of the Benedictine Abbey, to enter into alliance with Castalia, and to unite the aims of the Holy See with those of the glass bead game at Waldzell. Knecht accepts this mission without compunction – he does not hesitate to use his own intimacy with Father Jacobus as a political tool, and ultimately his role in incorporating the Church to the game is what gets him promoted to *magister ludi*.

It is nowhere directly indicated in the text that this choice is also what brings about Knecht’s downfall. In the next section of this chapter, it is argued how, if Knecht had paid more attention to the non-identical composition of the *I Ching* hexagrams, which he drew during his time at the Bamboo Grove, then he might have been able to avoid the tragic circumstances of his departure from Waldzell, as well as his death in the frigid lake near the end of the book.

But the main reason for addressing *The Glass Bead Game* here is just the non-instrumental character of the game itself, and how Hesse uses the *I Ching* as a literary device for this aspect of the game. The internal contradiction definitive of each hexagram is the main focus of the following section, and it is raised again later in application to the composition of the Tarot cards. The investigation begins by reviewing the places where the *I Ching* enters into the narrative of *The Glass Bead Game*.

4.2.3. Contradiction at the Bamboo Grove

The Bamboo Grove is introduced midway through the third chapter called “The Years of Freedom”, after Knecht graduates from early schooling at Castalia, but before being inducted to Waldzell and the order of the glass bead game. It is the location of Knecht’s first formal instruction in the *I-Ching* by Elder Brother, former glass bead game player and now hermit-monk and founder of the retreat at the grove.

He used to tell his intimates with special affection about the “Bamboo Grove”, the lovely hermitage which was the scene of his *I Ching* studies. There he had learned and experienced things of crucial importance. There, too, guided by a wonderful

premonition of Providence, he found unique surroundings and an extraordinary person: the founder and inmate of the Chinese hermitage, who was called Elder Brother. We think it proper to describe at length this most remarkable episode in his years of free study. (Hesse 1969[1941]: 126)

On Knecht's arrival at the grove, Elder Brother decides whether to admit Knecht to the hermitage on the basis of an *I Ching* reading. This reading is examined briefly with an interest in the process of divining the hexagrams and in the internally contradictory makeup of the hexagram, which is somewhat downplayed in the narrative of Hesse's book. The protracted excerpt also gives a nice picture of the traditional yarrow stalk procedure of divination.

While Knecht sat and looked on with an awe equal to his curiosity, keeping "as still as a goldfish", Elder Brother fetched the wooden beaker, which was rather a kind of quiver, a handful of sticks. These were the yarrow stalks. He counted them out carefully, returned one part of the bundle to the vessel, laid a stalk aside, divided the rest into two equal bundles, kept one in his left hand, and with the sensitive fingertips of his right hand took tiny little clusters from the pack in his left. He counted these and laid them aside until only a few stalks remained. These he held between two fingers of his left hand. And thus reducing one bundle by ritual counting to a few stalks, he followed the same procedure with the other bundle. He laid the counted stalks to one side, then went through both bundles again, one after the other, counting, clamping small remnants of bundles between two fingers. His fingers performed all this with economical motions and quiet agility; it looked like an occult game of skill governed by strict rules, practiced thousands of times and brought to a high degree of virtuoso dexterity. (Hesse 1969[1941]: 130)

The process of divining the hexagram goes even further than this, and continues through to the top of page 131. One purpose of citing the passage here is to spell out clearly just how involved, time consuming, and challenging the yarrow stalk method is to perform. Near the end of the first part of *Understanding the I Ching* (1995[1956]: 129–130), another detailed description of the yarrow stalk method is given, in which it is explained how the probabilities of deriving unchanging versus changing lines are somewhat different between the traditional yarrow stalk method and the later derived coin-tossing method, which was popularized for the obvious reason of its simplicity and that it is considerably less time consuming and requires less skill.

The result of Knecht's *I-Ching* reading is hexagram four, "Youthful Folly", described on pages 20–24 of the *I Ching* (Wilhelm 1985[1950]). Elder Brother describes the hexagram.

"It is the sign of Mong", he said. "This sign bears the name: youthful folly. Above the mountain, below the water; above Gen, below Kan. At the foot of the fountain the spring bubbles forth, the symbol of youth. The verdict reads:
Youthful folly wins success.
I do not seek the young fool,
The young fool seeks me.

At the first oracle I give knowledge.
 If he asks again, it is importunity.
 If he importunes, I give no knowledge.
 Perseverance is beneficial. (Hesse 1969[1941]: 131)

Hesse does not specify whether there were changing lines drawn in Knecht's reading, but one can assume not, given that no accompanying hexagram is described in the text. According to Wilhelm's specifications, when no lines are changing, only the judgment and the image are relevant, and not the text of the specific lines. If there are changing lines, then these lines are the 'advice' of the hexagram, and from the second hexagram which results, again only the judgment and the image are relevant and not the texts of the lines.



4. *Mēng* / *Youthful Folly*

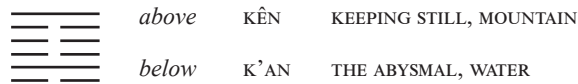


Figure 12: *Youthful Folly*, adapted from Wilhelm (1985[1950]: 20).

Knecht's interpretation of the information about the hexagram given by Elder Brother is that he will be allowed to remain at the Bamboo Grove to continue his *I Ching* studies.

Knecht had been holding his breath from sheer suspense. In the ensuing silence he involuntarily gave a deep sigh of relief. He did not dare to ask. But he thought he had understood: the young fool had turned up; he would be permitted to stay. Even while he was still enthralled by the sublime marionette's dance of fingers and sticks, which he had watched for so long and which looked so persuasively meaningful, the result took hold of him. The oracle had spoken; it had decided in his favor. (Hesse 1969[1941]: 131)

The fact of Elder Brother's silence on the meaning of the hexagram, and that this hexagram could just as easily be interpreted to imply the opposite, that he would on the contrary not be allowed to stay, is instructive regarding the double remove of all the hexagrams from the object-referent. Firstly, the deliberations of the divination process, in this case those of the manipulation of yarrow stalks – but equally for if the hexagram had been arrived at through the tossing of the coins – insure that the primary level already has no causal correlation with the life situation, as compared with the alternative situation in which, for example, Elder Brother had simply chosen the hexagram himself without randomization.

Secondly though, the internal contradictions of the full description of Youthful Folly insure that at the level of the secondary process the hexagram could just as easily be read to imply that Knecht should be expelled from the Bamboo Grove forthwith, rather than the opposite. For example, Wilhelm's commentary on the judgment of 4 Youthful Folly includes:

A teacher's answer to the question of a pupil ought to be clear and definite like that expected from an oracle; thereupon it ought to be accepted as a key for resolution of doubts and a basis for decision. If mistrustful or unintelligent questioning is kept up, it serves only to annoy the teacher. He does well to ignore it in silence, just as the oracle gives one answer only and refuses to be tempted by questions implying doubt. (Wilhelm 1985[1950]: 21)

Elder Brother indeed meets Knecht's question only with silence, as if to imply that Knecht's approach is importunate, however this interpretation is not considered by Knecht. Further, the reader is led to assume that no changing lines were given in the hexagram, however if Elder Brother were to have derived a changing line in the fourth place, the line would read:

Six in the fourth place means
Entangled folly brings humiliation.
For youthful folly it is the most hopeless thing to entangle oneself in empty imaginings. The more obstinately it clings to such unreal fantasies, the more certainly will humiliation overtake it. Often the teacher, when confronted with such entangled folly, has no other course but to leave the fool to himself for a time, not sparing him the humiliation that results. This is frequently the only means of rescue. (Wilhelm 1985[1950]: 23)

This line in the context of Knecht's situation would surely imply that he would not be allowed to remain at the Bamboo Grove. And as the commentary on the sixth line reads: "Sometimes an incorrigible fool must be punished" (Wilhelm 1985[1950]: 23), but Knecht sees none of this, choosing instead the interpretation that suits his ambition. The instruction given by Wilhelm regarding the interpretation of the hexagrams does specify that the individual lines should only be considered when they are drawn as changing lines, and presuming there were no changing lines in Knecht's reading, this would preclude the unfavorable judgments cited above.

This approach to *I Ching* divination gives the readings a much more concrete character. However, for the purpose of signomancy it makes more sense to consider all of the separate lines precisely because, in this approach, every hexagram yields an internally contradictory answer. This, like the paradoxical make-up of the manifest dream content, is what initiates the secondary process of retroactivity, in which the preconceived interpretive schemas of the querent undergo destabilization, the resolution of which contradiction produces the habit-change of the interpretant, the reassignment of signifiers to signifieds by means of a fundamentally new convention.

The consideration of each line individually yields another insight regarding the internal contradictions of the hexagrams, which is not indicated by Wilhelm in either of his books, and which is crucial for the psychoanalytic approach to signomancy. In application to Knecht's hexagram of Youthful Folly, this would be the difficult realization that the opposition of the young fool and the teacher is an interchangeable one. In other words, the hexagram would encourage Knecht to alternately place himself and Elder Brother as both young fool and teacher. Frequently, this subjective displacement, where in one line the querent is the subject of the hexagram, and in the next line the querent is the object of the hexagram, is the only interpretive strategy that can lend unity to the final interpretation of the hexagram. The interpretive predisposition of Knecht going in to the reading is that he is the student-fool and Elder Brother is the teacher, however in the grand scheme of Hesse's book it is disputable at best, which of them is the student and which the master.

Without doubt, by the late portions of the book, Knecht is decidedly the master. Conceptualizing himself as the master in the situation of his reading at the Bamboo Grove would require that he situate his own subjectivity outside of time, the purpose of the *I Ching* and all signomantic tools being the displacement of subjectivity.

Not much more detail is given of Knecht's time at the Bamboo Grove, other than that when Knecht proposes to integrate themes of the *I Ching* to the glass bead game itself, "Elder Brother laughed. Go ahead and try", he exclaimed. "You'll see how it turns out" (Hesse 1969[1941]: 132). Also, it is noted that some years later, after Knecht's ascent of the hierarchy of Waldzell, when he invites Elder Brother to give a course at the institute, he receives no answer. 4 Youth Folly could have warned Knecht about the downfalls of ambition for a young scholar. Instead of heeding the warning of the *I Ching*, and perhaps declining to continue his study at the Bamboo Grove – which choice surely would have derailed his promotion to *magister ludi* – Knecht proceeds with his underhanded political assignment. It is notable that Hesse gives no overt indication in his text that this was in fact the tragic turning point in Knecht's life.

The argument developed later in the section is that the internal contradiction of the hexagrams of the *I Ching* and their non-identity with the object-referent is just the model upon which Knecht understands the glass bead game, and perhaps also the reason for which he is ultimately forced to abandon it, because the ossified bureaucratic apparatus surrounding its instruction inhibits the realization of this ideal within the game.

4.2.4. Glass bead semiotics

The first section of the book, titled "The Glass Bead Game: A General Introduction to its History for the Layman", is presumably titled so ironically, given the dearth of concrete description provided there of the game itself. The reader is left at the end of the section with no definite idea of its rules or picture of what an actual game would look like when played.

These rules, the sign language and grammar of the Game, constitute a kind of highly developed secret language drawing upon several sciences and arts, but especially mathematics and music (and/or musicology), and capable of expressing and establishing interrelationships between the content and conclusions of nearly all the scholarly disciplines. The Glass Bead Game is thus a mode of playing with the total contents and values of our culture. (Hesse 1969[1941]: 15)

It is presumed that the language and grammar of the game would consist of a static set of terms universally applicable to all the different disciplines of which the game treats; however, no indication is given of what these terms are, where they come from, whether they are numerical, alphabetical, pictographic, or like musical notation. It is suggested that a game script can be converted “in the usual shorthand. In symbols, cyphers, signatures, and abbreviations of the Game language an astronomical formula, the principles of form underlying an old sonata, an utterance of Confucius, and so on, were written down” (Hesse 1969[1941]: 125).

The following citation already invokes a sort of homological procedure that reminds one of semiotics, where two or more different descriptive systems are superposed, terms are transposed from one to the other (terms are borrowed from linguistics and applied to musicology and vice versa), and the inconsistencies which arise in this homological procedure are themselves the ‘signs’ of a new typology.

At various times the Game was taken up and imitated by nearly all the scientific and scholarly disciplines, that is, adapted to the special fields. There is documented evidence for its application to the fields of classical philology and logic. The analytical study of musical values had led to the reduction of musical events to physical and mathematical formulas. Soon afterward philology borrowed this method and began to measure linguistic configurations as physics measures processes in nature. The visual arts soon followed suit, architecture having already led the way in establishing the links between visual art and mathematics. (Hesse 1969[1941]: 33)

Without giving a definite clue to the substance of the descriptive language uniting the various disciplines, the introduction to the glass bead game already indicates that the interest of the game is in the relations between the respective terms of the descriptive systems being compared, rather than in the sets of terms themselves. The prominence of linguistics, musicology and philology as chosen object languages for comparison is conspicuous also for its similarity with semiotics.

Every individual game takes on new object languages for its center. Every time a particular game is described in Hesse’s book, the composition and starting point of the game has two or more incompatible, or contradictory, such languages. In a letter to Tegularius, Knecht describes a game, “That began with a rhythmic analysis of a fugal theme and in the center of it was a sentence attributed to Confucius” (Hesse 1969[1941]: 120). Multimodal contradiction is a common element to all the game descriptions in the book.

Or again some fanatic had once more unearthed some new cabal hidden in the musical notation of the fifteenth century. Then there were the tempestuous letters from abstruse experimenters who could arrive at the most astounding conclusions from, say, a comparison of the horoscopes of Goethe and Spinoza; such letters often included pretty seemingly enlightened geometric drawings in several colors. (Hesse 1969[1941]: 140)

Absence of causal connection between the systems being compared is no bar to their functionality as material for the game. Quite the opposite, the game appears to explore and even systematize a domain independent of causality. Given Hesse's conversation with Jungian psychoanalysis, it is reasonable to propose that the glass bead game gives form to the notion of synchronicity, within which the very absence of causal explanation of correlations between signifiers and signifieds, and between signs and object-referents, is the pre-condition of their meaningfulness.

But to stress too heavily the signomantic aspect of semiotics runs the risk of a transcendentalist mistake, which can leave semiotics with the same dilemma as the glass bead game is left with, where even after reading a piece titled "The Glass Bead Game: A General Introduction", the reader still has no idea what the glass bead game actually is. Because ambiguity and the plurality of definitions are so central to the idea of sign and of semiotics, the mystery of retroactivity must not be extinguished. At the same time, it is important that this irreducible element not be so prominent that it eclipse all empirical and rational approaches, which would try to get a solid purchase on just what is the sign, or to understand the sign in terms of a broadened notion of causality rather than throwing out causality altogether. These approaches to retroactivity are considered in Chapter Five. Before giving way to the scientific impulse however, the synchronistic, unpredictable, and irrational aspect of retroactivity is given one last hearing.

4.3. Subject in process and Tarot

Tarot is discussed here because the structure of the cards and the divination process involved reproduce the basic logic of the double distortion: fundamental non-identity between sign function and referent is ensured at the primary level by the shuffling procedure; this non-identity is doubled at the secondary level by the internal contradictions of the cards themselves; the free association of the signomantic act, initiated by the double distortion, reassigns signifiers to signifieds between the images of the cards and the life situation of the querent, producing a habit-changed interpretant. As with the analysis of *I Ching*, the signomantic mechanism is described not through exhaustive discussion of the oracle itself, but through its treatment in some secondary semiotic literature. Inna Semetsky's *The Edusemiotics of Images: Essays on the Art~Science of Tarot* is not the first attempt to theorize the Tarot on the basis of semiotics. For instance, in the classic *Soviet Semiotics* anthology Maria Lekomceva, Boris Uspensky, and Boris Egorov

consider cartomancy in some detail (Lucid 1977: 65–86), but Semetsky’s book is instructive for black pyramid semiotics beyond the mere fact that her object of description is Tarot. Her major coordinates are Peirce, Deleuze & Guattari, and Kristeva, but Semetsky manages to draw something in from every corner. It is no mere structural analysis of a given pack, or case study of Tarot for therapy, or historiography of the cards and their origins. Semetsky’s book is all these things at once. Her treatment of the transcendentalist problem – whether the cards possess universal content or, on the contrary, should be used only in the differential immanent approach – is nuanced, even if in the end she seems to side with Jung on this matter. Most auspiciously, Semetsky discusses even the Hjelmslevian extension and the problem of stratification, in the context of the Tarot. Before entering into her semiotic and psychoanalytic treatment of the Tarot, Semetsky makes some useful introductory remarks.

According to the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, Tarot readings belong to “a branch of divination upon the symbolic meaning attached to individual Tarot cards... interpreted according to the subject or purpose of a reading and modified by their position and relation to each other from their specific location in a formal ‘layout’ or ‘spread’” (Sebeok, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 99). This definition, while acknowledging the symbolism of the pictures, still harks back to the stereotypical perception of Tarot as mere fortune-telling that exists at the low end of popular culture (cf. Auger, 2004). (Semetsky 2013: 40)

The quotation seeks to differentiate Tarot edusemiotics from low-end fortune telling. Generally speaking, low-end fortune telling ascribes either a transcendental content to the cards themselves, or to the abilities of the Tarot card reader, and the quotation suggests that Semetsky seeks to avoid this transcendentalist mistake. Tarot may on the contrary be conceptualized as a tool for psychoanalysis not completely dissimilar to the Rorschach inkblot free-association exercise, in the sense that the cards themselves have no direct bond with the object-referent because of the initial act of randomization in shuffling. In the end of course the Tarot cards are accorded a greater semiotic differentiation than the inkblot, which is what facilitates the secondary process of distortion, however the comparison with the Rorschach test is instructive for keeping in mind the primary level of distortion and the non-transcendental, formalistic aspect of signomancy generally.

This conceptualization is supported by the psychological function of Tarot as a kind of projective technique (Semetsky 2005a, 2011) or a psychological tool that not only parallels but even exceeds the Rorschach method used in clinical practice for the purpose of assessment and testing; the ink spots used in projective testing function as signs. By definition, the projective method is viewed as a structured interview or a dialogue, that is, an open and flexible arena for studying interpersonal – and intrapsychic (Semetsky, 2011), in the case of Tarot – transactions. (Semetsky 2013: 59)

The initial randomization and non-identity of the ink blot with the psychic state of the querent is what facilitates the process of free association in the first stage. This initial breakage from preconceived interpretive schemas at the primary level is crucial and is a precondition of the sign as such. The link between the primary and secondary processes in Tarot, as Semetsky describes it, must be considered before proceeding to discuss her psychoanalytic methodology, and her treatment of some specific cards. Following from Jung's quasi-transcendentalist suggestions about the *I Ching*, it is commonplace to gloss the Tarot as merely a tool of magical thinking, where it is presumed that the cards themselves have universal content, directly embodying the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

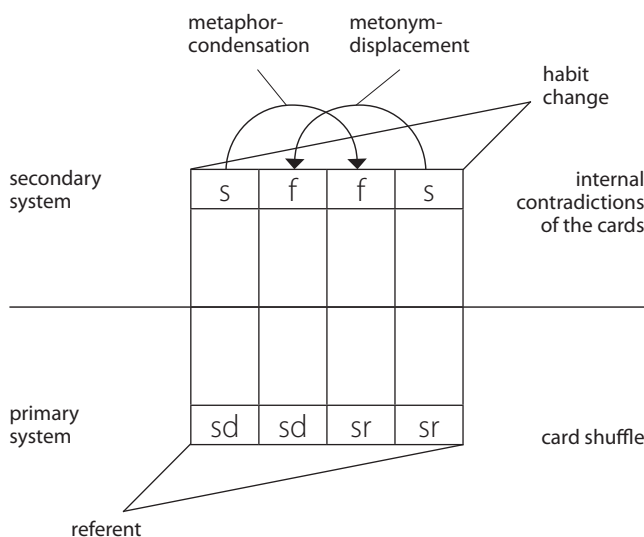


Figure 13: Tarot signomancy on the black pyramid.

Instead, the Tarot cards are viewed as just another typology of signs, which merely approximate these archetypes in their internal contradictions and derive their symbolism, as all modes of sign production do, from their external object-referents. Because of their internal contradiction, they defy any static method of application to the life situation of the querent, and the Tarot is mapped to the black pyramid schema (as shown in Figure 13). The cards are deployed as a method of constellation and metatheoretic transposition, recapitulating the non-identity of the sign function in the same way as the dream or the hexagram of the *I Ching*.

Again, in Tarot, the primary distortion and non-identity of sign with object-referent is enacted by the shuffling of the cards; the secondary distortion is enacted by the internally heterogeneous composition of the cards themselves and how this necessitates the reassignment of signifiers to signifieds, towards the generation of a habit-changed interpretant. In this way, the signomantic aspect of the Tarot provides further material for the general principle of retroactivity that is operational in all semiotic applications.

The semiotic theory behind Semetsky's Tarot edusemiotics spans the same breadth as the black pyramid schema. Her system comprehends the Hjelmslevian stratification of the sign into form and substance, the psychoanalytic application of this extension in Lacan and Kristeva, its ideology-critical application, the Deleuze-Guattarian critique of the extension, as well as finally the fusion of this system with Peircean semiotics as it is explained by Umberto Eco.

4.3.1. Semetsky's black pyramid

Semetsky's statements about this synthetic picture behind her work are interspersed throughout her book. There is no single chapter or section dedicated to explaining the synthesis, but some of her claims are presented in the following with application to Figure 13 above, and aid considerably in understanding the place of signomancy in general semiotics, in the same way as dream interpretation and *I Ching*. Semetsky notes that Deleuze and Guattari make use of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid and employ the term reciprocal presupposition. "Deleuze's a-signifying semiotics partakes of Peirce's triadic logic. As noticed by Genosko (1998), Deleuze and Guattari's semiotics present a conceptual mix of Peirce's logic of relations and Hjelmslev's linguistics; and binary signification gives way to the inclusion of the third category, an interpretant" (Semetsky 2013: 110).

As discussed in the introduction, Hjelmslev's notion of presupposition asserts that substance always presupposes form. This means that there can be form without substance but not vice versa, and that the sign function exists as correlations of expression and content at the level of form, not at the level of substance. Form comes first in Hjelmslev, but when Derrida and Barthes extend Hjelmslev's semiology, they assert that substance may also come first. The retroactivity that happens at the secondary level is all about this situation in which substance comes first. In this way, the hybrid contradicts statements by Hjelmslev that substance always presupposes form.

The interpretant is only produced when the primary level is complicated by the secondary one, which renders explicit the original non-identity of the sign function with the object-referent. At the primary level, deduction happens by the regular action of the form of the signified upon the substance of the signifier, and induction happens by the regular action of the form of the signifier upon the substance of the signified. But at the secondary level, the signifiers are sundered from their original signifieds, and this "transfer from the form of expression to the form of content" is what produces the interpretant (Semetsky 2013: 110).

Semetsky notes that the form of retroactive inference at the secondary level is what Peirce calls abduction. Abduction, like synchronicity, is only made possible by the suspension of the preconceived conventions and codes that make regular inference possible; the double distortion of the sign function is divided from the causal determinacy that orders the domain of sign production, opening the space of free association and reassignment of signifiers to signifieds by means of a new

convention. The arcs that link substance to form at the top and bottom sides of the figure are the cybernetic feedback loops of reciprocal presupposition.

It is the Peircean concept of the interpretant as well as the notion of abduction that provides the bridge between the internal sign function and the external sign production, the synthetic bridge of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid. On Figure 13, a horizontal line divides the primary from the secondary process at the semiotic equator, and a diagonal line connects the referent to the interpretant, by passing through the double distortion. Semetsky's description matches well to the black pyramid schema, but there are some inconsistencies. For instance, Semetsky quotes Deleuze and Guattari here:

The diagram retains the most deterritorialized content and the most deterritorialized expression, in order to conjugate them. [...] The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality. [...] On the diagrammatic level [...] form of expression is no longer really distinct from form of content. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 141–142) (Semetsky 2013: 307)

In her description, reciprocal presupposition entails the deconstruction and ultimately the disavowal of the expression-content opposition. Aligning in principle with Derrida here, the foundation of semiotics in the opposition of signifier and signified is fundamentally called into question. This is what is meant by destratification. Not only signifier-signified, but form-substance, sign function-sign production, metaphor-metonymy – all such oppositions are suspect, and cast into doubt by radical destratification.

The argument of the dissertation is rather that, while destratification happens, semiotic analysis nevertheless depends upon some elemental stratification, and thus reciprocal presupposition need not be an outright disavowal of the basic opposition of expression and content. The goal would be to make stratification as simple as possible, but no simpler, a task that has been advanced considerably by the domain of biosemiotics. Despite these small differences, Semetsky's formulation aligns remarkably well with the black pyramid hypothesis.

In her words, the sense of the miraculous that sometimes comes during a Tarot reading is not because of a supernatural agent, but just the liberation from pre-conceived concepts that happens in the reassignment of the signifieds, “that is the reason for such customary astonishment and the flavor of mysticism usually associated with the phenomenon of Tarot” (Semetsky 2013: 46). The cards recapitulate the double distortion, first in their randomization, and second in their internally contradictory symbolic construction. This idea is illustrated in the following, through brief discussion of two specific cards.

4.3.2. Contradiction in VI The Lovers and XVI The Tower

The first card under consideration in this section is VI The Lovers, one which Semetsky does not consider in her book. Different versions of the card succeed to different degrees in articulating the internal contradiction which should be its central organizing principle.

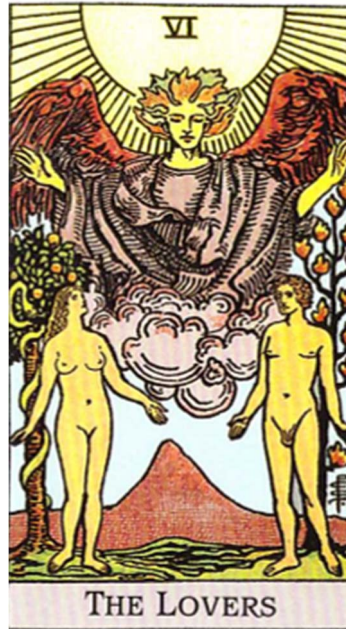


Figure 14: VI The Lovers. (RWS).

In the traditional dispensation, VI The Lovers implies that the man is the lover and the woman the beloved. In the above card, the masculine is signified by Adam, and the feminine by Eve. This recapitulates a basic ontology of sexual difference, where yang-masculine-assertive is associated with men, and yin-feminine-receptive is associated with women.

Other Tarot decks depict VI The Lovers differently, such that it becomes clear, that the masculine may take a feminine signifier and vice versa. Take, for example, the version produced by Frieda Harris and Aleister Crowley, on the basis of the occult system of the Golden Dawn, known as the Thoth Tarot.

In this image there are four pairs of creatures, none of which match directly to Adam and Eve. The bottom two aren't human, and their gender is ambiguous. The second two from the bottom appear to be male children. The third pair are quite ambiguous; either could be a man or a woman. The top pair at the upper corners appear to be women, but are drawn only in distorted outline, and colorless.



Figure 15: VI The Lovers. *The Thoth Tarot* (Crowley and Harris 1969).

All the pairings are presided over by a wizard or sorceress, whose cloak is so heavy as to totally mask his or her identity and gender. It is notable that the cards of the Thoth Tarot deck have additional symbolic inscriptions, giving the associated astrological symbol, the Hebrew letter of the alphabet which matches to the path between sephiroth on the cabalistic tree of life to which the card pertains, as well as its designation as one of the major arcana. In his *The Book of Thoth (Egyptian Tarot)* Crowley highlights the internal contradictions of the card as its most important feature.

This card and its twin, XIV, Art, are the most obscure and difficult of the Atu. Each of these symbols is in itself double, so that the meanings form a divergent series, and the integration of the card can only be regained by repeated marriages, identifications, and some form of Hermaphroditism. (Crowley 1991[1944]: 80)

The prominence of eclectic collection of mutually incompatible symbolic systems is what gives the Thoth Tarot its distinctive appearance, and what makes the deck so unapproachable. Because Crowley tries to make explicit, alongside the commonplace alchemical designation, the planetary and astrological association, the cabalistic association, as well as the correspondence with the Egyptian Atu, every card is packed to overflowing by designations from seemingly incompatible symbolic systems. “Atu VI refers to Gemini, ruled by Mercury. It means The Twins. The Hebrew letter corresponding is Zain, which means a sword, and the framework of the card is therefore the Arch of Swords, beneath which the Royal

Marriage takes place” (Crowley 1991[1944]: 80). In the introduction to *The Book of Thoth*, “Part One: The Theory of the Tarot”, Crowley makes very clear that the internal contradictions of the cards are paramount. Every concrete thought is a separation from a unity only apprehended at the level of the symbolic in the form of a contradiction. Commenting on his own description of VI The Lovers from a different work, Crowley notes that the internal contradictions of the card translate into a kind of methodology of description.

It is very significant that almost every sentence in this passage seems to reverse the meaning of the previous one. This is because reaction is always equal and opposite to action. This equation is, or should be, simultaneous in the intellectual world, where there is no great time-lag; the formulation of any idea creates its contradictory at almost the same moment. (Crowley 1991[1944]: 81)

This methodology of internal contradiction is the same methodology described as de-centered arche-writing, in Chapter One. Because this internal contradiction is the final object of every semiotic analysis, the object language at the ground of every analysis is provisional, just another metalanguage. The analysis does not apprehend a definite truth beneath the metalanguage, but only superimposes these metalanguages one upon the other, transposing their respective terms, and in the aporias of contradiction that result, new reassignments between signifiers and signifieds are achieved in the form of habit-changed interpretants. The result is a seemingly never-ending and absurd metalinguistic regress, inevitably eclectic, hopelessly intertextual, but this is no nihilistic gesture of vulgar relativism.

To close the subsection and bear out once again the perspicacity and insight of Semetsky’s book, the exegesis turns to her descriptions of XVI The Tower. Unlike VI The Lovers, Semetsky devotes several pages to XVI The Tower in her book, which demonstrate the proper signomantic function of the Tarot cards to constellate intertextual comparisons and organize theoretic transpositions between them. Diverging somewhat from the problem of sexual difference, the following treatment of XVI The Tower turns to political ideology critique, where the tower is applied to catalyzing moments of epistemic upheaval and the deconstruction of the discourses that would guide and control the patterns of change that follow these moments. It is the internal contradictions of XVI The Tower which facilitate the differentiation of the contents of the moment out from under the symbolic overlays that would reduce their meaning according to preconceived interpretive schemas. In this way Tarot signomancy is conceived as a tool of ideology critique.

In the RWS depiction the tower is struck by lightning on a black background. The crown of the king is ejected from the tower along with its inhabitants. The top of the tower is destroyed and burning. In the first part of his guidebook, A.E. Waite writes of “16. *The Tower Struck by Lightning*. Its alternative titles are: Castle of Plutus, God’s House and the Tower of Babel. In the last case, the characters falling therefrom are held to be Nimrod and his minister. It is assuredly a card of confusion” (Waite 2017[1911]: 69). He continues in the main part of the book, “Occult explanations attached to this card are meagre and mostly

disconcerting” (Waite 2017[1911]: 70). Building on the analogy with the Tower of Babel, Waite suggests that the destruction of the tower is attendant upon ambition, and represents the collapse of mental constructs rather than only material buildings. “The bibliographer Christian imagines that it is the downfall of the mind, seeking to penetrate the mystery of God. I agree rather with Grand Orient that it is the ruin of the House of We, when evil has prevailed therein, and above all that it is the rending of a House of Doctrine” (Waite 2017[1911]: 70).

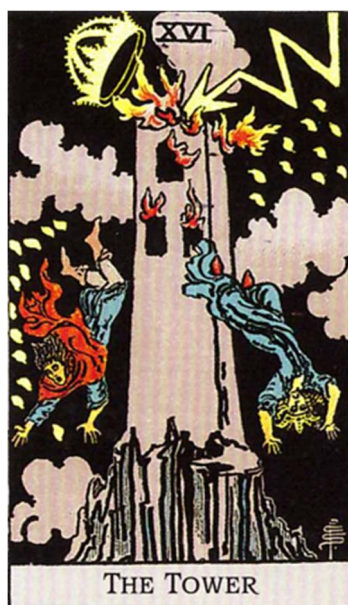


Figure 16: XVI The Tower. (RWS).

The false construct of the House of Doctrine is built upon shadow projection in the Jungian sense. Ideological self-construction always rests upon the procedure of identity through exclusion. This is the basis of Kristeva’s theory of the abject developed in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982[1980]). The encounter with the actually abject, with death, disease, excretion, forces the subject back into conflict with the sham of their contrived identity, and thus back into the flux of the subject-in-process, which resists all interpellation by nationality, gender roles, and institutional doctrine. Where XV The Devil represents the shadow projection, XVI The Tower represents the ideological construct of identity through exclusion, which is inevitably blown apart by the power of the abject.

The Tower stands erect; it is its crown that has been knocked down by the blazing flames caused by lightning. The Tower is hermetically sealed; the figures have imprisoned themselves in their own creation, the rigid, phallic, either mental or physical, symbolic structure crisscrossed by the chains carried forth by the preceding image of The Devil as a symbol of lack of power. The only way out is through the

agency of threatening, violent force that necessarily brings along a traumatic experience. (Semetsky 2013: 187)

The point which Semetsky repeats here is that the destruction of the tower is a direct threat to the individuals who inhabit it, but that this threat is not a strictly physical one. They are “abject experiences that inevitably produce a shock to thought (cf. Deleuze, 1989) and destroy habitual patterns of thinking” (Semetsky 2013: 188). The tower is their ‘home’ in the way that ideology – whether in the form of religious doctrine or national identity, gender roles, or political affiliation – comes to be the home of the static psyche, that offers it respite against the torrents that beset the subject-in-process. Attacks to the construct are perceived as direct attacks upon the subject. The Waite card does not reflect this nearly as well as the image designed by Frieda Harris in the Thoth Tarot, so once again the comparison is useful.

Once again, the Thoth rendition of the card is packed with a density of conflicting symbolism whose full explication is beyond the ambition of this analysis. Only details which are relevant to the discussion are raised. Specifically here, the interest is in the characters who have been ejected from the blasted tower. None of the imagery used by Harris in this card can be called realistic, but the ejected bodies are especially abstract, even cubist.

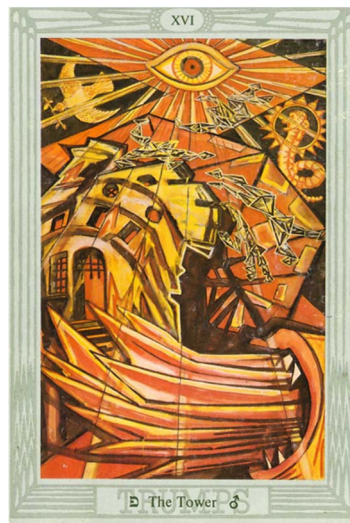


Figure 17: XVI The Tower. *The Thoth Tarot* (Crowley and Harris 1969).

Is the deracination by lightning the obliteration of life itself, or is it the return to the flux of the subject-in-process, to a state of potential primordial *différance*, to the profound articulatory matrix? “Falling from the tower are broken figures of the garrison. It will be noticed that they have lost their human shape. They have become geometrical expressions” (Crowley 1991[1944]: 108). Crowley continues, “This suggests another (and totally different) interpretation of the card. [...] To

obtain perfection, all existing things must be annihilated. The destruction of the garrison may therefore be taken to mean their emancipation from the prison of organized life, which was confining them. It was their unwisdom to cling to it” (Crowley 1991[1944]: 108).

When W.B. Yeats, in his poem “The Second Coming”, posed the question, “Who is this foul beast slouching toward Bethlehem to be born?” (Yeats 1996[1989]: 187) there is reason to believe he was referring to Aleister Crowley. Consider an excerpt from another of Yeats’ poems, this one titled “The Tower”:

*I pace upon the battlements and stare
On the foundations of a house, or where
Tree, like sooty finger, starts from the earth;
And send imagination forth
Under the day’s declining beam, and call
Images and memories
From ruin or from ancient trees,
For I would ask a question of them all. [...]*

Lacan’s lightning tree is the burnt index pointing to the referent as pure contradiction at the level of the symbolic. It is also the tower blasted by lightning, a unity shattered and newly constellating theoretic transpositions in Lacan, in Yeats, and in this subsection.

The tower is a lightning rod of projections. It is from the base of the blasted tower that Yeats puts his question to them all.

*Good fellows shuffled cards in an old bawn;
And when that ruffian’s turn was on
He so bewitched the cards under his thumb
That all but the one card became
A pack of hounds and not a pack of cards. (Yeats 1996[1989]: 194)*

As the lightning rod for projection, XVI The Tower is already fully charged with transference: destruction beyond death, the tower is the ultimate sigil of total non-identity, and thus it is the only card that is immune to the bewitchment Yeats accused Crowley of performing upon the other cards of the Tarot.

The worst imaginable outcome, which is the tower blasted by lightning, turns out to be the salvation and most hopeful card of the whole Tarot deck. Along this line of interpretation, Semetsky’s analysis of XVI The Tower takes a turn toward political ideology critique. She applies XVI The Tower to the inaugural event-moment of the twenty-first century. “Regarding real significant, indeed abject, events in human culture, The Tower picture has an uncanny resemblance with the image of the destroyed Twin Towers on 9/11” (Semetsky 2013: 193).

The attacks of September 11th 2001 were certainly a Lotmanian explosion in the sense that the linear progression of history was interrupted for a moment, and

a number of possible futures opened up. What is made from these openings is only determined later, through retrospective narrative transformations (Monticelli 2008: 191–210). “Abject experiences, such as the destruction of the Twin Towers on 9/11, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and other geopolitical events of similar scope, should become unorthodox lessons to be critically examined and learned from as signs of the times” (Semetsky 2013: 203).

The lessons of XVI The Tower are at base the same lessons of every other card, and of the hexagrams of the *I Ching*, having to do with internal contradiction. The true terror of the event-moment is not the bodies hurling themselves from the towers, but rather the secret knowledge that one’s own way of seeing the world must change.

While Semetsky’s application here may exceed the formalistic restrictions of the black pyramid, it nevertheless serves as a useful counterpoint to the rationalistic paradigm of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics. The last section of this chapter erects a bridge between the extreme retroactivity discussed so far, and the scientific paradigm of semiotics discussed in Chapter Five, in order to facilitate understanding that, despite all appearances, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. This is done by an overview of literature comparing Peirce with psychoanalysis.

4.4. Peirce and psychoanalysis

After having expounded at such lengths upon the psychoanalytic understanding of retroactivity, it may seem that the scientific aspirations of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics have nothing at all to do with detotalization. Even having dispelled the transcendentalist reception of psychoanalysis, and thereby having brought it closer to something accountable to scientific method, nevertheless the commonplace presumption about Peircean semiotics is that it takes an empirical orientation to the sign, in order to elaborate an internally coherent and fully instrumentalizable account of semiosis, an aspiration which is admittedly far away from that of detotalization. Already though, particularly in Chapter Three, it has been argued that Peirce may be read in more than one way, and that alternative readings of Peirce, such as those which would recuperate the notion of unlimited semiosis and redefine the notion of the object, show how the semiotics of Peirce need not be totally at odds with the aims of detotalization. Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by showcasing the findings of some of the most renowned exponents of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, and claiming that retroactivity is indispensable even there, particularly in the discussion of self-organizing systems. But before that, it is important to specifically demonstrate the intersections between Peirce and psychoanalysis, because of the primacy of the latter in the greater *sinthome* coordinates, and because of the enduring stigma which psychoanalysis has accrued among contemporary researchers of semiotics. The following sections overview extant literature comparing Peirce with Freud, Jung, and Lacan.

4.4.1. Peirce with Freud

When it comes to the comparison of Peirce with psychoanalysis, surely Vincent Colapietro has the most to say. He gives a rousing call to action in this regard when he writes that his project includes the tasks to: “(3) develop in an explicit form a semiotic interpretation of the unconscious; and (4) compare this approach to the unconscious with the approaches encountered in Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and others” (Colapietro 1995: 482). Colapietro’s works on this topic include: *Peirce’s Approach to the Self* (Colapietro 1989), “Notes for a Sketch of a Peircean Theory of the Unconscious” (Colapietro 1995), “Subject Positions and Positional Subjectivity” (Colapietro 1999), “Pragmatism and Psychoanalysis” (Colapietro 2006), and “Habits, Awareness, and Autonomy” (Colapietro 2014).

The point which resounds most through each work is that, like Freud’s, Peirce’s conception of the self is rather one of a subject in process, composed of multiple selves or voices that are often mutually conflicting and unaware of each other (e.g. Colapietro 2006: 139), and that the false assumption of a unified and totally aware self is one source of the abiding ubiquity of human self-deception. Where psychoanalysis brings to Peircean semiotics a more articulate formulation of this self-deception, Peircean semiotics brings to psychoanalysis a more precise vocabulary for discriminating between different levels of consciousness.

This last bit is developed in detail by Stjernfelt and Deacon in Chapter Five. It should be noted from the outset that the very term consciousness is one of the few genuine sticking points between the two, in the sense mentioned already that Peirce, at least in the objective idealist 1890s *Monist* papers, used an inflated definition of consciousness that spanned all forms of semiosis from sense to concept, and also extended consciousness to inanimate matter, and that obviously consciousness here must at the very least be used in the more restricted sense: the spectrum of conscious-unconscious is traversed by Peirce’s mature typology of signs. This is discussed at length by Deacon in the concluding chapter of *Incomplete Nature*, 17. “Consciousness” (Deacon 2012a: 508–538).

Colapietro stresses Peirce’s repeated statements to the effect that man overestimates his own capacity for deliberate rational action. For both Peircean pragmatism and psychoanalysis, human action cannot be explained strictly in the terms of conscious agency. He quotes Peirce: “The deeper workings of the spirit [or psyche] take place in their own slow way, without our contrivance” (CP 6.301 in: Colapietro 2006: 194). Probably the most important quote is this: “Men many times fancy that they act from reason when, in point of fact, the reasons they attribute to themselves are nothing but the excuses which unconscious instinct invents to satisfy the teasing ‘whys’ of the ego. The extent of this self-delusion is such as to render philosophical rationalism a farce” (CP 1.631 in: Colapietro 2006: 199). This may be read as a critique of voluntarism in Peirce. On the basis of this quote and others, Colapietro infers rightly that Peirce was aware and keenly interested in the dimension of mind which the psychoanalysts call the unconscious.

The demarcation between primary unconscious processes and secondary conscious ones need to be disambiguated along more formal semiotic lines (Colapietro 2006: 200)²⁷. Colapietro puts the project in traditionally Peircean terms: he holds that the unconscious should be divided into three levels, a firstness of the unconscious in its spontaneity, potential, and indeterminacy; a secondness of the unconscious as it stands in brute opposition to the conscious as a disruptive source; and a thirdness of the unconscious, as a force involving symbols, which mediates between preconscious agency and conscious activity (Colapietro 2006: 239). This division is underdeveloped, and in it there is no mention of Lacan, but the idea of symbolic overdetermination as the exertion of an unconscious force is more or less Lacan's definition of ideology. Also, this third dimension is the space in Peircean classification for the idea of "enlightened false consciousness", where cynical self-deception is what perpetuates the symbolic power structure rather than outright deception (Sloterdijk 1984: 192).

Colapietro underlines Freud's claim that the "I" is not even master of its own house. Unlike psychotherapy for example, there is no healthy ego with which the analyst can 'make friends' so as to assist the patient in overcoming their trauma. Under the ideological conditions of late modernity, successful integration into society means nothing less than collaboration with the enemy. Therefore, the goal of therapy is not to help the patient overcome their trauma, but rather to force them into confrontation with that trauma, to identify with its symptom, and to weaponize that symptom against the symbolic power structure. It is only this reading of psychoanalysis that is useful to detotalization, it is specifically Lacanian, and it is considered here at greater comparison with Peirce. As with dream interpretation, this radicalized reading profoundly alters the apprehension of the notion of synchronicity – synchronicity may be refashioned in this way, as a pragmatic tool for recapitulating the non-identity of the sign function.

4.4.2. Peirce with Jung

The classic if overused illustration of synchronicity given by Jung is the famous golden scarab example. The anecdote goes as follows. Jung is treating a patient in Basel, Switzerland, who is skeptical of any non-scientific explanations for her psychological problems. Jung knows her therapy will be a failure unless he can soften her rationalism somewhat. She describes a dream in which she is presented with an expensive piece of jewelry in the shape of a golden scarab. As she describes the scarab, Jung hears a tapping at the window. He opens it and snatches out of the air a golden scarab of the exact description given by his patient. He then hands the scarab to his patient and says, "Here is your scarab". Supposedly, this

²⁷ Here also Colapietro is careful to cite two passages in which Peirce indicates he has abandoned the inflated model of consciousness (CP 7.364–7.367 In: Colapietro 2006: 200).

coincidence was sufficient to weaken the patient's resistance to non-deterministic explanation.

As with dream interpretation, the commonplace transcendentalist reading of the meaning of synchronicity is that, although it is beyond our understanding, there is an intelligence of some kind behind the behavior of the golden scarab that causes it to fly against the window in that specific place at that specific time, or that there is some invisible connective structure between the psyche of the patient and the awareness of the scarab.

Such simplifications are the ones which impel scientifically minded people to dismiss psychoanalysis as pseudoscience, but there is another reading of synchronicity less vulnerable to these accusations. Even in Jung's own descriptions of synchronicity, one sees no strong indication of the belief in a transcendental intelligence or structure causing the coincidence.

The philosophical principle that underlies our conception of natural law is *causality*. But if the connection between cause and effect turns out to be only statistically valid and only relatively true, then the causal principle is only of relative use for explaining natural processes and therefore presupposes the existence of one or more other factors which would be necessary for an explanation. This is as much as to say that the connection of events may in certain circumstances be other than causal, and requires another principle of explanation. (Jung 1981[1967]: 421)

Here one stumbles into a serious aporia for semiotic theory generally. Recall that Semetsky (2013) describes the functionality of the Tarot to articulate a semiotic dimension of play and abduction that is definitively beyond causation. She separates the Newtonian realm from the semiotic realm, and seems to understand the latter on some model of quantum physics, the point being that the activity of the imagination channeled in Tarot cannot be understood in terms of cause and effect, however she does not explain her own theory of causation. Recall also that Semetsky understands the activity of Tarot as specifically synchronistic. But from the side of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, instead of separating sign action from causation entirely, the popular course is to rather widen the notion of causality.

The incorporation of formal and final cause to scientific explanation is one way to understand the broad ambition of Terrence Deacon's *Incomplete Nature* (2012a); also Jesper Hoffmeyer has developed his own biosemiotic approach to what he calls 'semiotic causation' (Hoffmeyer 2008). The point here is to say, that whether synchronicity (or any other kind of sign action) involves causation is entirely a matter of how broadly one defines causation. Clearly, Jung chose to retain a definition of cause closer to the sciences of his day, and Semetsky follows after him in this way, whereas the Peirceans want to broaden the notion of cause and play out some new kind of scientific teleology.

Deacon's teleodynamics is taken up again later in Chapter Five, but it is not presumed to arrive at any sort of final answer regarding the definition of causation. What is important here, is to understand that the absence of material and efficient cause (*viz.* Newtonian cause as per Semetsky) does not entail the absence of

meaning or significance. Rather, in synchronicity and in the sign function, the absence of an explanation according to cause may even be the precondition of significance. Jung goes on:

Therefore it cannot be a question of cause and effect, but of a falling together in time, a kind of simultaneity. Because of this quality of simultaneity, I have picked on the term “synchronicity” to designate a hypothetical factor equal in rank to causality as a principle of explanation. [...] This possibility presents itself when the psyche observes, not external bodies, but *itself*. [...] The subject’s answer [...] is a product of pure imagination, of ‘chance’ ideas which reveal the structure of that which produces them, namely the unconscious. (Jung 1981[1967]: 436)

The transcendentalist account of synchronicity would attribute to the coincidence exactly that which would disqualify the coincidence *as* a synchronicity. That is, this account would say that, even though one is unaware of it, and even perhaps incapable of being fully aware of it, yet still the substance of synchronicity is *causal* and can therefore be explained as such²⁸. Jung gives the further example, when he buys a train ticket that has the same number as the theater ticket that he buys afterwards, and then later receives a telephone call with the very same number, in such cases any causal connection seems unlikely, but in such improbable coincidences, in the absence of a causal factor, the mind strives for an alternative explanation. In Chapter Five, explanation in terms of absence comes into focus again, in the context of *Incomplete Nature* (2012a). But for now, what form would an a-causal explanation actually take? What, if any, is the positive substance of synchronicity? The answer to this question is facilitated with a comparison of the principle of synchronicity with Charles Peirce’s principle of tychism and absolute chance, another concept brought down specifically from the objective idealist thinking of the *Monist* series.

One notable comparison of tychism and synchronicity is conducted by Louise Marie Mederer in her doctoral dissertation “Making Chance Meaningful: Exploring Links with Creativity and its Culturally Subversive Application” (Mederer 2015). The work explores the concepts of chance and creativity in the philosophy of Peirce, in the psychoanalysis of Carl Jung, and in the artistic activity of Dada and Surrealism. Tychism in Peirce is related to firstness, as the first of the trichotomy of evolutionary cosmology (evolution by fortuitous variation), the second being anancasm (evolution by mechanical necessity), and the third being agapism (evolution by creative love) (CP 6.302).

The idea of a first thus encapsulates that difficult to grasp ‘initiating spark’ (Hausman, 1993, 123), as it can be perceived only in the brief moment of, for example, a sudden

²⁸ Explanation of an event or state of affairs as an effect of another preceding or concurrent event or state of affairs, which is the cause. Cause and effect must be linked by a causal law that holds universally between items of their types in a specified range of initial conditions. Causal explanation can be given materially in terms of events or states of affairs and initial conditions, or formally in terms of the truth of relevant propositions.

chance event of a moment of inspiration. Peirce defines Firstness as being marked by a ‘positive qualitative possibility’ (CP, [1903], 1.25), thus presenting itself as an opportunity to act freely and autonomously in order to realise a new way of being. On an experiential level this means for example, a moment of chance suddenly opens up the potential to see things in a new light, to draw new connections. (Mederer 2015: 66)

Tychism as the study of this instance of firstness is partly the study of associations and correlations prior to any deterministic, causal explanation. In the case of the golden scarab, it was the absence of causal explanation, which opened the way for the ‘initiating spark’ that allowed the patient to relinquish her deterministic worldview and consider Jung’s non-deterministic explanations of her psychoses or, in other words, allowed her to ‘act freely and autonomously’ and ‘see things in a new light’. Mederer writes of Jung’s famous example:

The young woman was under the influence of a strong rationality complex before the synchronistic encounter occurred. In fact, Jung recounted that therapeutic treatment had reached a stalemate because her ‘polished Cartesian rationalism’ and her tendency to know everything better made it difficult to access the deeper layers of her unconscious. Only the striking experience of synchronicity ‘punctured the desired hole in her rationalism and broke the ice of her intellectual resistance. The treatment could now be continued with satisfactory results’. (CW 8, [1951], 982. (Mederer 2015: 133)

Much in the same way that the Kantian reflective judgment of beauty cannot be ratified by an externally imposed concept, but can only be validated according to a common feeling in the group of inquirers, so the recognition and pursuit of the a-causal explanation of the synchronicity is guided by a feeling. As a study of the indeterminate potentiality of chance, tychism is a study of firstness, and “it should also be stressed that by describing chance, feeling and mind as Firsts alike, Peirce conceives them as sharing the same attributes. In a metaphysical sense Peirce understands feeling as the basic ground of being” (Mederer 2015: 67). Between pages 109 and 115 Mederer also draws connections between abductive inference (also a matter of firstness and indeterminacy) and synchronicity.

What is common to all these metaphors is that absolute certainty – about the status of the water pot’s boiling, about the location of a particle or a celestial body, or about the end goal (purpose) of an artistic project – in all these cases is an indication of misunderstanding, lack of apprehension, and uncertainty, contradiction, and non-identity, are necessary conditions, or a “pre-condition for creation” (Mederer 2015: 102).²⁹

²⁹ In the anti-necessitarian doctrine developed in Peirce’s “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined” (EP1: 298), his “focus was not on critiquing determinism per se, but the particular doctrine of mechanical determinism” (Mederer 2015: 61) in science, as it left no place for alternative modes of explanation. But “Implicitly Peirce’s hypothesis dashed the scientists’ hope that by discovering more and more chains of cause and effect one will be able to predict the future, thus gaining further control over oneself and nature” (Mederer 2015: 69). Andrew Reynolds’ *Peirce’s Scientific Metaphysics: The Philosophy of Chance, Law, and Evolution*

4.4.3. Peirce with Lacan

This Jungian tychism strives to express the semiotic structure of the a-causal ordering principle in a positive sense and, on its own, would come off as basic transcendentalism to the Lacanian psychoanalyst, who refuses to develop any grand theory of affects, and in his or her epistemological skepticism is wary of static metalanguages for the description of discourse-independent reality. Although Lacan is not thoroughly addressed in Mederer's dissertation, it is the Lacanian reading that really gives these practices their 'culturally subversive application'.

Given the noted incompatibility of Lacan's epistemological skepticism with Peirce's commitment to scientific realism, it should come as no surprise that the available literature on the intersection of Peirce's semiotics and Lacan's psychoanalysis is quite limited. Vincent Colapietro's works cited above make the call for more work in this direction, but remain focused on the comparison with Freud. Works of lesser significance include a bachelor thesis of limited depth called "Lacan avec Peirce: A Semeiotic Approach to Lacanian Thought" (Younkins 2005), and the project of *Psychosemiotics* (Smith 2001).

More considerable contributions are made in the anthology *Peirce, Semiotics, and Psychoanalysis* (Muller; Brent 2000). Regarding the dubious scientific legitimacy of combining Lacan and Peirce, Birgit Nordtug notes that Lacan's son-in-law, psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller, in his introduction to Lacan's *Ecrits*, writes that Lacan's understanding of subjectivity is inspired by Peirce's semiotic triad of sign, object, and interpretant (Nordtug 2004: 89).

Julia Kristeva did not explicitly conduct a comparison of Peirce and Lacan; Lacanian thought perfuses her entire corpus, whereas Peirce only comes up rarely and is never directly incorporated into her method. However, her development of the distinction of the semiotic and the symbolic, and her theory of the chora, are attempts to move her psychoanalysis beyond the formalist confines of structural semiology to something that would give positive names to sensory motor affects, drives, and emotions.

As already noted, Kristeva's semiotic chora exists somewhere on the borderline between the hard formalism of Lacan, and a more empirically and clinically oriented approach to the unconscious – in her later work especially it seems that the unconscious really is something more than merely the disruption caused at the level of the symbolic (Kristeva 1982[1980]). Remaining with Lacan however, the current section assesses specifically the research of John P. Muller in his *Beyond the Psychoanalytic Dyad* (1995) and *The Embodied Subject: Minding the Body*

(2002) corroborates Peirce's prescience in the context of 20th century findings in quantum physics. Jung cites Arthur Schopenhauer's critique of mechanical determinism as being influential on his own thought, "the more remarkable in that it was made at a time when the tremendous advance of the natural sciences had convinced everybody that causality alone could be considered the final principle of explanation" (Jung: 1981[1967]). Some interesting analogs in biosemiotics for example include Stuart Kauffman's (2010) formulation of the non-prestability of the biosphere, where it is held that no matter how much data one gathers, total prediction of biological evolution is increasingly beyond human grasp.

in *Psychoanalysis* (2007), Birgit Nordtug in her “Subjectivity as an Unlimited Semiosis: Lacan and Peirce” (2004), and Owen Hewitson’s “What does Psychoanalysis have to do with Psychology?” (2010).

Nordtug puts two of the central aims of this section quite succinctly. Her article confirms that Peirce’s conception of the self is more akin to Lacan’s than it would at first seem. Nordtug is original in her description of Peirce’s self as an unlimited semiosis, or as a sign which is always translated into a new sign, and for whom the cessation of transformation would mean the end of semiosis. This aligns with the picture of habit as habit-change as discussed in Chapter Three; and as discussed in Chapter Two, only the semiotic closure of symbolic overdetermination can solidify the subject-in-process into an undivided, singular self.

Nordtug’s second suggestion, having to do with the comparison of Lacan’s Borromean Knot (imaginary-real-symbolic) with some of Peirce’s terms, could benefit from some specification. The association of the Lacanian Real with the Peircean dynamic object seems intuitively correct, but Nordtug does not elucidate the implications of this. For example, the commonplace reading of the dynamic object is that it is Peirce’s word for Kant’s thing in itself, except that for Kant, one has no access to this thing.

Closer readings of the dynamic object however – such as that of Umberto Eco in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992) – show that this access in Peirce is by no means unproblematic, as discussed in Chapter Three. The subject makes contact with the dynamic object by means of an aggregation of collaterally observed immediate objects from different positions, between which there is always some discrepancy and contradiction (Short 2007: 191–195). The indexical bond to the dynamic object is maintained only so long as the space of collateral observation remains open and new immediate objects continue to modify the concept of that object. An unchanging portrayal of the object is no longer dynamic.

The somewhat pedantic, but still interesting point being here is that, Lacan’s description of the Real as nothing more tangible than a disruption of the symbolic can be applied to Peirce’s dynamic object as well. It would be more accurate to say that the Lacanian Real corresponds to the secondness of any given trichotomy, whether it be the dynamic object, the sinsign, or the index. Nordtug’s association remains valid nonetheless, and this ambition to hybridize Lacan’s Borromean knot with the Peircean sign is a central strategy also in the work of John P. Muller.

The stated premise of Muller’s *Beyond the Psychoanalytic Dyad* (1995) would also appear to capture the general aim of this section: he seeks to enhance the dyadic structural semiological model of the sign used by Lacan with the triadic sign model of Charles Peirce. Something in the triadic model “has been neglected by the individualistic orientation of American psychology as well as by ego psychology and the more recent dyadic focus of psychoanalysis. We are coming to realize, however, that a third is required to frame the dyad, to provide an orienting structure” (Muller 1995: 2). One would presume from this that Muller suggests replacing the signifier-signified of Saussure with representamen-object-interpretant of Peirce. Muller’s proposal on the contrary is to say that, what is

really missing is culture, in the form of the symbolic, that psychology is not attentive enough to the dimension of language and culture, and that the Peircean antidote would be to put a more specific name to this dimension.

The claim should strike the close reader of Lacan as especially bizarre, considering the heavy emphasis he puts on the place of the symbolic in conditioning the self. Muller's argument seems to be geared specifically against a behaviorist psychology that would overemphasize biological determination and a dyadic relation between patient and nature. While the accusation of biological determinism can and often is leveled (incorrectly) at Freud, what is missing from the psychoanalytic dyad in Lacan is clearly not the symbolic dimension, but arguably rather a positive name for sense, affect, and drive.

This accusation itself however is also a misguided one for reasons already discussed at length earlier in this chapter, but nevertheless it is a more understandable one than Muller's claim. Admittedly though, Lacan's category of the symbolic does not make a place for what could be called the productive dimension of culture, characterizing the symbolic, along with the typical Lacanian one that portrays language and culture generally as an entirely overdetermining and ideological power structure³⁰. Muller's work as a whole however is well grounded in clinical studies and provides suggestive applications to literary criticism. One passage in particular echoes the contention of this chapter on several levels.

Notions of the human subject as a multileveled process came prominently into Western philosophy through Hegel, in whose work both Lacan and Peirce found an emphasis on the self not as substance but as subject, not as isolated subject but as subject in the intersubjective matrix of culture, not as a fixed entity but a subject understood as a process, and not as a process that gradually unfolds positively but, rather, a process that operates through the dialectic of negation, suffering, division, and the shared memorialization of loss. (Muller 1998: 64)

Owen Hewitson's online article, "What does psychoanalysis have to do with psychology?" (2010) gives the textual sources for Lacan's antipsychologism and unpacks some of its implications. These implications relate directly to the problem of how to reconcile his radical anti-essentialism with Peirce's semiotic realism. Hewitson makes the keen observation, that what thwarts the attempt to treat psychology as an extension of animal behavior is the propensity in human signs for the signifier to become "unhinged" from its referent (Hewitson 2010: 3). This is why the ideological power structure is always a symbolic one, because as Peirce notes, only symbols can misrepresent their objects. Provocatively, this is the same argument given by Terrence Deacon in both *The Symbolic Species* (1997) and *Incomplete Nature* (2012a).

³⁰ Daniele Monticelli (2016) explores the contrasting definitions of 'culture' – culture as dynamic and productive in Juri Lotman on the one hand, and culture as overdetermining ideology in Roland Barthes on the other – in his 2016 publication "Critique of Ideology or/and Analysis of Culture? Barthes and Lotman on Secondary Semiotic Systems", as briefly discussed in Chapter One.

The term from Deacon is the cognitive penumbra, and it is theorized in detail in Chapter Five, under the title of the quasi-sign doctrine. One of the most profound and understated assertions of Deacon's corpus has to do with this idea – it is the backbone of a Peircean ideology critique – and profoundly it reflects the theoretic orientation of structural semiology like an inverse image: empirically oriented nouveau semiotics inadvertently recapitulates the claims of the linguistically oriented second-generation semiology, and the two may reinforce each other, and lead the way to some much needed reunification, through non-identity and detotalization, and emergent dynamics may provide the non-reductive universal to the fractured social sciences. Hewitson unequivocally establishes the antipsychologistic character of Lacan's psychoanalysis:

The signifier – its autonomy in the sense that it can act as a referent to more than one thing – is the key aspect of the symbolic process that Lacan highlights to his audience continually through the Seminar. Psychoanalysis would go astray if it were to fail to employ the notion of the signifier to understand human subjectivity, and instead make an unquestioning appeal simply to 'reality'. As he says in Seminar XI: 'In analytic practice, mapping the subject in relation to reality, such as it is supposed to constitute us, and not in relation to the signifier, amounts to falling already into the degradation of the psychological constitution of the subject'. (Hewitson 2010: 5)

In the above quote one receives a neat presentation of the central dilemma of hybridizing Lacan and Peirce. Readers of Peirce as a vulgar realist would refuse the possible compatibility of the two, just as readers of Lacan as a vulgar relativist would do the same, but these are straw man portrayals of them both. A nuanced reading of Peirce shows that, although he does reserve a place and give a name to discourse-independent reality, making access to that reality is by no means unproblematic. Dream interpretation, *I Ching*, and Tarot, have been used in this chapter to illustrate the element of randomization at work in retroactivity, because only these most extreme examples can effectively convey the discomfort and disorientation involved in going through the experience of this crucible (the double distortion), as Kristeva puts it. The impression made by this abject passage must be held on to, when venturing further into the territory of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, which presents itself as something fully instrumentalizable, for which retroactivity has nothing to say. But if the lessons of signomancy are kept in mind, one may see in texts of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics retroactivity popping up there also. These texts also, may be put to the detotalizing purposes of ideology critique. The lesson cuts the other direction as well: for detotalization to adequately combat the problems of relativism, it needs to incorporate the logical and empirical strategies of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, because in the end it is surprisingly these domains, which yield up the best evidence for the existence of the profound articulatory matrix.

V. DETOTALIZING PEIRCE: COMPOSITION AND TAXONOMY

Having restated the important theoretic coordinates of detotalization in the preceding four chapters, and in that process having elaborated the principle of retroactivity as the unifying thought which draws them all together, the current chapter now presents principal findings in Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics in the light of retroactivity. This is done in order to include them within the sinthome coordinates, and utilize their tools for the aims of detotalization. In both the introduction and the conclusion of his 2008 dissertation, Monticelli suggests that Peirce may indeed be drawn into the detotalizing thresher, despite the fact that, up till now, Peirce's semiotics have been unsympathetic with the aims of detotalization. In his introduction, Monticelli discusses Eco's famous but controversial reading of Peirce. "A new semiotic approach was developed – mainly by Umberto Eco (1975; 1979; 1984; see also Eco, Sebeok 1983 and Bonfantini 1987) – which recuperated some detotalizing intuitions of Peirce such as the notions of 'interpretant', 'abduction' and 'infinite semiosis' in order to trigger a shift from the structuralist to an interpretative semiotic theory" (Monticelli 2008: 12).

In the body of his work, Monticelli does not address the semiotics of Peirce at all, presumably because he would rather consolidate around extant theories of detotalization and show their continuity with the politics of emancipation. That is, his principal aim in *Wholeness and its Remainders* was to show that there is no insuperable break between deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and the Tartu-Moscow School on the one hand, and the thought of Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Rancière on the other.

In that picture, Peirce is only an afterthought. However, since 2008 the Peircean turn has only accelerated, especially in cognitive and biosemiotics. For evidence of this, and for the most comprehensive overview of the area of biosemiotics, one should rely upon Donald Favareau's *Essential Readings in Biosemiotics: Anthology and Commentary* (Favareau 2010). The major upshot of the ascendance of Peirce has been that his semiotics facilitates more conversation with real science, and lends itself to integration with empirical research strategies. But the Peircean turn has also contributed to the decline of interest in procedures of detotalization. In his conclusion, Monticelli is specific to say that, if Peirce is to be incorporated to semiotics proper, it should follow the example of Eco, and not lead to new hegemonic totalities, or the eclipse of the lineage of second-generation semiology, critical theory, and psychoanalysis.

The encounter of the remainder of semiology with Peircean semiosis could in this sense be imagined as its encounter with a general mechanism of detotalization which should not be understood as an all-encompassing criterion of identification giving access to a larger and more authentic totality. Semiosis detotalizes not only the theoretical results of semiotic practices, but semiotics as theoretical practice itself, insofar as it places it within (and makes it vulnerable by) the whole ensemble of human, animal, living practices. It is the openness and infinity of Peirce's semiosis

which relates it to such poststructuralist and Lotmanian instruments of detotalization as textuality and dialogue. And it is the awareness of the semiotic character of the theoretical practices of semiotics which sanction the unending turning back on itself of semiotics in the form of an auto-critique which also implies the impossibility for semiotics becoming a ‘superstructure’ for other theoretical practices. (Monticelli 2008: 301)

The interpretant, abduction, and unlimited semiosis are exactly the Peircean notions which, up to this point in the dissertation, have been deployed toward detotalization. They are the Peircean concepts which recapitulate the non-identity of the sign function and imply retroactivity. But the radicalizing potential of these terms is somewhat overplayed – to emphasize these terms at the exclusion of the rest of Peirce’s less radical concepts can be opportunistic. More than that, detotalization is not the whole story of semiotics.

The integration of Peirce to detotalization cuts firstly in one direction, toward the deconstruction of Peirce’s own thought, but then it also cuts back the other direction. Why, one must ask, does detotalization need Peirce? The answer to this question must be more persuasive than just the fact that Peirce is now the only game in town. But detotalization does need Peirce, and this is why: findings in Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics reinforce some of the central claims of detotalization; Peircean semiotics bears out clearly the importance of the humanities as an indispensable area for non-instrumentalizable inquiry, and it has also shown the way to an empirically grounded approach to ideology critique.

Detotalization needs Peirce, because the tools of the humanities in and of themselves have proven inadequate for defending their own existence. Another way of understanding this, is that the fractionation of the humanities and social sciences into mutually hostile camps has accelerated considerably even since 2008, and Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics provides a scientific line of defense against the erosion of the humanities, a point which Paul Cobley drives home in *Cultural Implications of Biosemiotics* (2014). The cutting edge of this defense is the semiotic theorization of self-organizing systems, here considered from the perspective of Terrence Deacon’s emergent dynamics.

A handful of singular works published since the turn of the millennium have proven that the texts of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics are now indispensable to defining and preserving the disciplinary identity of semiotics. Deacon’s *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter* (2012a), and Frederik Stjernfelt’s *Diagrammatology* (2007) now stand monolithic in the field, but they tell different stories regarding how Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics should relate to structural semiology. The concluding chapter of this dissertation takes the works of Stjernfelt and Deacon as principal objects of an exegesis geared toward demystifying the relationship of this decidedly scientific turn, with its predecessors in second-generation semiology, ideology critique, Eco’s interpretative semiotics, and psychoanalysis. One major result of this analysis is that, contra Stjernfelt, Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics does not need to disavow the “radicalizing philosophies of difference” (Stjernfelt 2007: 138).

In this way, semiotics may have its scientific defense of the profound articulatory matrix, at the same time as it retains its critical orientation. This would be the ambition fulfilled, of the project proposed by Daniele Monticelli.

The major dilemma for integrating Peirce to detotalization is that the alternately empirical and logical characteristic of Peircean semiotics does not seem to allow for retroactivity. Thus, the narrow-focus goal of the chapter is to deconstruct somewhat both views of Peirce, following on the proposals that have already been made in Chapters Three and Four regarding unorthodox readings of Peirce. In order to achieve this, the chapter proceeds along somewhat pedantic lines. For instance, to begin with, the usefulness of Umberto Eco's foundational opposition of sign function and sign production is defended by means of deconstructing Stjernfelt's own critiques of Eco and Deacon, which are shown to be mutually inconsistent. One assertion to this end, is that the sign types of icon, index, and symbol, are descriptors of sign production (which is the circle surrounding the pyramid in Figure 1 and subsequent figures), and that the empirically oriented taxonomic activities of some Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics should be understood in terms of their interest in sign production specifically, and not in the theorization of the sign function, for which there are no sign types, and the sign is never determined by an external referent.

The importance of Stjernfelt's work is maintained, but a hybrid approach is endorsed, spacious enough to accommodate both the scientific and the radically non-identical strains of semiotics. Taxonomy and composition relate to the preceding oppositions, but their division does not easily fall to one side and the other. In a footnote to his chapter "The evolution of semiotic self-control" (as a part of *The Symbolic Species Evolved*, edited by Schilhab et al. 2012: 39–64), Stjernfelt uses the illuminating metaphor of human architecture and dwelling spaces to explain the opposition.

Please permit an analogy. To trace the origin of human architecture, you will have to return to simple shelters and bivouacs and, before them, the nests of our biological cousins the great apes, and earlier, various biological hideouts and shells as protection devices, phylogenetically and ontogenetically built. Thus you begin with phenomena which perform the basic sheltering function of the whole building in a germlike form, rather than beginning with the development of bricks and planks which only much later assemble into full buildings. The full-building structure was there from the beginning, even if in a very primitive, unarticulated shape. Just like bricks, icons and indices primarily function within the wholes of dicisigns linked up into action arguments – and they only acquire semi-autonomous status much later, during the ongoing sophistication of argument structure through evolution. (Stjernfelt 2012: 46–47)

Consider how Stjernfelt employs this metaphor to distinguish his own approach from that of Deacon. "This points to the fact that semiotic evolution should not be seen as going from the simple to the complex in terms of beginning with atomic signs which later serve as building blocks for more complex signs" (Stjernfelt 2012: 47).

As illuminating as the metaphor is, the chapter here shows how the descriptive orientation toward house-building, rather than toward evolution of human architecture, does not exhaust the Deaconian taxonomy; but even if it did, the fact remains that Stjernfelt is also interested in building houses. It is partially in this respect that his critique of Deacon doesn't quite add up.

Like the structuralist oppositions between *langue* and *parole*, paradigm and syntagm, and metaphor and metonymy, the oppositions between sign function and sign production, and composition and taxonomy, do not map neatly to each other. These oppositions all intersect each other along multiple vectors, converging only occasionally on a fluctuating object that is the profound matrix. They help to chart the expanding constellation that is the black pyramid synthesis. After untangling this final theoretic knot, the problem of methodology remains; the final section of the chapter explains how retroactivity dictates textual and aesthetic measures to Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, some of which are already realized in the works of Deacon and Stjernfelt.

In recent years some pioneering researchers in the field of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics have intimated the need for this detotalization, without however carrying out the procedure to its logical end. The chapter begins by a review of one of the most prominent of these examples.

5.1. Cultural Implications of Biosemiotics

Paul Copley's interest in detotalization is made clear in *Cultural Implications of Biosemiotics* (2016). Citing Petrilli and Ponzio's semioethics he writes, "There is no doubt that communication between humans, particularly in the form of "communication-production", the profit-making imperative of global communication as identified by Petrilli and Ponzio (2005), has assumed a crucial position and has become, potentially, disastrous for the planet" (Copley 2016: 67). And in the introduction to her book *Sign Studies and Semioethics* (Petrilli 2014), Petrilli makes it equally clear, that a really detotalizing semiotics is also a divisive one:

this book does not only aim to critique the social programmes, goals and values that condition and pervade the globalized communication order today. The general science of signs itself, semiotics, is also called into question; not only when it presents itself as "quisling", "collaborationist" semiotics, that is, when it collaborates in supporting the globalized communication order, making sure it runs smoothly – with its transactions, markets, propaganda – and obtaining consensus for it; but also when in the face of growing social malaise the practitioners of semiotics persist in not contributing to any changes, in not acting to transform this order. (Petrilli 2014: V)

But it is not clear from the book or elsewhere, just who are the collaborators and who are the revolutionaries. Copley's latest book still sets a doubly useful precedent for detotalizing Peirce: on the one hand, Copley perceives the fact that semiotics cannot afford to dispense with ideology critique; it cannot completely jettison the heritage of structural semiology, psychoanalysis, and Marxism. On the other hand,

Cobley recapitulates on many points the very disavowal of both structural semiology and psychoanalysis for which his book would presume to serve as remedy and counterpoint. What rings most clearly there is the Marxist viewpoint and critique of capitalism, whereas second-generation semiology, deconstruction, formalism, poststructuralism – all the elements which provide an aesthetic and a textual methodology – are comparably neglected, and in this way some problems are left unaddressed, as to the connection between the philosophical interrogation of subjectivity at the theoretic level, and the aesthetic-textual necessities of that interrogation at the methodological level.

As Monticelli points out (2008: 11), the field of semioethics cleaves loyally to the semiotics of Peirce and yet aspires to reclaim the heritage of ideology critique that is disavowed by the Peirce nouveau. This imparts upon Cobley's book some unresolved internal conflict. He concedes, "it is clear that biosemiotics does owe a great deal to the 'old' semiotics and that which it owes regards an important cultural implication" (Cobley 2016: 28), but curiously writes off postmodernism, and seemingly with it all of non-Peircean semiotics, as an elaborate marketing fad, "The publishing bonanza attendant on 'postmodernism'" (Cobley 2016: xi), the "ultra-modern posing" (Cobley 2016: xii) of "these heady days of the publishing venture known as 'postmodernism'" (Cobley 2016: 94).

What then is the 'old semiotics' to which biosemiotics still owes some debt, if decidedly not postmodernism or poststructuralism? If it has nothing to do with de-centering, detotalization, or destratification, then one might presume it has to do with the earlier structuralism or semiology which, while it fell short of the radicalism and epistemological skepticism that was to arise at the advent of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1974[1967]) and Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* (1977[1964]), certainly inaugurated an approach to cultural theory via linguistics, and sparked the inter- and transdisciplinary fascination of structuralism. But one finds that this too remains inimical to Peircean semiotics from Cobley's view because, "As will be seen, the nominalism of the 'linguistic turn' is at odds with the Peircean realist perspective in biosemiotics" (Cobley 2016: 18). Chapter One was mostly dedicated to dispelling the reading of second-generation semiology which Cobley mostly adopts in this book, but this adoption is understandable.

One aspect that distinguishes Cobley's position is that he deliberately cites French Marxist Louis Althusser, to name this decisive turn that biosemiotics takes, purposefully showing (as one later discovers) that he would put biosemiotics to the purposes of ideology critique; however, Cobley's selection of the moniker of anti-humanism is not the most intuitive one. While initially allying his book with the Marxist thought of Althusser, anti-humanism also denotes the multi-species perspective, which for him is the most important aspect of biosemiotics, but the textual methodologies that accompany anti-humanism are not recommended by Cobley.

Biosemiotics for Cobley is an approach that explicitly renounces human exceptionalism. "It is for this reason that the present volume still argues for an anti-humanist perspective which, in spite of biosemiotics' departure from mechanism and materialism, remains necessary in assessing culture" (Cobley 2016: 25), and

for him, biosemiotics is “already political in its vivid counterposition to modern liberal humanism” (Cobley 2016: 48).

The implication of the multi-species approach of biosemiotics extends back to the other notable representatives of anti-humanism such as Michel Foucault, in the sense that he too was committed to the displacement of man as epistemological center and the place of the king, in *The Order of Things* (1970). As Cobley notes, if somewhat derisively,

humanism, as poststructuralism and postmodernism recognized albeit in a limited and self-serving fashion, is predicated on the unwarranted assumption that humans are central in the cosmos. Anti-humanist – and sometimes ‘posthumanist’ – scholars have eschewed individualism and cultural vitalism, attempting to depict the human as *subject* to the structures that humans have often been instrumental in constructing. (Cobley 2016: 26)

However, the critique of “bourgeois humanist thought” (Cobley 2016: 16) leveled by Foucault and Althusser by no means extends to the broader thought of biosemiotics. That is, the strategy employed by Foucault and many others surrounding him – here one does think of Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, and Kristeva – was largely a textual one, in which the descriptive and pedagogic norms of philosophical and scientific discourse themselves were entirely overturned, whereas Sebeok, along with the majority of later representatives of the Peirce nouveau, now construe this *ho trōsas iasetai* epistemological skepticism and auto-critical textual strategy as a mistake, and would rather return to at times either rationalistic, traditionally philological, or on the other hand concretely empirical strategies, which bear no resemblance whatsoever to deconstruction or poststructuralism. This aspect is one puzzling and at times inconvenient part of Cobley’s book, when he claims for example that Thomas Sebeok was anti-humanist. “Bourgeois humanism, as Althusser shows (1969: 247), makes ‘man’ the principle of all theory and the human’s products in culture must therefore be exceptional. Nixing that exceptionalism, as biosemiotics does, amounts to what can truly be called anti-humanism [...] Sebeok’s biosemiotics is even more truly anti-humanist” (Cobley 2016: 57). To the extent that they both refuse to grant the human species its privileged status, Althusser and Sebeok have something in common, but beyond that the comparison is a stretch.

And again later in the book, Cobley asserts “That the Althusserian call for anti-humanism is coterminous with Sebeok’s eschewal of humanism in the work that informs current semioethics” (Cobley 2016: 66). Anti-humanism does of course displace the human subject, calling into question the basic oppositions like mind-body, inner-outer, subject-object etc., but it does so more than just in name. It does not merely pay lip-service to these destabilizations, but translates them into a textual methodology of retroactivity. Of what use is it, to simply say that the mind-body opposition is false? Language recapitulates these oppositions, until language is turned against itself and the oppositions are forcibly shaken. Sebeok and the Peirce nouveau are supposedly all about ‘getting at’ this non-linguistic

meaning, but for the most part they do so in an uncritical taxonomic fashion, whereby non-linguistic meaning is labeled with ‘sign species’, and thus presumed to have been recovered, but there is no tangible recovery here. The principle of *ho trōsas iasetai* is totally lost on this approach.

It must be remarked however that (as will be demonstrated with regard to Stjernfelt’s work later in the chapter), regardless of Sebeok’s many disavowals of structural semiology, nevertheless his own texts are themselves quite interdisciplinary, eclectic, internally conflicted, and intertextual, many of the features one detects in the properly anti-humanist work.

But as Monticelli points out, Sebeok’s so-called global semiotics plays off its own totality in a very non-semiotic fashion, this is a serious problem, and serious enough to say that Sebeok was certainly not an anti-humanist, at least not in the sense that either Foucault or Althusser intended the term. This however does not delegitimize his works in any way, nor proscribe their appropriation for the aims of detotalization.

Cobley’s anti-humanism may lead to another confusion which he is careful to point out: one may mistake anti-humanism itself for an attack on the traditional institutions of human knowing. That is, one might think by the name of anti-humanism that biosemiotics should be going away from the humanities, but it is rather the opposite of the case.

In fact, the defense of the humanities is a topic about which Cobley has published variously. As he argues, anti-humanism is not against the human sciences, because “the humanities are not necessarily humanist” (Cobley 2016: 111). All of the eighth chapter of *Cultural Implications of Biosemiotics* is dedicated to this matter. If there is one ideology he would deconstruct, more specific than liberal humanism, it would be that instrumental rationality which has prioritized STEM at the expense of the humanities. This is yet another way in which his thesis is complicated. Cobley points to the same woeful situation to which many other notable Marxist critics in recent decades have directed their attention: the systematic subordination of the academy to financial interest. Žižek, Eagleton, and Jameson have all written on this rapidly deteriorating situation. “The humanities are currently under assault for the perceived lack of utility. The humanities are found wanting in the face of the putative utility of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and they are increasingly called upon to demonstrate direct economic use-value” (Cobley 2016: 107).

If one were to put the question to Petrilli, Ponzio, or Cobley himself, just which semiotics is this ‘quilting, collaborationist semiotics’, probably they would not point to structural semiology. Probably they would point to marketing and advertising semiotics. At times, Cobley’s radicalism is more plain-faced, such as when he casually notes that “the biosemiotic concept of ethics is grounded in anti-humanist principles which echo Engels” (Cobley 2016: 11), or when he cites Alain Badiou (Cobley 2016: 67), and Giorgio Agamben (Cobley 2016: 69). That is, at times Cobley’s anti-humanist biosemiotics has the refreshing tenor of unapologetic Marxism.

Chapter Two of this dissertation clarified the fact that, while certain aspects of Marxist literary theory are indispensable to the black pyramid synthesis, many of the problems of unreconstructed Marxism also need to be repeated and rectified, in order to retain the integrity of the sinthome. For example, following upon Monticelli's own discussion of circularity and circulation (2008: 112–158; 179–184): there can be no concrete opposition between use value and exchange value, class consciousness and false consciousness, or base and superstructure. Nevertheless, the pointed gesture by Copley, of asserting the rightful place of Marx in the greater picture of semiotics, is really unusual on the part of the Peirce nouveau, for whom by and large Marx remains as taboo as deconstruction and psychoanalysis. In some of the exegesis that follows, it is shown again how in contemporary semiotics Marxism tends only to be used as a straw man for disavowal, instead of being implemented as it should be, for the dissection of the commodity fetish and the identification of the ideological secondary systems.

5.2. Taxonomy

It would be convenient to say that structural semiology concerns the theorization of the sign function exclusively, and that Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics concerns the typologization of modes of sign production, but this would be an over-generalization. One ambition of the chapter is to specify applications of Peirce which take one or the other methodological approach, and that Peirce's system is broad enough to accommodate both. In the same way, taxonomy and composition are not opposed to each other, but form a pair: taxonomic and non-taxonomic, and compositional and non-compositional. It is useful to cite here some observations by Zdzisław Wąsik on the matter, which he makes in the context of Sebeok's 'six species of signs' (1975; cf. also 2001[1994]), namely *signal*, *symptom*, *icon*, *index*, *symbol*, *name*, which will be discussed at length and developed further in this chapter. Referring back to his earlier work, *From Grammar to Discourse: Towards a Solipsistic Paradigm of Semiotics* (2016), Wąsik reminds that, depending on the realm in which the sign manifests, whether it be that of the human, animal, plant, or other, semiotic study may be conducted from the perspective of linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, biology, etc. Importantly, he establishes a basic division between the logical-philosophical approach to signs, and the psychological-biological approach. Contrary to Sebeok's enumeration of the so-called six species of signs, where the 'language sign' is considered under the term *name*, in Wąsik's hierarchical classification, the highest place occupies, as the definitional *genus proximum* of all semiotic objects, either a *phenomenon* or a *stimulus*, where the lowest place belongs to the language (i.e. verbal) sign. Accordingly, the hierarchy of seven classes of semiotic objects, according to Wąsik includes, *index*, *symptom*, *signal*, *appeal*, *symbol*, *icon*, *sign* (2016: 200–202). As he has noticed, what is missing in Sebeok's enumeration of signs is the category of "appeal" (introduced nota bene by Karl Bühler (1879–

1963) in his *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language*, 1990 [*Sprachtheorie. Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache*, 1934]).

Such specifications aid in avoiding unwarranted generalizations, such as that Peirce is taxonomic and Saussure is not, and that the difference between them consists in just this. One such generalization is captured in the title of Mihhail Lotman's 2002 article, "Atomistic versus holistic semiotics", where he writes that "Peirce's approach to signs could be called atomistic. In the centre of attention there is a (single) sign. From the standpoint of Peircean semiotics, sign is elementary and, semiotically, the smallest element. [...] it does not consist of any smaller components" (M. Lotman 2002: 515).

M. Lotman's article usefully recapitulates the received view, and challenges that atomistic viewpoint understandably, given the already at the time meteoric rise of Peircean semiotics against its structural semiological counterparts. One can sense in the article some frustration with the attitude of disavowal, common to the Peirce nouveau. Paraphrasing the sentiment, M. Lotman writes, "Wouldn't it be more expedient, then, to forget Saussure at all, as some of Peirce's followers earnestly suggest? [...] Thomas Sebeok was even more resolved in this matter. [...]: if Saussure had drunk less, then he wouldn't have written all these obscure things and would have come to the ideas which can be found in Peirce's works" (M. Lotman 2002: 514).

As should be clear, a major goal of this dissertation has been to show that the disavowal of structural semiology on the part of the Peirce nouveau is misguided at best, but at worst oftentimes politically motivated, and in this respect one must agree with M. Lotman. At the same time it should be pointed out that the characterization of Peircean semiotics as atomistic or even necessarily taxonomic is a misleading generalization.

One of the reasons why Peirce is now received exclusively as a taxonomist is because of publications mostly in the Sebeokian vein, which put to use a drastically simplified model of Peirce. The problems of this simplification are abundant, however the heuristic expedient of this simplification should not be dismissed out of hand. That is, for the purposes of teaching and dissemination of semiotic ideas, this simplification has been very successful.

The Forms of Meaning (2000) is the landmark book, where it was first systematically proposed that the primary modeling system is something simpler than verbal language. It is also a taxonomic semiotics par excellence, second only to its precursor and the most well-known taxonomic semiotics, *The Symbolic Species* (Deacon 1997). Both of them reflect the germinal idea of Kalevi Kull's broad, sign-based evolutionary thresholds. These sign production-, genesis-, and taxonomy-oriented works are the target of some criticism for the fact that they diverge so completely from the classic orientation of the sign function and from the methods of structural semiology, or because they contradict Peirce. The most focused critique of the taxonomic approach comes from Frederik Stjernfelt.

But Stjernfelt's critique of Deacon, both in his taxonomic enterprise as well as his compositional account of the sign, turns out to be inconsistent – what Stjernfelt really wants, is a more rigorous adherence to the details of Peirce's own

writings. Before moving to the specificities of Stjernfelt's critique of Deacon, an overview of the taxonomic approach to Peirce is briefly discussed, which considers both its enduring merits as well as some of its more serious problems.

5.2.1. *The Forms of Meaning*

Marcel Danesi and Thomas A. Sebeok's *The Forms of Meaning* is unique for its accessibility and interdisciplinarity. It attempts to give an internally coherent and consistent account of the theory of signs, based upon a simplified, taxonomic application of the semiotics of Peirce. Kalevi Kull defines the taxonomic approach against the counterpart notion of 'meronomy,' otherwise known as mereology, which is discussed later in the context of composition (5.3).

If we classify independent objects, we carry out taxonomy, and get taxa. But if we classify parts of a whole, this is meronomy, where we make a distinction between merons. Thus, in the case of the classification of sign vehicles, we have taxonomy, whereas when classifying sign as components of a sign system, we have to carry out meronomy... (Kull 2000: 12)

Kull also gives the barebones outline of a basic, phylogenetic taxonomy of evolutionary thresholds on the basis of Peirce's most famous trichotomy of signs, in his "Vegetative, animal, and cultural semiosis: The semiotic threshold zones": "(1) Vegetative, which is capable of recognition – iconic relations; (2) Animal, capable for association – indexical relations; (3) Cultural, capable for combination – symbolic relations" (2009: 15). For the most recent and comprehensive summary of the issue of taxonomy in biosemiotics, see Kull (2019).

This style of taxonomization also sometimes takes an ontogenetic application, where these thresholds describe the phases of development of single organisms, or of semiotic processes in which sensory percepts develop gradually into concepts. This ontogenetic taxonomizing strategy is major idea of *The Forms of Meaning*, which takes the further step of abstracting these thresholds to the modeling system levels, to the effect that primary modeling is iconic, secondary modeling is indexical, and tertiary modeling is symbolic.

Developmental psychology is one domain which has adopted the ontogenetic taxonomic approach, describing individual human development across semiotic thresholds. Accordingly, where verbal language was previously taken to be the primary modeling system, Danesi and Sebeok extend the lower threshold to include pre-linguistic sensory motor percept and affect, thus including non-linguistic as well as non-human acts as signs. In this way then, verbal language is already the secondary modeling system. Following from this, by the received view, what were called the secondary modeling systems (e.g. conventions of poetry, styles of topiary, and culture-specific codes of conduct), are now called tertiary modeling systems.

However, this last part is a misreading of Sebeok and Danesi's book as some have pointed out, for example Anti Randviir (2009). The actual statement by Danesi and Sebeok was this: yes, primary modeling is lowered to include sensory motor affect and emotion; verbal language is then moved up a level, to the secondary modeling system; culture codes, genres, styles, and other higher-order conventions however are not tertiary: they are also secondary; tertiary modeling systems on the other hand refer to a special level of highly abstract formal systems, principally mathematics.

Already from the outset, this empirically oriented, taxonomic, and psychological-biological approach to the sign diverges drastically from the approach of structural semiology, where there are only two levels of modeling systems, and where (more importantly) the division of modeling systems has nothing to do with the substrate in which the sign is realized. As discussed in the context of circulation in Chapter Two, from the structural semiological view, what is primary and what is secondary may switch places, neither is guaranteed access to the object-referent, and thus what is primary and what is secondary may not be decided on the basis of substrate specificity. This is the fundamental difference between the approaches, and the reason why the Sebeokian, taxonomic-empirical approach has more to do with the typology of sign production, and less to do with the theorization of the sign function.

Most of the examples of tertiary modeling given in *The Forms of Meaning* come from mathematics and formal logic. This in itself is a quite different picture from the received view. One may note here, that the way that Danesi and Sebeok describe tertiary modeling also implies that ideological constructs may be considered counterparts to mathematical formulation, as another form of tertiary modeling, however they do not develop this connection.

The whole normative thrust of saying that verbal language is not the primary modeling system is to extend signs firstly beyond language, and secondly beyond humans: to grant to non-humans the ability of sign use. This is a normative gesture because it is an ethically charged, value-based assertion. It is meant to counter what is called anthropocentrism, where the presumption is that to restrict signs to verbal language is at once to accord a qualitatively superior position to humans. There are some minor inconsistencies in *The Forms of Meaning* which complicate this critique of anthropocentrism.

The primary-secondary-tertiary distinction is preceded by another, more fundamental series, that is the singularized, composite, cohesive, and connective types of model (Danesi, Sebeok 2000: 170). Whether issuing from the primary, secondary, or tertiary level, all models come in one of these four types.

The four types of model are described in this section of their book as types of "representation" (Danesi, Sebeok 2000: 5). Representation, however, is defined as human-specific. "Semiosis is a capacity of all life forms; representation, on the other hand, is a unique capacity of the human species" (Danesi, Sebeok 2000: 5). On the following page it is asserted that singularized, composite, cohesive, and connective models, are all specifically types of *representation*, whereas non-

representative precursors of semiosis are not yet specified into this four-term series (Danesi, Sebeok 2000: 6).

That is, whatever the substrate- or species-specific status of sign, no one but humans can produce these four types of models. The book's chapters are organized according to the primary (Chapter Two), secondary (Chapter Three), and tertiary (Chapter Four) modeling systems, and the subsections of each chapter are organized according to the types of models singularized, composite, cohesive, and connective. In other words, if these types are kinds of representations, and representations are human-specific, this means that nothing in this book should pertain to non-humans in any way at all.

One can see how this inconsistency at the beginning of the work takes a bit of the wind out of the sails of their attempt to strike a blow against anthropocentrism. Later in the book however, they assert that it is rather tertiary connective modeling that is the missing link that defines humans (Danesi, Sebeok 2000: 150–154), not representation; connective models are Danesi and Sebeok's version of the conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson, and tertiary connective models are precise analogs for Lakoff and Johnson's complex metaphors. Needless to say, this later account makes the whole picture of *The Forms of Meaning* more coherent, but it contradicts directly what is asserted in the introduction, as described above. This sort of inconsistency is just one of the numerous unavoidable problems of trying to typologize signs on the basis of substrate-specificity, i.e. the problems of sign taxonomy. Stjernfelt's critique of taxonomy bypasses this discussion of Sebeok altogether, proceeding directly to the Deacon's *The Symbolic Species*.

5.2.2. Semiotic insights into the typology of species

The phylogenetic taxonomizing strategy is what gives the book its memorable name: *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain* (1997), and Kalevi Kull's above-cited typology into the vegetative, animal, and the cultural is a useful heuristic for understanding its basis. Two things are noted from the outset: the first is that this classification of species difference by sign type is only a secondary matter in Deacon's book.

Deacon's major semiotic insight is captured much less by the main title, and more by the subtitle. The co-evolution hypothesis is that Language with a capital L, language as such, has been around much longer than is commonly thought. Where spoken language as we know it emerged in its primitive form only one hundred thousand years ago, Deacon says the capacity for language as such arose probably more like one million years ago (Deacon 2012b: 33).

The word Deacon chooses to use for this language capacity is symbolic, but it is just this terminological choice that is the real point of contention with other writers in Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, namely Stjernfelt. Stjernfelt insists that symbol in the way Peirce intended it does not match Deacon's usage, and in this complaint Stjernfelt is probably right.

One thing that is clear is that Terrence Deacon does not care as much about fidelity to the original thought of Peirce as Stjernfelt does. The argument in here and in 5.3, is that Stjernfelt exaggerates this problem, and moreover that the critique of Deacon’s taxonomy, while perhaps still valid in itself, is nevertheless inconsistent with Stjernfelt’s critique of Umberto Eco.

More important than all of this is that, regardless of the accuracy or fidelity of Terrence Deacon’s use of the symbol concept from Peirce, the major semiotic insight about the co-evolution hypothesis – the pre-existence of language as such – confirms the uniting hypothesis of general semiotics: the existence of the profound articulatory matrix. This is a more important accomplishment, over and above any amount of textual pedantry.

Thus, some work is put into defending Deacon’s taxonomizing here, and later defending his allegedly compositional account of signs, in order to more securely approach the groundbreaking insights of the later book *Incomplete Nature* (Deacon 2012a), for the quasi-sign doctrine (5.4) and the biosemiotic aesthetic function (5.5). Worth presenting upfront is Deacon’s titular diagram, from the chapter “Symbols Aren’t Simple” (Deacon 1997: 87).

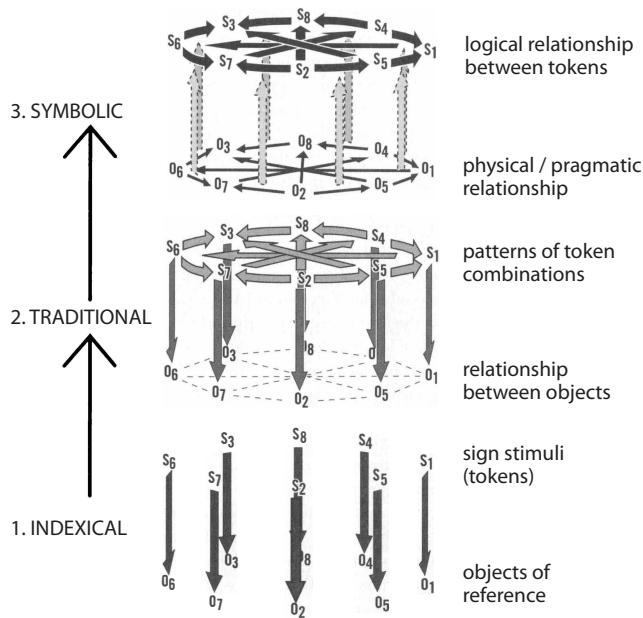


Figure 18: Deacon’s three-tiered hierarchy, adapted from Deacon (1997: 87).

The diagram explains the process of language acquisition. It attempts to dispel a folk notion of language, in which language is a mere collection of token-object terms. The diagram shows how, at the symbolic threshold, language is freed from token-object dependence, as they are uploaded to the higher order system. This explains why, past a certain threshold, the effort required in the rote memorization of early language acquisition decreases substantially. “The indexical token-object

relations upon which the structure was built are subordinated to the now dominant token-token system of the symbol” (Deacon: 1997: 83).

In the figure, note how the shade of the downward pointing arrows lightens during the ascent of the hierarchy, and how the arrows reverse direction at the top of the diagram. Note also how at the bottom there are no horizontal arrows interconnecting the tokens, at the middle level the interconnecting arrows appear but are light-grey, and at the top the interconnecting arrows are dark-black. This is meant to depict the concretization of the higher-order relationships between tokens that frees them from dependence on the context of the objects upon which they were formed. “Ascending the representational hierarchy progressively frees responses from stimulus-driven immediacy, thus creating space for the generation and consideration of alternatives” (Deacon 1997: 413).

It is just this idea, that the symbolic threshold consists in a collection of tokens and relationships between them, that Stjernfelt calls compositional, and which he asserts is a mistake on the part of Deacon. Clearly already from this early period of Deacon’s account, the tokens that make up the symbolic level are not indexes any more at all – these tokens are freed from their object-reference, and it is rather the system of interconnectivity that constitutes the symbolic level. That is, the symbolic for Deacon is not compositional, either in the sense that it is merely composed of a collection of *indexes*, nor in the sense that it is *merely* composed of indexes: Deacon’s account of the symbolic, whether or not it is compositional, is definitely not compositional in the reductive sense, as if to say that the symbolic is *nothing more than* the sum of its indexical ground, or that the symbolic can be explained entirely in terms of its indexical ground.

One goal of Deacon’s theorization is ultimately to overcome what amounts to a disciplinary divide, between the study of mind, culture, and its products on the one side, and brain, nature, and its aspects on other side. *Incomplete Nature* (2012a) spells out in greater detail how this theorization is to proceed, under the banner of emergent dynamics. What he later calls the teleodynamics of mind can only be apprehended by understanding the thermodynamic and self-organizing levels that are the infrastructure and precondition of this higher emergent level. But the ground for this theorization is already laid by the titular diagram (Figure 18), in which the infrastructure is conceptualized at a more local level, and in the more restricted context of language acquisition. “A failure to take into account the complex iconic and indexical infrastructure of symbolic interpretation processes has blocked progress in the study of language structure, language evolution, neural processing of language, and language acquisition” (Deacon 1997: 9).

As far as semiotic taxonomizing exercises go, Deacon’s has proven to be one of the most lasting and influential, and more or less free of the simpler inconsistencies found in *The Forms of Meaning*. Deacon even acknowledges some of the shortcomings of his taxonomy, in the retrospective anthology *The Symbolic Species Evolved* (Deacon 2012b).

This account leaves out many subphases of the interpretive process, but it captures the crucial architectonic that I believe is critical to understanding why there might be a cognitive threshold separating iconic and indexical forms of communicating, common to most mammals and birds, from symbolic communicating that is distinctive of humans. Interpreting something symbolically is simply more complex, and unlike iconic and indexical interpretation there is nothing inherent in the form or physical relationships of the sign vehicle to provide an interpretive clue. This must be supplied entirely by the process itself, and it is of the nature of a systemic relationship, not some singular object or event. (Deacon 2012b: 14)

At the same time, the substrate specificity of this taxonomy, in which indexes are sensory motor and perceptual affect markers, and symbols are abstractions typified by verbal language, still compromises the notion of what has been described in this dissertation as the sign function. In this way, when Stjernfelt argues that it is a mistake to do as Deacon does, when Deacon atomistically isolates a simple sign type and appends it to an object-referent in a concrete substrate, Stjernfelt is in principle still correct, if only from the view of the sign function. But again, Stjernfelt is also interested in building houses – his own work devolves also upon extrasemiotic questions, and this leads to some inconsistencies.

5.2.3. Stjernfelt's critique of Deacon's taxonomy

Stjernfelt has two major problems with Deacon's book. The first is its taxonomical application of sign types, and the second is its compositional account of signs. As it unfolds, these critiques are interdependent somewhat, and inconsistent at times, with each other and with other writings of Stjernfelt. His main problem with taxonomy is that the symbol notion of Peirce is more inclusive than to be able to specify human uniqueness against non-humans. 'The symbolic species' is misleading, because the missing link that typifies human uniqueness takes a different form than the symbol notion from Peirce, the latter extending at least to more simple instances than just verbal language, or even spanning all sign instances whatsoever, in a kind of omnipresent grid of signs. Just which of these is the case for Stjernfelt becomes really complicated in *Natural Propositions* (2014), where through detailed exegesis on this matter Stjernfelt shows, if nothing else, that Peirce himself was not settled on the question of whether all instances of sign can rightly be called symbolic or not. In the introduction to *Diagrammatology* (2007), Stjernfelt summarizes his critique of Deacon's idea, that

the Peircean symbol forms the main semiotic transition between animal and man. Deacon's idea, however, redefines Peircean symbols as more specific and complex than they are, and a more restricted version of Deacon's hypothesis is proposed: that the decisive semiotic 'missing link' is rather the special symbol subtype named by Peirce 'hypostatic abstraction'. (Stjernfelt 2007: xvii-xviii)

This diplomatic portrayal takes a softer stance toward Deacon than is later expressed in “Beyond the symbolic species” (2012b) or in *Natural Propositions* (2014). In the above summary, it is merely a request to specify the Peircean appellation for the missing link to the notion of hypostatic abstraction, a position which Stjernfelt retains through the later works.

What becomes more incisive, is his general critique of taxonomy as such. As one discovers, the taxonomizing impulse (and the drive to elaborate evolutionary thresholds on the basis of sign types) is alive and well in *Diagrammatology* (Stjernfelt is also interested in building houses), but in the later works the very idea of appending sign types to evolutionary thresholds at all is challenged by Stjernfelt. As it develops, when typologization itself is challenged, the major methodological schism between sign function and sign production rears its unavoidable head, and this is one reason why the fundamental oppositions in semiotics may not simply be drawn between Peirce and Saussure (for example), but must be drawn on a multi-axial theoretic basis, including the taxonomic and non-taxonomic, the compositional and non-compositional, and the sign function and sign production. But by and large, *Diagrammatology* can be read as sympathetic to the taxonomizing realism of Sebeok, Kull, and Deacon.

It remains a question in this early work, of how to go about the taxonomy, rather than a question of dismantling the notion taxonomy entirely and replacing it with something else. The main chapter from *Diagrammatology* dealing with Deacon’s 1997 work is chapter 11. “Diagrams, Abstraction, and the Semiotic Missing Link” (Stjernfelt 2007: 241–256).

Based on a threefold background of arguments – philosophical, neurological, and anthropological, – Deacon proposes that the main event in the animal-man transition is the introduction of symbols. Now, as is well known, the concept of symbol is probably one of the most ambiguous notions in the history of thought, and Deacon takes great care to make precise the version of it he finds central. He picks the notion of symbol found in Peircean semiotics which stands apart from many other symbol concepts by assuming the symbol as a complex derivative notion related to simpler sign types included in its composition. (Stjernfelt 2007: 241)

As argued in the previous section, Deacon’s account of the way in which a combination of indexes comes to prefigure the symbolic is in no way reductive. Deacon does not claim that the symbolic may be understood simply in terms of the indexes which make it up. So what then is meant, by the accusation that Deacon’s account of signs is compositional?

5.3. Compositionality

Consider that hypostatic abstraction, the alternative proposed by Stjernfelt to demarcate the human specific threshold, is basically just the most symbolic of the symbolic.

While symbols as habits are not equivalent with abstraction, all abstraction is still symbolic, and hypostatic abstraction being just a very high level of abstraction, it is not a mere error to call human-specific forms of abstraction symbolic. It is just a great simplification, which Stjernfelt sees to sacrifice too much of the specificity of the term symbol.

Regardless of the actual extension of the word symbol, it is sufficient here to maintain that all conventional signs are symbols, even if all symbols are not conventional signs; the same goes for abstraction: all abstractions are symbolic, even if not all symbols are abstractions. But this conventionalist argument is the target of serious attack by Stjernfelt in *Diagrammatology*.

If one leaves aside the question of anthropocentrism and logocentrism, the critique of conventionalism has everything to do with the extension of symbols – that is, in *Diagrammatology* Stjernfelt argues that not all signs are conventional, but rather that specifically icons have a reality in and for themselves irrespective of the involvement of symbols. This, one may say, is the main thesis of the book. Icons and similarity are real, and Stjernfelt constructs a whole history of anti-iconism in chapter three of his book (Stjernfelt 2007: 49–88).

Stjernfelt's insistence that icons may stand on their own independently of other sign types is well serviced by his rebuttal to Umberto Eco's famous critique of iconism (Eco 1979[1976]: 191–216). However, the second prong of his attack against Deacon is to say that Deacon's account of signs and their thresholds is *compositional*, and that this compositionality is an error. It is this charge (whether it is accurate of Deacon's account or not) which introduces inconsistencies to Stjernfelt's critiques, both of Deacon and of Eco.

The following section shows how Stjernfelt's own 2014 dicisign doctrine is itself compositional. Deacon's theory of emergent dynamics is in fact not compositional, at least not in the reductive way which Stjernfelt would accuse it of being. The last part unpacks Stjernfelt's critique of Eco's conventionalism, to show how it is inconsistent with the compositionality of dicisign doctrine (in some ways, Stjernfelt's dicisign doctrine recapitulates the conventionalism of Eco).

In the end, all of their approaches have the same goal: to describe the profound articulatory matrix. Both taxonomy and composition, both sign production and sign function, are necessary to this chiasmatic description. It lays the groundwork for the final subchapters of the dissertation, regarding the quasi-sign doctrine and the biosemiotic aesthetic function.

5.3.1. Dicisign doctrine is compositional

When Stjernfelt levels the pejorative ‘compositional’ at Deacon, he accuses Deacon of wrongly asserting a few different things. The first is that higher order signs like symbols are built of simpler signs, specifically icons and indexes; the second is that the lower indexical level is a collection of numerous indexes, and it is the arrangement between these indexes that constitutes what is the symbol; the third is that the whole of what is the symbol can be exhaustively understood and described in terms of the parts which make it up, the indexes.

As far as *The Symbolic Species* (1997) goes, the first and the second kinds of compositionality may be present, but the second is disputable. The third claim on other hand is nowhere made by Deacon, whether in *The Symbolic Species* or elsewhere – the emergent characteristic of the symbolic has been part of Deacon’s thesis from the beginning – neither the symbol nor any other semiotic threshold may be exhaustively understood or described in terms of its parts.

When it comes to *Incomplete Nature* (2012a), the first claim is implicit, however it is not described in terms of icons, indexes, and symbols, but rather in terms of the levels of thermodynamics, self-organizing systems, and semiosis. The second claim is no longer part of the thesis, and the third claim is directly challenged.

So, in some respects at least *The Symbolic Species* may be said to give a compositional account of signs, at least in the sense that more complex signs are built of simpler ones. But if compositionality is so simple, and does not imply the explanation of the higher level in terms of the parts of the lower (which in Deacon it nowhere does), is it really a fault? And does it contradict the intentions of Peirce? The argument here is that Peirce’s own dicisign is itself also compositional in this limited sense, and thus that Stjernfelt’s criticism of Deacon’s (hereby limited) compositionality contradicts his doctrine in this way.

The main idea of the dicisign is that it is a more complex sign built of simpler signs, but this is just what Stjernfelt calls a mistake in Deacon. This compositional premise of dicisigns is succinctly expressed by their double function.

As a sign, the proposition must involve those two different signs: it must, at the same time, fulfill two functions connecting it in two different ways to the same object, the index and the icon mentioned above. This is the reason why many propositions possess an internal structure composed from two separate parts, each fulfilling its specific function. Oftentimes, Peirce generalizes the classical notions of subject and predicate to account for these two aspects of Dicisigns:

It must, in order to be understood, be considered as containing two parts. Of these, the one, *which may be called the Subject*, is or represents an Index of a Second existing independently of its being represented, while the other, *which may be called the Predicate*, is or represents an Icon of a Firstness. (*Syllabus*, 1903, EPII, 277; 2.312) (Stjernfelt 2014: 55)

One notes in the first paragraph of the quotation, that Stjernfelt describes the structure of the proposition as “composed” of two parts that are themselves signs.

It can be said here that ‘composed’ does not mean what ‘compositional’ means, but this sort of ambiguity is hazardous when so much rides one what is compositional, and what is not. The idea of the *dicisign* generalizes the notion of proposition to impart subject-predicate structure upon all sign action, non-linguistic and non-human (Stjernfelt 2014: 56).

Stjernfelt then quotes the 1903 “Syllabus on Some Topics of Logic” from Peirce to confirm this, inadvertently confirming at the same time the compositional account of the *dicisign*: “That is to say, in order to understand the *Dicisign*, it must be regarded as composed of two such parts whether it be in itself so composed or not. It is difficult to see how this can be, unless it really have two such parts; but perhaps this may be possible” (*Syllabus* 1903, EPII, 276; 2.311).

It must be reminded here, that in neither the case of Deacon nor of Stjernfelt does this qualified compositionality actually compromise their theory. Their theories both persist, monolithic in the world of Peircean cognitive and bio-semiotics. When subject is replaced with index and predicate is replaced with icon, the fact that subject and predicate are not only found within language but importantly pre-exist language becomes explicit in the descriptive system.

Stjernfelt fixates on this innovation of Peirce’s and develops it considerably, because of just how it provides a systematic approach to the profound articulatory matrix: Language with a capital L, that came long before language as we know it, and which is in principle accessible to all species, even if only in a rudimentary form. The way that Stjernfelt (via Peirce) approaches the description of non-verbal meaning is not unlike that of structural-semiology itself. *Langue* and *parole*, metaphor and metonymy, are not simply found within language.

The idea of real structuralism, or second-generation semiology, is that these oppositions came before language, constitute some kind of vast fluctuating structure which definitively cannot be described within a single language as it constitutes their precondition, and hence verbal spoken language and later written language were adaptations of physiological affordances to that pre-existing structure.

The point is that, just like structuralism applies terms from linguistics to describe something that is beyond language, so does Stjernfelt apply terms from philosophy of language to describe that same something, and in neither case is this simple logocentrism. Subject, predicate, *langue*, *parole*, metaphor, metonymy: the idea of semiotics is that these terms may describe a pre-existing, multi-modal and yes, multi-species matrix of meaning, and that their instantiation in verbal language is only that, an instantiation, but that their existence is crucially substrate-independent.

About this substrate-independence, Terrence Deacon has a whole lot more to say later. None of this changes the fact that *dicisign* doctrine is just as compositional as Deacon’s account of signs.

Thus far in the account of *dicisign* structure, it is established that *dicisigns* always have an icon and an index, but what about the symbol? Because in the case of Eco’s conventionalism, it is not so relevant that more complex signs are built of simpler ones, but rather that all signs possess a specifically symbolic component.

1. Rhematic Iconic Qualisign	5. Rhematic Iconic Legisign	8. Rhematic Symbolic Legisign	10. Argument Symbolic Legisign
2. Rhematic Iconic Sinsign	6. Rhematic Indexical Legisign	9. Dicent Symbol Legisign	
3. Rhematic Indexical Sinsign	7. Dicent Indexical Legisign		
4. Dicent Indexical Sinsign			

Figure 19: Peirce's ten classes of signs (a), adapted from CP 2.264.

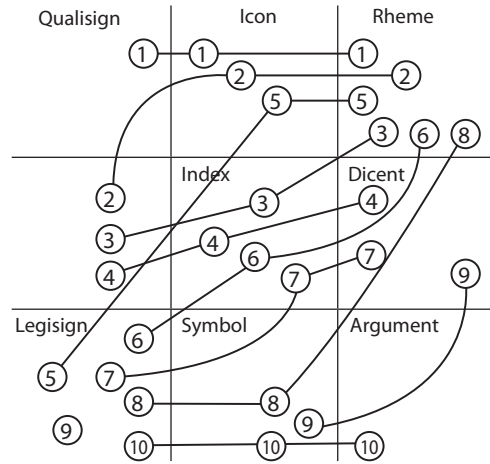


Figure 20: Peirce's ten classes of signs (b), adapted from Merrell (1996: 8).

Following from this, only if one can show that dicisign doctrine holds that ‘it’s symbols all the way down’ (not just that complex signs are built of simpler signs), can one then go on to claim that Stjernfelt’s critiques of Deacon and Eco are mutually inconsistent. Hence, according to Peirce’s 1903 classification of signs, the answer is no (as one can conclude from the confrontation of Figure 19 and Figure 20).

One clearly observes that there are also dicent-indexical-legisigns and dicent-indexical-sinsigns. Stjernfelt accounts for this. On page 62 of *Natural Propositions*, he asserts that a painted portrait with a legend may function as either a dicent-indexical-sinsign or as a dicent-symbolic-legisign, the difference residing in whether the portrait is an original or a replica.

In footnote 6 on page 51, Stjernfelt holds that “Peirce’s initial argument here is that symbols are genuine signs in contradistinction to the degenerate sign types of icons and indices. [...] Not all Dicisigns, however, are symbols, cf. below.” In the below, he alludes to non-symbolic dicisigns by omission.

The Dicent symbol, of course, is Peirce’s version of ordinary propositions involving predicates expressing general ideas, such as linguistic adjectives, verbs, common nouns, etc. But language is not the only source of such predicates. A wider array of icons may have general qualities, most conspicuously in their function as diagrams. Thus, a diagram with a label – say, a geometrical figure with a legend – may express a Dicent symbol, a full-fledged proposition, and the manipulation of that diagram, in turn, may express an Argument. (Stjernfelt 2014: 93)

The above establishes that not all symbolic dicisigns are linguistic (some may be mathematical), but it does not establish the status of sub-symbolic dicisigns. If one is to reconcile the above footnote with the following quotations, it would seem that yes, there are non-symbolic dicisigns, but that these are now of a new class, sometimes called ‘degenerate’ signs and sometimes ‘quasi-propositions’ or quasi-

signs. While this may provide some solution to the problem, it contradicts the contention held elsewhere by Stjernfelt that language is not the criterion by which the symbolic can be distinguished from the non-symbolic, such as in *Diagrammatology* (2007: 244), where he holds that Pavlov's dog salivation is an instance of a symbol.

It also, somewhat more inconveniently, contradicts the claim made later in *Natural Propositions* that, indeed, it's symbols all the way down to even the simplest organism sign use. Taking a stronger position than before, now it is not just that the Peircean symbol is a bit too broad to be used to describe the human threshold; here now it is the case that the most sophisticated sign types extend to the simplest possible instances of signs no matter the substrate, and that the very taxonomizing ambition is therefore misguided, as all sign types (in this later, more extreme view) coexist simultaneously. This claim, cited below, undermines somewhat the claims made in *Diagrammatology*, for the existence of the icon in and for itself, independent of symbolic articulation.

Many spontaneous ideas in biosemiotics and evolutionary epistemology presume that the earliest signs appearing in evolution must be simple in the sense that later, more complicated signs arise from the combination of simpler signs. If biological cognition has evolved to fit parts of logical structure, however, the perspective should be turned 180 degrees. The "highest" Peircean sign types: propositions and their linking into arguments, are what represents aspects of reality (propositions) and give rise to inference to action (arguments) – they must be present from the very beginning of biosemiotics, albeit in a rudimentary indistinct proto-form, corresponding to Peirce's idea that propositions are genuine signs, and the whole periodic table of simpler signs are but degenerate signs which naturally occur *within* propositions. Selection forces the survival of truth-bearing signs – Dicisigns. Evolution then subdivides, sophisticates and articulates quasi-propositions, gradually achieving growing autonomy of its parts. So, instead of an ongoing construction from building blocks, semiotic evolution is rather the ongoing subdivision, articulation and autonomization of a reasoning process having its very first proto-form in primitive metabolism. (Stjernfelt 2014: 141–142)

The real complication here is the increasing dependency on the qualifying prefix of 'quasi-', 'proto', and the whole notion of degenerate signs. But leaving aside for now the qualifying prefixes, what could it possibly mean, to assert at once that "not all Dicisigns, however, are symbols" (footnote 6 on page 51), and at the same time to assert that the most complex signs extend to the very beginning of biosemiotics? The *Escherichia coli* bacterium has become the emblem example for dicisigns, and deserves to be treated at some greater length, as it shows how even this simplest of signs also involve a symbol, according to Stjernfelt.

Even a case as simple as coli bacteria (*Escherichia coli*) swimming upstream in a sugar gradient as the result of its registration of molecules displaying a specific active site (cf. Berg 1988; Stjernfelt 2007) must be described as symbolic in Peirce's sense of the term: it is a habit (acquired phylogenetically, to be sure, in contrast to Pavlovian conditioning acquired ontogenetically), the habit connects a specific, typical aspect

of molecular shape with a specific, typical action, that of oriented swimming and consumption. We shall argue this perception-action link is even the proto-form of an argument. (Stjernfelt 2014: 142)

For as much dispute as there has been so far, about whether or not all signs are symbols, the above establishes beyond reasonable doubt that, at least from one descriptive angle, it's symbols all the way down. If it's symbols all the way down, what becomes of the actually descriptive power of sign types? If, at the top end its hypostatic abstraction, and at the bottom its quasi- proto- degenerate signs, then the intervening 'sign types' seem to lose a lot of their explanatory power. If everything rides on the quasi-, proto- prefix qualifier, then what precisely is a quasi-sign, if not simply *not a sign*?

Are all non-linguistic dicisigns proto-propositions? Are then all non-human signs importantly quasi-signs? Because if this is the case, then all of the talk about anthropocentrism and logocentrism doesn't add up to much, sort of like when Danesi and Sebeok claim that all types of models are representation and the ability of representation is what distinguishes humans from non-humans; or like when John Deely says humans are *the* semiotic animal: non-humans use signs, but they are not aware of signs *as* signs.

Stjernfelt's dicisign doctrine in the end is compositional in the restricted sense that more complex signs definitely are built of simpler ones. On top of this, his theory is conventionalist just like Eco's, in the sense that, at the end of the day, it's symbols all the way down. But where does this leave one with Deacon?

If Deacon's work is compositional just in the way that Stjernfelt's is, then Stjernfelt's critique does not hold. But if Deacon's work is compositional in the reductive sense, then this is a more serious problem. As already asserted, Deacon's work is not reductive in this way. *Incomplete Nature* (2012a) dispels any notion of reduction in his semiotic thresholds. The discussion of this non-reduction leads into the topic of substrate-independence.

When it comes to taxonomization, substrates are important. All object-referents are embedded in a substrate of some kind, and in this way it is held that all classification and all sign typologies deal with substrate-specificity. On the other hand, what makes a sign a sign is always substrate-independent. This is a matter on which Deacon, Stjernfelt, and Umberto Eco all agree, it devolves upon the opposition of sign function and sign production, and it is a critical matter for defining and describing the profound articulatory matrix, both from the viewpoint of structural semiology as well as from the viewpoint of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics.

5.3.2. What is the concrete object of biosemiotics?

In the first chapter of *Incomplete Nature* Deacon attempts to clear up some misunderstandings about his early account of signs and their thresholds. Referring to the three-tiered hierarchy and its famous diagram (Figure 18), "This hierarchic

dependency of symbols on indices on icons was the core semiotic argument of *The Symbolic Species*. But notice that it is not a simple compositional relationship. Indices are not *made of* icons and symbols are not *made of* indices” (Deacon 2012a: 13).

By the label of compositional it is intended that the symbolic is nothing more than a collection of indexes, which are nothing more than a collection of icons. Already from *The Symbolic Species* (1997) this was not the case, but *Incomplete Nature* isolates the substrate-independence of threshold crossing, and turns it into the central principle behind emergent dynamics. Deacon gives a number of different terms for this organizational feature which depends upon that which it organizes, but which cannot be explained in terms of its parts.

The notion of constraint is the limitation of possible future states in a transformation. The constraint consists in an absence of possible states, rather than in the remaining number of states that may still arise.

Semiotic constraints should be agent-independent, species-independent, language-independent, and discourse-independent. They have been mistakenly assumed to be either innate structures or else derived from cognitive schemas or determined by sensorimotor biases and/or social communicative pragmatics. Though they are prior to language experience, and some are prerequisites to successful symbolic communication, they are neither innate nor socially derived. They are emergent from constraints that are implicit in the semiotic infrastructure of symbolic reference and interpretive processes. (Deacon 2012a: 24)

This early passage anticipates one of Deacon later strong claims, that sign use is strictly a product of neither nature nor nurture. The essence of the substrate-independence of mind and his conception of emergence, is that mind and sign do both emerge from matter, but that which emerges can only be explained in terms of the organization itself – that is, by the absences and precluded states of constraint. This hypothesis has important implications for social theory. Cultural and identity differences are not reducible to the parts of biology or ethnicity, but they also do not arise from nowhere, and may be studied by the same methods: the emergent self-organizing features that happen with inorganic matter are a precursor to the self-organization of mind.

In the wheel that is rolled, gyroscopic stability emerges from the parts of the wheel, but is irreducible to those parts. Teleodynamics is the self-sustaining perpetuation of these self-organizing features. Thus, in the field of humanities and social sciences, a semiotic approach that bridges matter and mind through the understanding of self-organizing systems may approach the explanation of cultural difference through the tools of science, without reducing individual and cultural uniqueness to mechanism or biology.

If Deacon’s cognitive biosemiotics can find its proper expression in the domain of the humanities, it could provide a key to addressing the impasse of relativism ascendant in what is called identity politics: an irreducible method to reunify the fractured social sciences, still at war with each other and unable to work toward a common goal.

To explain what it means, when it is said that the symbolic threshold emerges from the parts of the indexical threshold but is not explainable in the terms of those parts, Deacon introduces the useful distinction of ‘reducible’ and ‘decomposable’. He does this partly in order to rehabilitate the notion of reductionism, which has come to have an unfortunately pejorative valence.

As Deacon writes, “There can be little doubt that reductionistic science is fundamentally sound. It has provided unparalleled predictive power for explaining physical-chemical processes across unimaginable ranges of scale and diversity of phenomena. It would be pointless to even imagine that it is somehow misguided” (2012a: 203). He uses the new opposition to give better precision to this issue of substrate independence, where the emergent dynamics of a substrate are in fact reducible to the elements of the substrate in which they appear, but are not decomposable to those elements. That is, in addition to the indexical parts, there is something more to the symbolic whole. “Reduction only depends on the ability to identify graininess in complex phenomena and the capacity to study the properties of these subdivisions as distinct from the collective phenomenon that they compose. Decomposition additionally requires that the subdivisions in question exhibit the properties that they exhibit in the whole, even if entirely isolated and independent of it” (Deacon 2012a: 85).

In other words, if the symbolic threshold were decomposable to its indexical constituents, those constituents when taken separately would have to possess the same features that they show when united at the symbolic level. In this way, Deacon allows for the semiotic thresholds to be reducible to that which precedes them, but does not allow for them to be decomposable.

The features of the wheel that allow for its gyroscopic stability when it is rolled are all necessary to that stability; however, when the wheel is not rolling, the features of the wheel do not exhibit the same properties as they do when it is rolling. Crucially, the teleodynamics of the level of the sign are themselves not decomposable to the morphodynamics of self-organizing systems – the way that Deacon describes the difference hinges on the fine distinction he makes, between constraint amplification, and constraint conservation. “It is this higher-order dynamical organization itself that is organized with respect to its own persistence, and precisely because it is *not* bound to specific material substrates or component dynamical process” (Deacon 2012a: 270).

It is a subtle and incredibly sophisticated distinction which, unfortunately, cannot be fully explained here. Deacon is fond of citing Taoist proverbs such as the one from Lao Tzu about the spokes of the wheel and the hole in the center; he makes self-referential remarks about the eclecticism of his work; crucially, and distinguishing him from many other representatives of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, he seems to respect psychoanalysis (Deacon 1997: 122; 144; 424–425). However, Deacon too would seem to relegate the aesthetic question to a secondary status. To anticipate the direction of the remaining subchapters, it is possible to understand the insights of emergent dynamics as being more closely aligned with structural semiology than they are with Peirce.

In Chapter One, it was shown how the translinguistic hypothesis of second-generation semiology is non-logocentric. When Benveniste poses the question, just what is the concrete object of linguistics, he implies already with Saussure, that this object is the substance of no particular language at all, but rather something more general that pre-exists language as we know it.

It is in this way, that when structuralism applies the oppositions of *langue* and *parole*, or metaphor and metonymy, to the analysis of non-linguistic objects, this application is not logocentric, glottocentric, or linguistically reductive. Instead, it uses these terms in their broadened capacity. And it is in this way, that when Barthes performs the famous reversal, and says (seemingly contrary to Saussure) that semiotics remains a part of linguistics and not vice versa, this is not the same as to say that signs only exist in verbal language, or that verbal language is always the primary modeling system. On the contrary here, Barthes makes this willfully controversial and misleading remark with the covert intent, that what is meant by ‘linguistics’ is broader than it seems – it is this *translinguistics*, whose ultimate object is the multi-modal articulatory matrix – and simultaneously Barthes demonstrates the limits of verbal language as a modeling system.

This is why Derrida confirms and repeats the Barthesian reversal in *Of Grammatology*, a work that is as far from logocentrism as possible. And thus, when one re-arrives at Umberto Eco’s claim from *A Theory of Semiotics*, that “Obviously one may suppose that there probably does exist a profound articulatory matrix which governs every sign-system and all its possible articulatory transformations, but this matrix must not be identified with one of its surface manifestations” (Eco 1979[1976]): 229), one should at least be clear on the point, that this theory of semiotics is not logocentric but postulates, much in the way that Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics does, a multi-modal and multi-species matrix of meaning that is substrate-independent.

The closing chapters of *Incomplete Nature* are his most direct address of the concrete object of semiotics, but the idea was already central to Deacon’s first book. As the subtitle indicates, in *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain*, the basic idea is that what we know of as language, which appeared only 100,000 years ago, was only the externalization of an ability that existed for more like probably one million years, and was the precursor to all languages as such. Deacon restates the thesis usefully in his article contribution to *The Symbolic Species Evolved* (2012b), an anthology to which Stjernfelt also contributed.

If language is a comparatively recent feature of human social interaction, that is if it is only, say, a hundred thousand years old or so, then we should expect that it had little effect on human brains. [...]

On the other hand, if language has been around for a good deal of our evolutionary past, say a million years or so, that amount of time would have been adequate for the demands of language to have affected brain evolution more broadly. (Deacon 2012b: 33)

Because form of expression and form of content are not in any particular language, but common to all languages, what is said here is that linguistics is used to study a structure that is more general than any single language. The laws of constraint that Deacon uses to discuss emergent dynamics are just other tools for describing oppositions like *langue* and *parole*, signifier and signified, metaphor and metonymy, syntagm and paradigm.

Thus, when one uses the vocabulary of emergent dynamics to describe either cultural formations like novels, or simpler biological formations like the *Escherichia coli* bacterium seeking out sugar, one is not confusing levels nor reducing culture to biology, or vice versa. The same may be said of Hjelmslev's dependency calculus, in its formality: it can just as easily be applied to simpler biological systems (Chavez 2019).

It is the formalism and emphasis upon the sign function that gives structural semiology a view on the profound articulatory matrix. So it is somewhat ponderous that Stjernfelt would see all this, and yet proceed to say that Hjelmslev's formalism is in fact a problem, rather than its key feature. He notes how Hjelmslev abandons the vocabulary of linguistics proper and develops his own unique vocabulary to describe the features of the dependency calculus. He then goes on to blame this formalism for the alleged failure of Hjelmslev's project.

What is to be learned from the partial failure of Hjelmslev's grand mereological project? The set of restrictions the theory admits deliberately cuts it off from possible insights, first in the letting out of sight language's reference to any context ('matter'), and second in its dogmatic decision that any relation between expression and content is arbitrary merely. (Stjernfelt 2007: 170–171)

It is difficult to conceptualize how Hjelmslev's glossematics could proceed, if it relinquished its formalism and invited into the picture all the concerns of empirical reality. Just what is a sign and what is not a sign would become open to dispute across all the physical sciences whatsoever – who is the expert in semiotics and who is the layman would be left up to the computer programmers and the graphic designers, as much as it would be up to the biologists and physicists.

The subtitle of Stjernfelt's *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics*, seems to imply that the borderlines between the final term and the preceding two should be blurred or even erased. When Stjernfelt argues that Hjelmslev should allow for considerations of matter, and he rejects the isolation of the sign function, he implies that what semiotics is, and how the sign is defined, should be opened to all the concerns of the empirical sciences.

And when it is argued here that these borderlines should not be blurred, it is only to say that there remains a considerable difference between semiotics, on the one hand, and phenomenology and ontology, on the other hand, and that there is some sense in retaining the disciplinary specificity of semiotics. It is just this fact that Umberto Eco asserts in *A Theory of Semiotics* so strongly. In the next section, Stjernfelt's critique of Eco is directly addressed, and some closure is sought regarding the fashionable disavowal of structural semiology by the Peirce nouveau.

5.3.3. The inconsistencies of Stjernfelt's critique of Eco

In the conclusion of *A Theory of Semiotics* (Eco 1979[1976]: 314–318) Eco unequivocally restates the importance of separating sign function from sign production.

One could remark that very little attention has been devoted, in the preceding chapters, to the ‘transcendental’ or ‘empirical’ protagonist of these processes. [...] I am only assuming that semiotics cannot define these subjects except within its own theoretical framework, in the same way in which, examining referents as contents, it does not deny the existence of physical things and states of the world, but assigns their verification (and their analysis in terms of concrete properties, change, truth and falsity) to other types of approach. (Eco 1979[1976]: 316)

Eco famously deconstructs the notion of iconicity, but Stjernfelt does no justice to the nuance of this critique, because he does not seriously consider the division of sign function and sign production. Stjernfelt dismisses this division without consideration. The quotation from Stjernfelt is included in its entirety, and its several distortions are treated in turn. He writes, that Eco's

‘Critique of iconism’ forms a part of his ‘Theory of Sign Production’ framed in a funny semi-Marxist language of “production and labor” and even if it does not figure explicitly as an argument this overall ontology is crucial to his critique of iconism: iconicity, or natural, motivated, analogical signs of any kind seem to come into being ‘without work’ so to speak. But in Marxism, there must be no free lunch, and consequently these apparently spontaneous signs must have their basis in the human production of codes and conventions revealed, they are bourgeois signs whose apparent freedom is built upon ideological suppression of underlying, more hardworking signs. It might seem like kicking a more than dead horse to counterargue claims like these nowadays, but it still has relevance because of the underlying idea that human subjectivity is responsible for all semiotic activity. This idea is not a privilege for Marxism, and one finds it in various disguises in existentialisms, (de)constructivisms and other heirs to the subjectivist strand in German Idealism on the one hand as well as in extreme formalists like Hjelmslev on the other. (Stjernfelt 2007: 61)

First, the division of sign function and sign production is not framed in Marxist terms at all, despite the admitted undertones of capital critique in all of Eco's works. To repeat it once again: the division is rather framed on the extension of Hjelmslev, reflected also in the work of Barthes and Derrida, and discussed mostly in Chapter One.

Sign function is concerned with the stratum of form; the sign function is never determined by an object-referent, but only by the internal differential articulation of the planes of expression and content. This circularity is no deficiency of the sign function, but rather its crucial definitive feature. Circular is the path by which the action of form upon substance reverses into retroaction of substance upon form – circular is the explanation, by which the non-identity of the sign function

produces the habit-changed interpretant, which emerges from a substrate-substance, but is not decomposable to the elements of that substrate; and circular is the exchange, between primary and secondary semiotic systems, when object language becomes metalanguage, base becomes superstructure, and dream thought becomes dream work.

Stjernfelt in one place admires this circular formalism (in his chapter on mereology) and in another place renounces it, when it takes on any deconstructive political inflection. Stjernfelt says the opposition of sign function and sign production ‘does not figure explicitly as an argument’ in Eco’s critique of iconism; however, on the contrary, this opposition is the whole argument. Icons exist for Eco, it is just that this classificatory term has no relevance for the sign function.

Motivated signs do not come into being ‘without work’ as Stjernfelt puts it. Eco in fact puts a whole lot of work into describing sign production, which spans the whole second half of his book, about sign motivation and the empirical determinants of sign production – these modes may hypothetically be systematized, but such a task involves the whole gamut of physical sciences, and there is in principle no restriction, as to what typologies are relevant to this task; hence Eco’s desire, to limit what is semiotics from what is not semiotics.

Stjernfelt’s joke about the dead horse, and there being no free lunch in Marxism, falls a bit flat, when one takes more seriously the distinction of sign function and sign production.

The only portion of Eco’s book that even touches upon Marx is the section “Ideological Code Switching” (1979[1976]: 289–313). Even there, Marx is barely mentioned, but the concept of ideology is admittedly raised. Eco’s persuasive contention is that there exist formal criteria for the differentiation of the ideological from the non-ideological secondary semiotic systems. While this may be a Marxist idea, it is certainly not a relativistic claim. On the contrary, Eagleton’s notion of relativism is just the assertion that one cannot distinguish the ideological from the non-ideological. So, from Eagleton’s perspective, Eco is the opposite of a relativist. Far from dissolving the notion of ideology entirely, Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics confirms, rather than denies, the object of ideology critique. The doctrine of the quasi-signs is the main statement of ‘Peirce for ideology critique’.

5.4. The quasi-sign doctrine: Peirce for ideology critique

As established in 5.2 and 5.3, the taxonomic approach may entail simplifications that do an injustice to Peirce’s mature theory. It also may be untrue to a strictly formalist structural semiology, for which the sign is never determined by something exterior to the descriptive system. The fact remains that, in practice, semiotics is always concerned with the external. Every analysis presumes the existence and the describability of an outside, and without the attempt to theorize the influence of the external upon the sign there is no way to incorporate the tools of empirical science to the aims of detotalization.

Monticelli's detotalization theorized the external largely in terms of temporalization and the place of time in semiotics, but did not address findings from Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics that apply the taxonomic approach to theorization of the external. The deliberation upon taxonomic semiotics up to this point has established some criteria necessary for its inclusion in the broader *sinthome* coordinates, such as the non-decomposability of higher levels to lower ones, and that all signs are compositional in a restricted sense. Another requirement of sign types, is that each term of a given typology must recapitulate the non-identity of the sign function.

This was touched upon briefly in Chapter Four, on the example of a hexagram of the *I-Ching* and a couple cards of Tarot. The hexagrams and the cards are exemplary sign typologies for the way each of them bodies forth an internal contradiction. Many typologies of the sign, such as the icon-index-symbol typology of Peirce, are conceived as a hierarchy, as shown by Deacon's system in Figure 18. At the lower end, the icon is less sign-like, and at the higher end, the symbol is more sign-like. The sign-likeness of a given term in any typology may be understood as a measure of the degree to which that term recapitulates the non-identity of the sign function.

The proposal of the quasi-sign doctrine is firstly, that proto-signs are those signs beneath the lower threshold, at the bottom of the hierarchy, which fail to recapitulate the non-identity of the sign function; and secondly, that there is more than one kind of quasi-sign. Not only are there those which never achieve this non-identity. There are also those which pass beyond the upper threshold, becoming post-semiotic. These are called the *tardo-signs*.

This theorization is elaborated upon the basis of Thomas A. Sebeok's six species of signs, which is a modification of Peirce's original trichotomy of the object dimension. Following on the Peircean way of thinking, where fully-fledged signs are triadic, quasi-signs are rather dyadic, proto-sign and *tardo-sign* collapse into the dyad in different ways, and both can be understood more completely in terms of each other.

In Peircean semiotics, the idea of the proto-sign has been extensively developed in the context of simple biological life, however the *tardo-sign* is an innovation of just this work. The latter idea however, of a post-triadic, self-replicating quasi-sign, has been discussed at length across structural semiology, Marxist ideology critique, and psychoanalysis. So one major upshot of the development of the quasi-sign here is to facilitate the application of Peircean semiotics to domains previously restricted to the province of the other approach. Specifically, the tools of cognitive and biosemiotics have a nascent application for ideology critique, hence the subtitle of this section.

Instead of a linear hierarchy, the quasi-sign doctrine is understood in the terms of the circular diagram, in Figure 21.

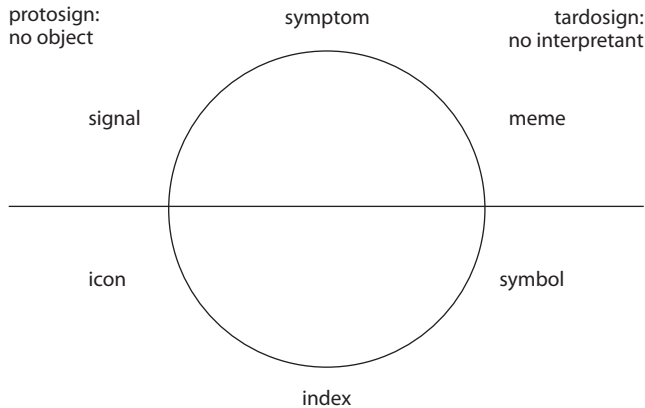


Figure 21: *Proto-signs and tardo-signs.*

A linear hierarchy would imply that the symbol is the most sign-like and the icon the least sign-like without qualification, however the circular description indicates that symbols exist also at a sort of threshold, close to becoming quasi-signs. This upper threshold is the crucial domain for theories of simulacra, automatization, mob mentality, ideology, and other symbolic situations in which signs are detached from their contexts and take on a life of their own. In the section devoted to the tardo-signs, it is shown how this domain is usefully illuminated by the cognitive strategies of Terrence Deacon.

5.4.1. Ground arms!

The quasi-sign doctrine originates from two excerpts from Peirce’s CP 5.47, which includes in its later portions the much-discussed MS 318, from which come the two variants “Pragmatism” (EP 2: 398–433) and “A Survey of Pragmaticism” (CP 5.476–96), which are discussed in Chapter Three. The excerpts in question come from the preceding section titled “On the logical interpretants”, and deal with the late trichotomies of the interpretant, immediate, dynamic, and final, in comparison with the emotional, the energetic, and the logical interpretants.

Among other things, the section discusses the concept of collateral observation, and how the dynamic object is composed of a series of objects as they are represented in the sign, and which requires prior familiarity with the object for its apprehension. Peirce observes that, in some cases, both the observation of an object and the production of an interpretant can be diminished. He compares the situation of diminished engagement, with the fully automated signaling processes of the thermometer. This basic comparison anticipates the division of the quasi-sign into two parts.

Suppose, for example, an officer of a squad or company of infantry gives the word of command, “Ground arms!” This order is, of course, a sign. That thing which causes a sign as such is called the object [...] the sign is determined to some species

of correspondence with that object. In the present case, the object the command represents is the will of the officer that the butts of the muskets be brought down to the ground. Nevertheless, the action of his will upon the sign is not simply dyadic; [...] For the acceleration of the pulse is a probable symptom of fever and the rise of the mercury in an ordinary thermometer or the bending of the double strip of metal in a metallic thermometer is an indication, or, to use the technical term, is an index, of an increase of atmospheric temperature, which, nevertheless, acts upon it in a purely brute and dyadic way. (CP 5.473)

Peirce's choice of the military example is opportune for the later extension of the notion of the quasi-sign to ideology critique. The soldier has performed the action so many times, of putting the butt of the gun upon the ground at response to the command, that deliberation over the object is no longer required.

Peirce compares the automated action of the soldier with the rise in mercury of a thermometer, without specifying any typological difference between these signs, only stressing their mutual automation and lack of deliberation. The difference in types of quasi-sign has to do with just which dimension of the sign is diminished, object or interpretant, and in this respect the excerpt from Peirce gives no decisive answer.

In these cases, however, a mental representation of the index is produced, which mental representation is called the immediate object of the sign [?]; and this object does triadically produce the intended, or proper, effect of the sign strictly by means of another mental sign; and that this triadic character of the action is regarded as essential is shown by the fact that if the thermometer is dynamically connected with the heating and cooling apparatus, so as to check either effect, we do not, in ordinary parlance speak of there being any semeiosis, or action of a sign, but, on the contrary, say that there is an 'automatic regulation', an idea opposed, in our minds, to that of semeiosis. For the proper significate outcome of a sign, I propose the name, the interpretant of the sign. The example of the imperative command shows that it need not be of a mental mode of being. Whether the interpretant be necessarily a triadic result is a question of words, that is, of how we limit the extension of the term 'sign'; but it seems to me convenient to make the triadic production of the interpretant essential to a "sign", calling the wider concept like a Jacquard loom, for example, a 'quasisign'. (CP 5.473)

Ground arms! approximates the automation of the thermometer, but differs from it by still producing an immediate object, and so in some minimal respect it retains its sign-hood. This is the respect in which the doctrine of quasi-signs is necessary. The quasi-signs exist to describe these liminal, borderline cases of sign, and it is within the borderlands that theoretic transformations take place. The habit-changed interpretant, such that it exists, adjusts the boundary between sign and not-sign. Ground arms! is an example of a tardo-sign, because what was once a fully-fledged sign now cycles back toward the dyadic symptom or signal.

Peirce does not speak here of simple biological signs, or proto-signs, but lays the groundwork in this passage for a theory that uses basic dyadic signals as the frame of reference for degenerate signs at both sides of the spectrum: one (tardo-

signs) for which the symbolic threshold has already been crossed, and habituation cycles back towards dyadicity; and the other (proto-signs), for which the sign has yet to become fully-fledged.

The former (labeled here as memes) are post-semiotic, and map to an area of semiotic inquiry that is well developed, especially in critical theory and post-structuralism; the latter (labeled here as symptoms) on the contrary are the major interest of biosemiotics, the minimal, biologically simple signs. This simple division serves to constellate a variety of theories that tend not to come into contact – it easily connects biosemiotics to ideology critique.

5.4.2. Proto-signs

The terms of Figure 21 are based on Sebeok's six species of sign, presented in *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics* (2001[1994]), and reformulated in *The Forms of Meaning* (Danesi, Sebeok 2000). They are: signal, symptom³¹, icon, index, symbol, and name. Something which Sebeok does not specify there, is that these types are not types of sign as such, but rather are types of ways in which the representamen may be connected to its object. Icon, index, and symbol in Peirce are understood as the so-called object trichotomy, whereas the ways in which the sign may relate to its representamen, or to its interpretant, yield different types.

Allow some brief clarification: when Sebeok says object, he means object-referent. The object, for Sebeok's reading of Peirce, implies a referential function – the object-*referent* reaches outside of the sign function. In Eco's reading of Peirce on the other hand, the object is stripped of its referential function, and that function is projected to the interpretant.

When the object is stripped of its referential function, representamen-object may be mapped to signifier-signified with no complication, and the icon, index, symbol trichotomy is simultaneously projected outward, to the perimeter of sign production. Sign *types* always imply object-referent, because typologization devolves entirely upon the way in which a sign is mapped to something external. In this way, it is entirely appropriate that what Sebeok calls the fundamental sign types are in fact only the ways in which a sign may relate to its 'object'. A number of other observations and changes are made to Sebeok's six types of signs, so as to accommodate the doctrine of quasi-signs.

The most fortuitous aspect of Sebeok's six species of signs for a theory of quasi-signs is the fact that Sebeok includes signals and symptoms within the classification, despite the fact that Peirce did not include these types in his object trichotomy. This is above all the reason why Sebeok's six species of signs are used here to describe the perimeter of sign production and the derivation of the quasi-signs. The reason why signal and symptom are not included in the classic

³¹ In the figure, the places of signal and symptom have been reversed. This is a choice made in order to emphasize the position of the symptom as the absolutely basic sign, which unites sign function and sign production at the top of the sinthome coordinates, as per Figure 5.

object trichotomy should be obvious: Peirce did not consider them fully-fledged triadic signs, but to be automated to an extent that precluded either full deliberation over the object, or the production of a genuine interpretant.

At the same time it is clear that Peirce found the notions of both signal and symptom heuristically useful for describing marginal and transitional cases of sign, and that what is a signal versus what is a sign is always a matter of the scope of the definition and the frame of the descriptive system. In this way, the perimeter of sign production is like a rotating, case-sensitive dial, as shown in Figure 22.

The apex of the pyramid at the interpretant, and the tip of its shadow at the referent, transect the semiotic equator: the orientation of the sign function itself is what decides what is a fully-fledged sign and what is a quasi-sign. In the following, some of Sebeok's words about signals and symptoms are considered. Later, Sebeok's sixth type, which he calls 'name,' is returned to in the context of the tardo-sign. There it is discussed, why name is changed to meme, and how this bears upon the quasi-sign doctrine for ideology critique.

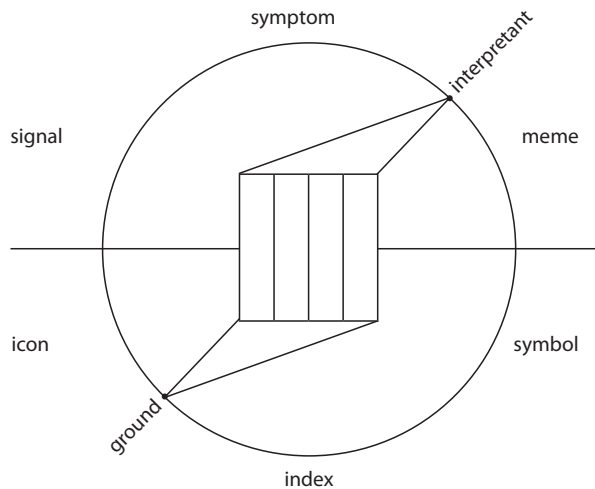


Figure 22: *Black pyramid sundial.*

At first glance Sebeok's simplifications, both those given here as well as those already discussed in the section on taxonomy, warrant criticism for neglecting certain nuances of the sign. But as with the matter of the primary modeling system, Sebeok's accommodation shows that he appreciates the dimensions both of sign production as well as sign function. For instance, from the outset, Sebeok shows he is no simplistic taxonomist – Sebeok knows that all sign types coexist, insofar as they are fully-fledged signs, and typology and classification are operational procedures that require considerable simplification. He also sees that all signs are compositional. “It should be clearly understood, finally, that it is not signs that are actually being classified, but more precisely, aspects of signs: in other words, a given sign may – and, more often than not does – exhibit more

than one aspect, so that one must recognize differences in gradation” (Eco 1972a: 201). (Sebeok 2001[1994]: 42–43).

And although on the surface it appears purely Peirce nouveau, Sebeok’s conceptualization also is founded on a synthesis of structural semiology with Peircean semiotics. For instance, he explains the interrelation of sign types also by concern for combination and selection (Sebeok 2001[1994]: 43–44), and here he describes his otherwise Peircean six species of sign still in terms of the relation of the Saussurean signifier to signified: “This chapter has dealt with a half dozen possible relationships that are empirically found to prevail between the signifier and the signified components of signs, and certain problems attendant to the definitions offered, in particular as these may have a bearing on their classification” (Sebeok 2001[1994: 61).

As argued in the previous section, Sebeok’s conception of how the signified and object match to each other conceptually is flawed in the way that it retains the referential function of the object, thus conferring said function upon the signified. As Daylight points out, and as discussed in Chapter One, it is a misunderstanding of Saussure to think that the signified may in any way have a referential function conferred upon it. Nevertheless, once the referential function is expelled to the perimeter of sign production, this is no longer a problem, and the impetus behind the fusion of Peirce and Saussure in this way remains valid.

The easy mistake here is again to presume that the dyadic quasi-signs are simply the place of Saussure’s signifier-signifieds, and the triadic signs simply those of Peirce; but the situation is rather that the fully-fledged triadic signs are also Saussurean signifier-signified relations, and the quasi-signs may be understood as the situation in which signified collapses into signifier, and vice versa. Or more specifically, the proto-sign is that whose signified just is the interpretant (it has no object), whereas the tardo-sign is that whose signified just is the object (it has no interpretant).

This becomes more clear as the exact nature of the proto-signs and tardo-signs is unpacked. Beyond these generalities, Sebeok’s specific definition of signal and symptom gives useful guidelines for understanding the quasi-signs. When he writes that “The signal is a sign which mechanically (naturally) or conventionally (artificially) triggers some reaction on the part of a receiver” (Sebeok 2001[1994: 44), the word ‘trigger’ is key, denoting a reflex action or automatic response.

Sebeok uses the example of a pistol being fired at the beginning of a race, to exemplify the signal. On the one hand, the pistol shot is specifically unmotivated – there is no natural bond between the shot itself, and the beginning of the race. On the other hand, the runner responds without hesitation, rather than deliberating over the meaning of the shot.

One colloquial understanding of the signal is that it is agreed upon with a specific receiver what the signal shall mean, but that meaning remains concealed for other possible receivers: the military commander agrees with his soldiers, that when the flare is fired the battle shall begin, but the enemy does not know the intended meaning of the signal flare. Another example would be the red light in the window of the apartment signaling prostitution – the intended receiver knows

the meaning, but the mere signal is not sufficient basis upon which to accuse the sender of illegal activity. In all signals, there is an element of convention, in the sense that there is no widely known bond between signifier and signified. This brings the signal closer to the symbol; on the other hand, this convention is only a proto-convention, as it is not publicly agreed upon to a degree sufficient that any possible receiver would decode its meaning.

Any of these signals may be conceived of as a fully-fledged index-sign in a given context, but what makes them signals is a specific lack of a bond, either between representamen and object, or between representamen and interpretant. Sebeok seems to agree with Bühler, that one difference between signal and symptom has to do with the former's orientation toward the receiver.

It may be well to recall what Bühler did say about the signal within the framework of his model. In Bühler's view, the signal appeals to the destination, whose interior and exterior behaviour it governs; that is, it acts, as it were, like a traffic regulator, which elicits or inhibits reaction. By contrast, the symptom has to do with the source, whose inner behaviour it expresses; and the symbol relates to the designation (Bühler 1934: 28). (Sebeok 2001[1994]: 45)

As the signal depends on a lack of bond between the sign and its referent, the symptom as per the above depends on a definite bond there. "A symptom is a compulsive, automatic, non-arbitrary sign, such that the signifier is coupled with the signified in the manner of a natural link" (Sebeok 2001[1994]: 46).

Several complications arise: does a symptom need to be diagnosed to consist *as* a symptom? Does the bond between the symptom and its source imply a definite object? In the first case, the situation is the same as with the signal: the signal implies an agreement between sender and receiver, but when that agreement becomes known to a third party, the signal becomes a symbol; the symptom implies a natural bond between sign and object-referent, but when that bond is diagnosed, the symptom becomes an index. Proto-signs become fully fledged signs by articulation, and modulation of the sign function.

The problem becomes: to what extent can a signal or symptom be said to even exist, if part of their definition has to do with the code of their correlation remaining unknown? This just is the problem, and the necessity, for the doctrine of quasi-signs (as opposed to a hard distinction between sign and non-sign). The scope of the definition of the sign changes with the modulation of the sign function, and what is quasi-sign in one application becomes a fully-fledged sign for another. Nor is this demarcation anything to do with the modality of the sign, that is, whether the sign be linguistic or non-linguistic.

Biosemioticians seem to agree that some activities of the *Escherichia coli* bacterium are prototypical proto-signs, but not all agree that it's 'symbols all the way down.' One article in question here is "Protosemiosis: agency with reduced representation capacity", co-authored by Alexei Sharov and Tommi Vehkavaara in 2015. The article brings the notion of proto-sign to the forefront of discussion, and it straddles the divide somewhat, between the taxonomists on the one side,

and those that would insist on the coexistence and inextricability of signs on the other side.

In one respect, Sharov and Vehkavaara would seem to agree with Sebeok, Danesi, and Kull, on the claim that it is not ‘symbols all the way down’. They would rather assert that symbols are far too complex to extend to primitive organisms, but would still fall short of saying that symbols are unique to humans. In another respect, they would side with Stjernfelt in denying that the sign types of icon, index, and symbol, may be mapped to phylogenetic evolutionary thresholds (2015: 104). As they put it, none of the simplest organisms engage with ‘objects’ at all in their sign activity, thus the need for the qualifying prefix in proto-sign (Sharov, Vehkavaara 2015: 106). For them, the *Escherichia coli* bacterium has a drastically reduced deliberation over the object, and this reduction is what constitutes the proto-sign.

There is no evidence that bacteria are aware of their spatial locations or directions of movement. Receptor output can be seen as a measurement of the environment, but the only way a bacterium can partition its environment is by the types of its own receptors. This kind of sensory system is not sufficient for categorization of objects, which requires a dynamic convergence of a large number of signaling pathways to stable attractors (Fig. 2). Instead a bacterium responds to the signal directly by modifying its actions. We can say that bacteria categorize the types of whole environment, not the objects in it. (Sharov, Vehkavaara 2015: 113)

Because their theory of proto-signs denies the triadic structure to simple organisms, this puts it at odds with much Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, where the triadic structure is a pre-requisite to all semiosis, but they would not strictly deny semiosis to all organisms. From this view, while *Escherichia coli* signs may not be strictly triadic, they are nevertheless rudimentary signs because they involve a basic kind of agency. This then, would be the proto-sign, and one can see how it may be mapped to the notion of symptom as it is understood by Peirce and Sebeok in the above, as a quasi-sign.

It is important to note that they derive their understanding of the proto-sign from Giorgio Prodi, the Italian epidemiologist and semiotician (Sharov, Vehkavaara 2015: 114), and that the term “proto-semiotics”, which is attributed to Prodi’s contribution to the volume *Essential Readings in Biosemiotics* (Favareau 2010), was already alluded to in the earlier article by Prodi in *Semiotica* 69 3/4, titled “Material bases of signification” (Prodi 1988).

It may seem that these qualifying prefixes ‘proto-’ and ‘quasi-’ threaten to erode the notion of sign itself. One overall argument here is that the prefixes do not need to be a problem, so long as the methodological division between sign function and sign production be accepted because, at the level of sign function there is no sliding of definitions between types of sign and between notions of what is a sign and what is not a sign: a sign is whatever is being described, and that is that; but at the level of sign production, there is in principle no limit to the different ways in which the types of signs may be demarcated and decided.

5.4.3. Tardo-signs

Tardo-signs are a category developed on the basis of the black pyramid schema to cover a class of sign already written about extensively in structural semiology, critical theory, and psychoanalysis. In the Hjelmslevian extension of structural semiology described in Chapter One, the tardo-sign is the connotative form of retroactivity; in Chapter Two, in Eagleton's view, tardo-sign accords with the fifteenth definition of ideology, that is semiotic closure.

As for Chapter Three, Eco describes the tardo-sign in his subchapter about ideological code switching; in Freudian psychoanalysis as described in Chapter Four, Freud approaches the notion of the tardo-sign in his discussion of procedures of condensation in the dream, in the resistance that already-cathected structures exert against the perception of details that would upset their integrity, and in the ostrich policy of the patient whose unconscious cognitive filtering process also dominates the waking state.

Baudrillard famously described tardo-signs as simulacra; Foucault best captured the effects of tardo-sign systems in his section on the panopticon, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977: 195–202); Félix Guattari theorized the tardo-sign in a quasi-Peircean fashion already, in his notion of 'a-signifying semiotics' (Genosko 2001). The basic operation of the tardo-sign is disavowal. Examples of disavowal abound throughout the dissertation.

The tardo-sign is all over Terrence Deacon's works. Beginning from *The Symbolic Species*, where he first suggests that the human-specific symbolic capacity brings with it evolutionary disadvantages, along with the well-known advantages. It is already here, that he describes the inverted modeling capacity within which sensory motor percepts and affects are diminished by symbolic sign use. In a later article contribution to the anthology *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity* (Turner 2006) he calls it the cognitive penumbra.

In the follow-up anthology titled *The Symbolic Species Evolved* (Schilhab et al. 2012), he expands the notion of the inverted modeling capacity to automatization in procedural memory. Finally, in *Incomplete Nature* (Deacon 2012a), all of these approaches to the tardo-sign come together in the metaphor of the golem, and the inertia of mental content. In the following, a select few of the relevant excerpts are presented and compared with parallel theorizations of the tardo-sign already given thus far. Ultimately, the implied strategy for managing tardo-signs is an aesthetic one, a conclusion which is consonant with the methods of second-generation semiology.

It's quite late in *The Symbolic Species* that Deacon starts some free-wheeling speculation that gets really interesting, diverging somewhat from the empirical orientation of most of the book, and extending his findings to different domains of inquiry. For instance, it is only in the very final chapter, "14. Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On", that Deacon mentions the insidiously inverted modeling tendency of humans. As he puts it, "Though the evolution of brains has been about systems for modeling and predicting events in the world, the evolution of

symbolic abilities has not just amplified this ability far beyond that in any other species, it has also introduced an insidiously inverted modeling tendency” (Deacon 1997: 435).

The inversion can be understood with reference to the three-tiered diagram in Figure 18 where, between the second and third levels, the previously down-pointing arrows flip, to show how the token-objects are uploaded to the higher order system of the symbol: these indexes no longer require their objects to maintain the network of signification. This inversion is supposed to capture the way in which sensory motor affect and percept are diminished in symbolic reference, both potentiating reproduction and automation, and reinforcing the conceptual apparatus. As Deacon puts it on the previous page,

The price we pay for this is that our symbolically mediated actions can often be in conflict with motivations to act that arise from more concrete and immediate biological sources. Arguments in support of the classic notion of free will frequently cite this capacity to use reason (that is, symbolic inference and model building) to overcome desire and compulsion. One might respond that calling some actions “free” and others not oversimplifies what is really only a matter of the degree of the strengths of competing compulsions to act, some compulsions arising from autonomic and hormonal sources and others from our imagined satisfaction at reaching a symbolized goal. But there is an important sense in which these competing compulsions are not equal. (Deacon 1997: 434)

Between the ‘autonomic and hormonal sources’ on the one side, and the ‘imagined satisfaction at reaching a symbolized goal’ on the other side, it is clear that extreme instances of the former are proto-signs, and extreme instances of the latter are tardosigns. The cognitive penumbra “provides a reduction in the relative differences in associative salience by virtue of the partial dissociability of symbolic reference from more direct associations with other correlates and features of its object. Thus, prepotent and arousal influences are reduced” (Deacon 2006: 37).

Deacon extends this thesis to a broader commentary on the role of the humanities in university education for addressing or restoring lost sensory motor affect and emotion. It suggests the same as Paul Cobley does at the end of *Cultural Implications of Biosemiotics* (2016), where the arts have a specific but non-instrumentalizable evolutionary function.

The arts and humanities are often treated by evolutionary biology and the neurosciences as peripheral epiphenomena with respect to more instrumental cognitive domains. This seems to me to be a serious intellectual blindspot. The human fascination with the perceptual experience and activities that we broadly classify as aesthetic seems to be one of the clearest indices of the existence of a broader cognitive penumbra – extending beyond increased intelligence or language ability – cast by our neural evolution. (Deacon 2006: 26–27)

The next subsection takes this thesis a step further, by pointing out that the evolutionary edge of the humanities is not facilitated merely by the idle preoccupation with narrative, but necessarily requires tools of the highest order from

the semiotic theory of narrative, including but not limited to psychoanalysis, second-generation semiology, and deconstruction, in order to serve that evolutionary function. It is in just this spirit that such tools are brought to bear upon the texts of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics. This kind of automatization, which has its precursor in the proto-sign, is not unusual in humans, but more like as Freud notes, it is the rule and not the exception.

In “Beyond the symbolic species”, Deacon’s contribution to the commemorative book *The Symbolic Species Evolved* (2012b: 9–38), Deacon describes procedural memory itself, something involved in day-to-day activity, as a germinal tardo-sign, and which anticipates its later development in the ‘Golems’ chapter of *Incomplete Nature* (Deacon 2012a). “In semiotic terms, then, the index-symbol relationship also corresponds to a fundamental distinction between those aspects of language that can be automated and those that cannot, respectively. This has clear neurological implications [...]” (Deacon 2012b: 28). Ground arms! is the Peircean prototype of procedural memory-as-tardo-sign, and

In neuropsychological terms, automatization is characteristic of what is often called procedural memory. Procedural memories are mostly associated with highly regular activities or skills in which a sequence of component actions and assessments is made highly predictable and easily cued. These are effectively behavioral algorithms that have been acquired by constant repetition, to the point that they can be executed with a minimum of conscious monitoring. (Deacon 2012b: 28)

Recall that, in the three-tiered diagram (Figure 18), the inverted modeling capacity is represented by the reversal of the direction of arrows, specifically between the indexical and symbolic levels. It is only once the dependency upon token-objects is diminished that this automatization may proceed. It is notable that in this article, which is published the same year that *Incomplete Nature* is published, there is already some inconsistency. Here, the notion of the symbolic threshold is defended somewhat, whereas in *Incomplete Nature*, the very definition of human specificity as being symbolic is abandoned totally, conforming somewhat it seems, to the views of those critics like Stjernfelt, who accuse Deacon of wielding a too simple notion of Peirce’s symbol.

The specifically symbolic aspect is no longer crucial to Deacon’s conception – however, it may be said that his apparent willingness to concede this point to Stjernfelt or whoever else is disappointing, if only for the fact that Deacon’s early use of symbol matches perfectly with Lacan and Kristeva’s notion of the symbolic, which just is the tardo-sign, in the sense that the Lacanian symbolic constitutes ideological overdetermination exerted primarily through verbal language. Deacon’s later claims in *Incomplete Nature* about the ‘inertia of mental content’ have a clear parallel in Freudian theory about the difficulty of de-cathecting already-cathected associations. He writes in “Beyond the Symbolic Species”:

Importantly, once a skilled behavior is well-ingrained it can be executed at a rate that is many times more rapid than if each component operation required monitoring. The result is that automated procedures tend to be automatically initiated by stereotypic

cues, once initiated “run” autonomously to completion, and are modular in the sense that dissecting them back into component actions is difficult if not impossible, and their structures tend to become inaccessible to introspection. (Deacon 2012b: 28)

The observation that ‘these structures tend to become inaccessible to introspection’ is a quintessentially psychoanalytic comment, but Freud would add that certain procedures do exist, whereby these structures may be de-cathected. In psychoanalysis these procedures all tend to involve free association, dream interpretation being the exemplar of such strategies for de-automatizing patterns of habitual thought, and this is one of the obvious reasons why psychoanalytic theory has such abiding traction in the arts and literary studies.

The biosemiotic aesthetic function, as it is called in the concluding section of this dissertation, is the proposal for a fusion of these strategies with those of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics. Deacon anticipates the hybrid, when he concludes that the evolutionary function of aesthetics has to do with making deliberate again, those patterns of thought and action that have been automatized. “This ability to use a repertoire of acquired procedures to reliably access and organize life-episodes and abstract ideas is likely a major factor contributing to the human preoccupation with narrative” (Deacon 2012b: 29).

To describe what is called here the tardo-sign, Deacon uses the metaphor of the golem, because the golem is a mythical creature endowed with the autonomy of life, but which lacks a certain degree of deliberation. Golems may be employed to wreak havoc upon one’s enemies, but they may also turn upon their creator.

Golems can thus be seen as the very real consequence of investing relentless logic with animate power. The true golems of today are not artificial living beings, but rather bureaucracies, legal systems, and computers. In their design as well as their role as unerringly literal slaves, digital computers are the epitome of a creation that embodies truth maintenance made animate. Like the golems of mythology, they are selfless servants, but they are also mindless. Because of this, they share the golem’s lack of discernment and potential for disaster. (Deacon 2012b: 89)

Between the zone of the symbol and that of the meme, there remains some deliberation – the fully-fledged symbol still recapitulates the non-identity of the sign function. The symbol still entails active interpretation which, as it is argued in the next section, does indeed imply a biological element. The meme also still requires its biological host, but deliberation decreases rapidly.

Like Freud’s cathected associations, a meme, once it has entered the mind of the host, may be difficult to change or to get rid of. Deacon talks about this point, in the borderlands of the tardo-sign, in terms of the inertia of mental content. This comes up in the final chapter of *Incomplete Nature*, Chapter 17: “Consciousness”.

Like the final chapter of *The Symbolic Species*, things start to get really interesting here, as Deacon begins to extrapolate his findings to different domains. In this chapter, Deacon asks the question, what are the implications of emergent dynamics for describing consciousness? He enigmatically suggests “that there

should consequently be something akin to inertia associated with a change of mental content and shift in attention” (Deacon 2012a: 518). As usual, the comment on the cultural level is concealed by the contingencies of making such an assertion from an empirical basis. One of the central interests of *Incomplete Nature* is to bridge the descriptive gulf between the sciences and the humanities, where mental phenomena cannot and should not be reduced to their biological substrate.

Emergent dynamics attempts to overcome this issue, by asserting that what is being described by these dynamics is neither reducible to the elements of its substrate, nor is it understandable in total abstraction from that substrate. Like the wheel that is rolled by Lao Tzu, its gyroscopic stability is not reducible to any of its parts, none of which, when the wheel comes to a rest, or when taken in isolation from each other, exhibit the gyroscopic stability that emerges from the whole.

Self-organization, or morphodynamics, is the link between the material world of thermodynamics, and the mental world of semiosis and teleodynamics. In this way, phenomena of mind may be understood in the terms not of their substrates per se, but in terms of the absences that make up the constraints that organize those substrates into greater wholes, such as that of gyroscopic stability. It is by this absential logic, that Deacon is confident to proceed in saying that mental constructions should exhibit ‘something akin to inertia’, despite the fact that this claim mixes descriptive terms from different levels. But he follows up with a stronger restatement that confirms the analogy:

Rapidly shutting down an ongoing dynamic in one area and just as rapidly generating another requires considerable work, both thermodynamic (metabolic) and morphodynamic. But consider the analogy to simple physical morphodynamic processes like whirlpools and Bénard convection cells. These cannot be generated in an instant nor can they be dissipated in an instant, once stable. The same must be true of the mental experiences in such cases of highly aroused shifts of attention. Prior dynamics will resist dissolution and may require structural interference with their attractor patterns (morphodynamic work imposed from other brain regions) to shut them down rapidly. They will in this sense resist an imposed change. This tension between dynamical influences at these two levels – the homeodynamics of metabolic processes and the morphodynamics of network dynamics – is inevitable in any forced change of morphodynamic activity. (Deacon 2012a: 523)

‘Prior dynamics will resist dissolution’: this is Peircean ideology critique in a nutshell, and when he cautions that these inert mental contents ‘may require structural interference’ in order to be shut down, one may understand the special procedures of signomancy and textual retroactivity as tools for introducing exactly this interference. When Deacon establishes the missing link between animate and inanimate matter on the basis of his emergent dynamics, he also theorizes a descriptive link between science and the humanities. These findings presented at the end of the book explain ominous statements made at beginning, such as

it shouldn't surprise us that just when our scientific prowess appears on the verge of Godlike capacities to extend life, create new species, leave the Earth, manufacture new elements, and create machines able to perform tasks that once only people could perform, ancient fundamentalisms have swept across the globe in a rising tide of denial and defiance. (Deacon 2012a: 34)

Neither of his books end on such a dismal note, and it should be reminded that ideology and the tardo-sign are not a major interest in the work of Deacon. Instead, both of his works conclude optimistically. From Deacon's view it is possible, to overcome the divide of the sciences and the humanities. The link that is provided by emergent dynamics, comes in his subtle theorization of constraint and the causal efficacy of absence. Mind and semiosis and the products of culture may yield to the descriptive tools of science, as long as these descriptions appreciate the subtle bridge between thermodynamics and teleodynamics that is self-organizing systems. In the closing section of this dissertation, it is hoped that the idea of retroactivity may help to explain this bridge as the methodology of emergent dynamics, and thus how semiotics may succeed in its original ambitions, of providing a unifying but non-reductive transdisciplinary vocabulary for the fractured social sciences.

5.5. The biosemiotic aesthetic function

In the closing words of *The Symbolic Species* Deacon reminds that, already in 1997, the line between the real and the virtual is quickly fading, and the speed at which this transformation accelerates surely outpaces the inertia of humanity's own mental content to keep up with it. But while the ancient fundamentalisms of the cognitive penumbra endanger the symbolic species, it is also only through the symbolic that this danger may be effectively confronted – the principle of *ὁ τρόσας ἰάσεται* (ho trōsas iasetai) is also relevant to Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics. On the same page, Deacon comforts the reader by reassuring that, “we should not underestimate the miraculous power of symbols to break down even vast barriers of space, time, and idiosyncratic experience that would otherwise separate us impenetrably” (Deacon 1997: 454).

The last words of *The Symbolic Species* differ somewhat from those of *Incomplete Nature* where, one recalls, Deacon predicts that one day consciousness will be fully quantifiable (Deacon 2012a): 536), and these messy intertextual and literary asides will no longer be necessary. The earlier book in contrast, ends by alluding to the poetry of Yeats. “As we have seen, the symbolic threshold is not intrinsic to the human-nonhuman difference. It is probably crossable to some extent in many different ways by many species. This means that we are not the only species that could possess such a ‘pilgrim soul’, to use William Butler Yeats's elegantly descriptive phrase” (Deacon 1997: 454). The phrase comes from the poem “When You Are Old”, whose memorable first lines follow:

*When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;*
(Yeats 1893 In: Finneran 1996[1989]: 41)

The fact that consciousness may eventually be fully quantifiable and uploaded to a computer does mean emergent dynamics aren't still well served through an unexpected literary allusion. Throughout the dissertation, literary quotations and their analyses have been interspersed in order to demonstrate how the two forms of retroactivity interact with each other. When a figurative trope or an allusive non-sequitur interrupts the linear exposition of a concept, it destabilizes the concept in a way that allows it to be interpreted in a number of different ways. As in the case of Deacon's allusion to Yeats, the literary moment is no mere ornament to an idea that could otherwise be expressed in a more straightforward way, but is integral to the idea itself.

The nature of retroactivity is such that it cannot be concretely expressed in a single concept, but requires the intersection of at least two incompatible codes. This principle is pervasive in second-generation semiology, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis, but it is not widely understood how such a principle may be relevant to undertakings in Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics. Deacon's theorization of the causal efficacy of absence, implicit in his understanding of constraint, is a major advancement in the direction of showing the relevance of retroactivity outside of the literary and philosophical domain. It should be no surprise then, that the textual effects of retroactivity so characteristic of the other semiotics can also be found here, in his works.

5.5.1. Deacon's dynamics: noise, recursivity, self-preservation

For instance, chapter 12. "Information" of *Incomplete Nature* proposes a theory of referential information that easily facilitates the concept of retroactivity. It begins by clarifying the definition of information and differentiating it from sign action (Deacon 2012a: 372). Here the obvious reference point for a detailed overview of the problems of information and semiotics should be the works Søren Brier, particularly *Cybersemiotics: Why Information is Not Enough* (2013), which was published shortly after *Incomplete Nature*.

Deacon's idea about the indispensable role of noise in the channel for redundantly grounding the signal, and how this redundancy grounding has an analogy in self-preservation in biology, accomplishes three things: first, it is a demonstration of how emergent dynamics provides a non-reductive vocabulary applicable to problems of both science and the humanities; second, it shows how the theorization of retroactivity accomplished in the structural semiological approach also applies to problems of biology and evolution; thirdly, it shows how retroactivity may inform a textual methodology of emergent dynamics. The idea of

referential information is briefly summarized in the following, to facilitate the connection with retroactivity.

In classical information theory as summarized by Deacon, a formal quantity of information is measured against the total possible configurations of the elements of the transmission, as a matter of statistical irregularity. In any signal transmission there will be errors. The information of the transmission itself is already measured as an error, that is, as a statistical improbability against the otherwise predictably equiprobable distribution of elements in the thermodynamic system.

The idea of redundancy checking is to send the message more than once, and to check the irregularities of the first message against the irregularities of consecutive ones. One can then sort the intentional irregularities out from the unintentional irregularities. In this way, the noise of the channel is indispensable for determining the referential content of the message. “Without reference to this absent background of possible alternatives, the amount of potential information cannot be measured” (Deacon 2012a: 379). The noise, or at least its function in redundancy checking, just is the referential content.

In other words, once we begin considering the potential entropy of the class of things or events that a given medium can convey, the physical characteristics of the medium, not merely its range of potential states, become important. This reduces the Shannon entropy of the range of possible phenomena that a given change in that medium can be about. In other words, what we might now call referential information is a second order form of information, over and above Shannon information. (Figures 12.1, 12.2). (Deacon 2012a: 384)

This theory of referential information brings in the cybernetic dimension, where higher order semiotic information is always *new information*³². Deacon says: “All of these approaches to the problem of representational error checking reinforce the claim that interpretation is a dynamical process, which inevitably involves the generation of new information in the form of new signals and new interactions that do work with respect to those that were generated previously” (Deacon 2012a: 407). Not only do the organized contents of a signal need to be preserved for referential information transmission to continue, but also the material constraints of the channel itself, and the noise it imparts upon a given transmission, need to be preserved as well. Here, Deacon links the idea of signal redundancy checking and biological self-preservation (Deacon 2012a: 273).

This is the beginnings of a definition of interpretation that is intrinsically biological, and thus of biology as intrinsically interpretative, the germinal contention of biosemiotics.

Does Deacon see how second-generation semiology, ideology critique, and psychoanalysis anticipate these findings? The postulation of the necessary newness of referential information and semiosis has an obvious connection with Juri Lotman, and with the help of Monticelli the reader can easily see then, how it is

³² See: Silvi Salupere’s “The cybernetic layer of Juri Lotman’s metalanguage” (2015).

not too long a journey from Deacon to deconstruction. In his section about retroactivity, Monticelli (2008: 62–109) connects Juri Lotman and Derrida in the concept of newness and unpredictability as detotalization. “This new kind of significance is not attached to something that is grasped, comprehended by the subject (something ‘objectively present’), but exactly to the unpredictability of those oscillating possibilities, from which new information may emerge (Lotman 1997: 13)” (Monticelli 2008: 91).

Lotman was well aware that these conclusions derive not just from semiotics and cybernetics, but also from the statistical mechanics and information theory that Deacon relies upon. “The space of explosion thus (re)constitutes a reserve of indeterminacy which is ‘the measure of information’ (Lotman 2000: 227)” (Monticelli 2008: 91).

Juri Lotman’s ‘(re)constitution of the reserve of indeterminacy’ is just the same as Deacon’s preservation of the constraints of the channel. Monticelli’s project for some time has been to argue for the overlap between Lotman (and the Tartu-Moscow school generally) and Derrida’s deconstruction. By means of the bridge already constructed by Monticelli between Derrida and Lotman, the insight of detotalization and retroactivity is extended to Deacon, to show how Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics is also de-centered, and this aesthetic matter is intrinsic and indispensable – it is no mere ornament to the description of that profound articulatory matrix. Its textual aesthetic exigencies are also found in the work of Stjernfelt.

5.5.2. Stjernfelt’s synaesthesia: intertextuality, hyperdensity, transformation

These textual and aesthetic excesses are more abundant in Stjernfelt’s work than in Deacon’s. Although Stjernfelt is critical of the structural semiological tradition, the fact remains that his work is much closer to that tradition than is Deacon’s.

According to Stjernfelt, part of the need for the diagram notion is that the old semiotics makes no place for transformation. As he sums it up, from his early view: “it is striking that no prominent concepts of transformation are to be found in most of European structuralism and structural linguistics, the Saussure-Brøndal-Hjelmslev-Eco lineage” (Stjernfelt 2007: 118). The claim of the current work on the contrary is that transformation is exactly the problem of retroactivity, and thus already from second-generation semiology transformation was the main interest – their techniques for dealing with transformation are simply those which Stjernfelt ignores because, as he claims, they lead to epistemological skepticism, relativism, and nihilism, and Peircean diagrams are his answer to this problem.

Were the diagram notion sufficient for accounting for all transformations, one might expect more actual diagrams in Stjernfelt’s books (as compared with Deacon’s, which are full of lovely diagrams); and one might expect that Stjernfelt himself would not rely on the old strategies of management for transformation, that are specifically intertextuality, hyperdensity, and eclecticism. What one finds

however, is that Stjernfelt is just as preoccupied with narrative as the next old semiotician. Stjernfelt closes *Diagrammatology* with four chapters more or less about literary theory. Ostensibly, these chapters are meant to lay to rest the idea that literary interpretation should repose upon the detotalizing strategies of structural semiology. What these chapters show mostly, is that Stjernfelt is indeed very interested in narrative and literary theory (some of the most entertaining writing of the book is in these chapters), that he approaches it as much from a structural semiological view-point as he does from a Peircean one, and finally that he is not above the occasional dalliance into radical *différance*.

In the supremely entertaining Chapter 16. “Who is Michael Wo-Ling Ptah-Hotep Jerolemon?” (Stjernfelt 2007: 327–343), Stjernfelt gets into some of the real heavy-lifting of Peirce scholarship, that deals with the internal inconsistencies of Peirce’s drafts, the sort of labor he presumably would like to see Deacon take up. In part of this chapter, Stjernfelt usefully distinguishes between two or three different kinds of abduction – the kind of inference dealing with the creation of new hypotheses. “The more precise determination of abduction changes over Peirce’s lifetime and is, as such, the subject of some controversy. Let us here briefly run through the most crucial among the different aspects of abduction” (Stjernfelt 2007: 329). One way of understanding the black pyramid schema in the context of Peirce, is to place abductive inference at the secondary level with retroactivity³³, and induction and deduction at the primary level.

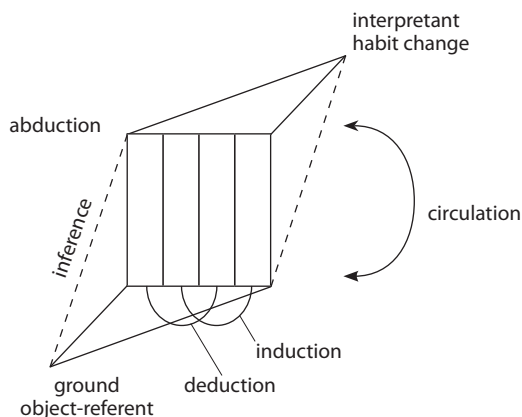


Figure 23: *Inference on the black pyramid.*

³³ It is possible that the different types of abductive inference elaborated by Stjernfelt could also be mapped to the two forms of retroactivity.

Stjernfelt summarizes that, in the early accounts of abduction the unexpected hypothesis has more to do with the selection of the rule upon which the hypothesis is generated, than to do with the generation of the hypothesis itself. Peirce reformulated abduction later in 1903 to account for this, “But, as Peirce himself is the first to admit, the presence of A in both the premise and the conclusion causes problems. It implies that this logical form does not in any way account for the process of adoption of the hypothesis” (Stjernfelt 2007: 330). This problem gives food for thought, for how to use Peircean abduction for literary interpretation – how to account for new information in Peircean terms. He goes on to summarize, that even for the late formulation of abduction,

The problem remains evident in the fact that while Peirce contends that there is substantially no information in the conclusion which was not already (albeit, maybe, implicitly) in the premises, on the other hand he claims that Abduction is the only source for new information in the reasoning process (deduction and induction providing no new material). But hence, this innovation cannot stem from the logical form of Abduction. (Stjernfelt 2007: 331)

Stjernfelt proposes to solve the problem of Peircean abduction, by linking it to the idea of perceptual judgments. “As Hoffman argues, this becomes possible to see if we draw a distinction between the logical form of abduction of the 1903 lectures on the one hand and the ‘creative’ act of perception of the surprising fact on the other, leading to the adoption of a hypothesis” (Stjernfelt 2007: 331).

Ultimately, the whole argument leads up to the point that theorematic diagram transformations always involve abduction. In other words, the spatial aspect of the diagram introduces certain ambiguities which the user must manipulate, to facilitate new conclusions. The user must flesh out the incomplete, skeletal nature of the diagram by moving and rearranging its pieces. After that begins the subsection “Literary Interpretation” (Stjernfelt 2007: 336), and soon after come the final two chapters: 17. “Five Types of Iconicity in the Literary Text – An Extension of the Ingardian Viewpoint” and 18. “The Man Who Knew Too Much: Espionage in Reality and Fiction: Regional Ontology and Iconicity”. These last two chapters employ only in a cursory fashion the Peircean complexities elaborated thus far. Especially in the final chapter on espionage, the notions of schematic iconicity and diagram transformation are really nowhere to be found.

The point of these chapters at the end is presumably to establish how a fleshed out Peircean theory of diagrams can replace the detotalizing theories of the old semiotics, and give just as persuasive an account of literature as the old semiotics did, with its anti-capitalist, epistemologically skeptical, culturally relative orientations. However, while being some of the best reading of the whole book, they really do not succeed in establishing this. In fact, the final chapter makes more reference to Greimas than it does to Peirce. Some of Stjernfelt’s descriptions of Greimas’ narratological molecule restate the core features of the opposition of sign function and sign production, as well as the substrate-independence of the profound matrix (Stjernfelt 2007: 471).

When Stjernfelt uses the word diagram, he intends the inflated meaning that “Diagrams comprise all things by means of which necessary conclusions may be drawn” (Stjernfelt 2007: 285), and in this broad extension it is disputable what advantage the notion has over the classic notions of text and metaphor. As to the all-purpose character of diagram, Stjernfelt more or less admits this weakness, in *Natural Propositions*. “One terminological issue is that the technical, Peircean notion of diagram is now extended to such a degree that the common-sense notion of diagrams vanishes in the haze and seems to constitute only a small subset of the new enlarged category” (Stjernfelt 2014: 211).

If semiotics is to retain its disciplinary identity, it could follow the example Stjernfelt actually sets with his writing, where the method remains with the textual orientation of exegesis, close reading, philology, and metatheory. Mere multimodality is no solution to logocentrism, and for this reason the diagram category presents no substantial advantage over the categories of text and metaphor, when it comes to answering the pivotal question of what should be the major unit of analysis in semiotics. The even more telling fact about Stjernfelt’s work however, is that despite its pretensions to scientificity, empirically grounded and scientific strategies are not the major ones in *Diagrammatology*. Instead, what one sees there is an exceptionally diverse, prismatic refraction of theories and approaches, held together delicately by the thread of the Peircean notions of diagram and icon. Logic, cognition, semiology, phenomenology, biology, art criticism, literary theory, evolution – what makes the book so unique and singular is this eclecticism and plurality of approaches, within which a whole lot of improvisation and speculation takes place. It doesn’t all add up, but it is pulled off with such style and erudition that one is inclined to follow the thread. When this active innovation is paralleled by the equally active theorization of the concept of creativity itself – in this case, in the form of Peircean abduction – the result is a reflexive, self-aware transmission, like Deacon’s redundantly grounded referential information. This is what is meant, when it is said that retroactivity shows up also here, as the Peircean cognitive and biosemiotic aesthetic function. Deacon’s dynamic noise and recursivity, and Stjernfelt’s kaleidoscopic synaesthetics, are the textual implementation of the second form of retroactivity, which is in constant tension with the first form. Thus, their texts not only reproduce the same major interest of second-generation semiology that is the profound articulatory matrix; they also reproduce the same method of its description. It is because the approach remains fundamentally sympathetic, that all disavowals (such as that of Eco) must be eschewed in favor of a greater basic integration, even while detotalization proceeds uninterrupted. Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics are integrated into detotalization by means of what is called the *dici-sinthome*, as per Figure 5, on the basis of this fundamental sympathy, in the hopes that the more cosmetic disagreements can be sorted out some time in the future.

5.5.3. Eco and biosemiotics

Hopefully it may be laid to rest, the idea that Eco's interpretative semiotics is somehow anthropocentric, logocentric in the naïve or the proper sense, or relativistic. His early prototype of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid, upon which the black pyramid schema is based, is as solid a foundation as any, for integrating the semiotics of Peirce to the aims of detotalization.

On top of the already cited statements by Eco, which demonstrate beyond reasonable argument that his early semiotic theory already goes beyond the realm of linguistics (such as Eco 1979[1976]: 229, and 234), there are also those statements by him affirming the importance of biosemiotics itself, such as are included in his dedication to Giorgio Prodi, the inventor of the proto-sign (Eco 1994). As noted by Kull (2018: 357), Eco makes it clear there, that Prodi's efforts to overcome the divide between the humanities and the sciences should remain an ongoing emphasis of semiotics. From this, and from the whole latter portion of Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics*, it may be safely inferred that Eco did not seek to marginalize the empirical study of sign production and taxonomy, when he divided it from the sign function.

He only wanted to stress the fact that what makes semiotics what it is, is the intense theorization of the sign itself, no matter whatever other concerns attend that theorization, whether they be biological, cognitive, literary, or otherwise. The sometimes inaccessible, labyrinthine, and arcane textual result of this focus may discourage some readers, but it also serves to protect semiotics from over-dissemination, and from bad instrumentalization, through a kind of hermetic concealment that Eco understood all too well.

These descriptive systems are always in the process of transformation – they are changing, even as they are being applied within a single analysis. The inner chiasm gives forth to the byzantine proliferation of new theories. One can see this in *Diagrammatology* also, whose eclecticism and ingenuity really does rival even that of Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics*. But when it comes to the analysis of literature for example, or other classic problems of the humanities, it will be some time yet before anything from cognitive and biosemiotics will rival the unageing monuments of the actual magister of semiotics.

CONCLUSION

Transcending his disavowal of detotalization, Stjernfelt's *dicisign* doctrine is adopted here as an abbreviation for the whole field of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics and fused with the *sinthome*, producing the neologism: *dici-sinthome*. The Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid is formulated through it, and through the quasi-sign doctrine. This formulation has specific consequences for the coordinates of each chapter that remain to be developed.

In the *dicisign* structure, retroactivity happens in the metaphorical and metonymical linkage between subject-index and predicate-icon. The propositional structure of the abductive *dicisign* is partially figurative, requiring a speculative or creative leap to make the connection. The possibility of understanding types of *dicisigns* in this way is already latent in Stjernfelt's book, but he does not mention this possibility, because the assertion that metaphor and metonymy are basic to the sign could imply that *dicisign* doctrine is just structuralism dressed up in Peircean vocabulary, an association that is diligently eschewed by the Peirce *nouveau*. It should be clear that the *dici-sinthome* and quasi-sign doctrine totally affirm Eco's heterodox interpretation of Peirce. Needless to say, this affirmation extends also to Eco's sometimes alleged Marxism. The quasi-sign doctrine is the proposed solution to the problem of relativism in Marxist literary theory confronted in Chapter Two. The doctrine maintains that the ideological semiotic system may be distinguished from the non-ideological one, as the quasi-sign may be distinguished from the fully-fledged sign, but this is not performed by importing a naïve referent as a discriminant parameter of the sign's definition. The vocabulary of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics is integrated to ideology critique (as demonstrated in section 5.4) and brings the tools of empirical science to the problems of Marxism, but without making the mistake that many Marxist critics make, when they presume to consolidate concepts like class and value by resorting to fantasies of ethnic unity and linguistic identity.

The quasi-sign doctrine is in this way also an extension of numerous extant projects for adapting Peirce's pragmatism to German social theory, from such moderate examples as Karl-Otto Apel (1995), to Erkki Kilpinen (2000) and Arran Gare (2004), to more extreme cases like that of E. San Juan Jr. (2020). The upshots of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics for second-generation semiology, discussed in Chapter One, are also clear: the profound articulatory matrix which interested Eco and Derrida is just the same matrix proven by Terrence Deacon with empirical tools. Biosemiotics and structural semiology have the same object of inquiry. Language as such is far older than previously thought, it comprises a general capacity which Deacon (perhaps misleadingly) calls symbolic, and according to him this matrix has exerted evolutionary pressure on the brains of developing species for about one million years. But the effort of section 5.5 was to show that, no matter how much empirical evidence is brought to bear upon this discussion, the profound matrix cannot be expressed purely by these methods

alone. The method of description must involve textual retroactivity. This retroactivity is present in the works of Deacon and Stjernfelt, but the thinkers who are most eloquent about its function are those of second-generation semiology, and the other paragons of detotalization, like Monticelli himself. Old semiotics and new meet each other in the shadow of the black pyramid.

Consider again Figure 1, where the circle of the six species of sign is already superimposed upon the square of the sign function. The figure has implications that haven't been sorted out yet, and which could be taken in different directions. For example, the quasi-signs in the upper part of the diagram appear to align with the two forms of retroactivity. This could imply that the two kinds of quasi-sign (proto-sign and tardo-sign) are differentiated according to the sort of retroactivity which happens there, or which does not happen there. This would suggest that the proto-sign is connotative retroactivity without metalanguage, and the tardo-sign is metalinguistic retroactivity without connotation. But this result is not ideal. One problem is that it does not match the claim that tardo-signs are the equivalent of the connotative ideological system, as asserted in 5.4.3. In order to rectify the alignment, the circular perimeter of sign production may be turned ninety degrees counter-clockwise, so that the quasi-sign doctrine meets the types of retroactivity at the perpendicular. In this arrangement, the relationship of the quasi-signs to retroactivity is more sensible: proto-signs are regular activity without retroactivity, and tardo-signs are retroactivity without regular activity, and are now aligned with the connotative secondary system. The author could go back to Figure 1 and modify it to show this change, but that would erase the transformation. On top of that, the new arrangement introduces a different problem: in Figure 23 the primary level and regular action are associated with deductive and inductive inference, whereas the secondary level and retroactivity are associated with abductive inference, but if the perimeter is turned in the way suggested above, then proto-signs become kinds of regular inference without abductive inference, and tardo-signs become abductive inference without regular inference. This result is also less than ideal. An alternative solution would be, instead of turning the perimeter ninety degrees counter-clockwise, to draw a vertical line down the middle of the figure, and rotate the circular perimeter along this axis 180 degrees. When this is done, the tardo-signs now align with connotative retroactivity, and proto-signs align with metalinguistic retroactivity. Needless to say, this new arrangement, while solving some problems, introduces new ones.

No matter how the diagram is reorganized, inconsistencies remain. For example, the first term of the six species of signs is sometimes signal (corresponding with Sebeok's arrangement), and sometimes symptom (corresponding with the order of the sinthome coordinates); and the main figure still asserts that condensation-metaphor and displacement-metonymy only describe Freud's secondary process, even though Lacan sometimes claims that they also describe the primary process. Inconsistencies such as these are not merely an inevitable result of the theoretic transposition; they are its main fruit, the portals of future discovery.

After seeing how the parts of the black pyramid organize each chapter, it might be inferred that the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid, and the two forms of retroactivity found in the pyramid, are a legitimate discovery, a structure hidden in all the texts under discussion, waiting to be excavated. While they are original, the black pyramid schema and its pieces are not intended this way. The initial interest of the dissertation was to defend the procedures of textual randomization employed by Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida, against the now prevailing accusation against them of being fashionable nonsense. Later, it was decided that the best way to go about this defense was to justify them with the semiotics of Peirce, whose system has the luster of highest credibility. After that, textual randomization was repackaged as a method of ideology critique, and the constellation of relevant texts for exegesis was decided on this basis, spanning the parts of the sinthome described by Figure 5. The work of that exegesis demanded that the classic Hjelmslevian stratification be reconciled to the Peircean sign trichotomies – the two forms of retroactivity and the way they are identified in each chapter were confected retrospectively, in order to accommodate the structure of that hybrid. It was mostly in order to give this dissertation the veneer of concreteness and a comprehensible research question, that the work was afterwards reframed as an answer to Monticelli's question about Peirce for detotalization, however it must be conceded that these later, direct integrations with Monticelli proved to be some of the most persuasive. Nevertheless, the black pyramid schema itself is a retroactive textual procedure of randomization – it could even be called a *pyramid scheme*, in the way that it lures readers with the apparition of a theoretic solvency it doesn't entirely possess. Regardless of the questionable circumstances of its genesis, the results of the work demand two directions for future research. The first is oriented to philosophy before Peirce, and the other to philosophy after Peirce.

In the conclusion to *Wholeness and its Remainders*, Monticelli briefly lists his own suggestions for future directions of research. In addition to the project of integrating Peirce to detotalization, he also proposes to extend the analysis to additional authors, “for instance, the above-mentioned Hegel” (Monticelli 2008: 33). A new focus on Hegel for detotalization could be especially effective if it is conceived in tandem with the integration of Peirce. That is, one way to proceed would be to argue that Peirce was a closet Hegelian, and that Hegel's absolute idealism is alive within the thought of Peirce. A great deal of energy has been expended up until now to distance Peirce from Hegel. Consider Stjernfelt (2007: 43) and Dilworth (2015) in this application, but Peirce's self-styled objective idealism has many similarities with Hegel's absolute idealism. These similarities, and the obvious comparability of Peirce's three categories with the classically tripartite conception of Hegelian dialectics, are both discussed in great detail by Robert Stern (2013). When he comes to the conclusion that Peirce is just “An Hegelian in strange costume”, as the title of his article says, he does downplay Peirce's training in empirical science, as compared with Hegel, who had no such training. The fact remains that efforts to distance Peirce from Hegel bear the mark of disavowal, in the sense that the similarities in their thinking are undeniable, despite whatever other differences remain.

One possible explanation for the disavowal of the connection between Peirce and Hegel is the fact that the latter is the notable progenitor of the notion of alienation, which became so crucial to Marxism and ideology critique. Hegel is important for new wave ideology critique coming from the Ljubljana school of psychoanalysis and Slavoj Žižek, the biggest name in ideology critique by far. Combining Peirce and Hegel could yield results in a variety of areas. For example, up to this point, studies in Peirce for aesthetics and art criticism have produced negligible results. As asserted in section 5.5.3, it will be some time before strategies coming from cognitive and biosemiotics will be as impactful for this task as those originating in the classic coordinates of detotalization. But just this underdeveloped application is one possibility, for intersections of Peirce and Hegel. Philosopher John Kaag has explored the connections between Peirce's abductive inference and Immanuel Kant's reflective judgment, specifically with application to aesthetics and art criticism (2005; 2014), but what has not been substantially discussed is the place of Hegel's aesthetics in this picture. This direction of research is promising enough to constitute its own dissertation, but let it suffice to remind the reader of footnote 15, which cites a comment made by Žižek where he says that Terrence Deacon is his favorite evolutionary biologist. He makes this reference in the context of his assertion that Hegel's causal efficacy of absence has some recent scientific substantiation, in what Deacon calls teleodynamics. As to the implications of this for aesthetics and art criticism, the interested researcher should consult Adrian Johnston's "Lacking causes: Privative causality from Locke and Kant to Lacan and Deacon" (2015), where the connection between Deacon and Hegel is pursued a bit further. Another possibly important work in this project should be *Morphodynamics in Aesthetics: Essays on the Singularity of the Work of Art* (Caliandro 2019). It was only for lack of time, that this did not take up its own chapter of the current work, especially considering relevant comments from Hegel like "The *sign* is some immediate intuition which represents a wholly different content from the content that it has for itself; – the *pyramid* into which an alien soul is transferred and preserved" (Hegel 2007[1817]: 194, §458). For commentary on this ponderous passage, refer to Derrida's *Speech and Writing According to Hegel* (Derrida 1978 in: Stern 1993).

In this way, exploration of the black pyramid could be continued in the context of philosophy pre-dating Peirce; or, it may be continued in the context of more contemporary developments, for example in what is called the new materialism. As noted in the introduction, Gary Genosko coins the name of the "Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid" when discussing Eco (2016: 17), but he argues that this hybrid is most fully developed in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, two major people for the new materialism. In an earlier article, Genosko notes that Hjelmslev's work "has the reputation of being theoretically abstruse and Byzantine in its complexity", that this complexity is an intrinsic part of its theorization, and that "This is, I believe, no less true of Félix Guattari's uses of Hjelmslevian and Peircean concepts in the description and application of a mixed semiotics" (Genosko 2001: 175). Deleuze and Guattari are still some of the most frequently

cited in social theory and critical philosophy today. Their concepts of deterritorialization, rhizome, and the body without organs, may all be understood in terms of the principle of retroactivity developed in this dissertation. At the same time, when Deleuze and Guattari assert that expression and content are continuous rather than discontinuous, and call for total destratification, it may also be interpreted as an outright rejection of semiotics and structuralism and the basic opposition of signifier and signified. Combine this with the commonplace reading of *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2009[1972]); there, the critique of the Oedipus complex and the incest prohibition are central, and this is interpreted by many as a resolute rejection of psychoanalysis. One should keep in mind that, despite the critical approach of Deleuze and Guattari, their works consist of prolonged meditations upon both semiotics and psychoanalysis, not rejections of them. But prevailing, the reception of their work has resulted in the disavowal of the tradition of detotalization.

The other aspect of the work of Deleuze and Guattari for which they are most well-known, is the way their writing rejects academic formality. If one chooses to take a negative view of their textual experimentation, one may arrive at the conclusion that a portion of the blame for the decline of interest in ideology critique resides with them. It is easy to accuse Deleuze and Guattari of inciting nihilistic relativism in social science and the humanities. Following from this, one possible direction of future research is to develop a thorough critique of Deleuze and Guattari's major work, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, following somewhat the direction taken by Žižek, but on the basis of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid. But while this may be an enticing path, it is not the path endorsed here. The textual experimentation of Deleuze and Guattari actually exemplifies better than any other, the metalinguistic form of retroactivity explored by this dissertation. If their texts are found to be lacking in the empirical aspect characteristic of the Peircean persuasion, the correct approach should not be to disavow them, but to supplement and continue their work by introducing more material from cognitive and natural science, following the lead of biosemiotics.

A third path – which would neither disavow Deleuze and Guattari, nor attempt to moderate their radicalism with empirical science, but would instead accelerate their destratification – is also possible. In the introduction to Nick Land's *Fanged Noumena* (2019[2011]), another important person for the new materialism, Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier note that “Land violently repudiates *A Thousand Plateaus*' sage warning against the dangers of a ‘too-sudden destratification’ [...] To Land's eyes, *A Thousand Plateaus*' newfound caution – ‘don't provoke the strata’ – is a lamentable step backward from *Anti-Oedipus*' most audacious innovations” (Land 2019[2011]: 30). Following Land's example, this approach would employ the concept of signomancy more directly and consistently in the random generation of text, using either the traditional techniques discussed in Chapter Four like divination and dream interpretation, or more advanced ones like those used by the fictional trio of publishers in *Foucault's Pendulum*, who combine the cabala with computer programs to re-write the Ingolf document and forge a new Gnostic Templar conspiracy theory. Both of these strategies are

considered again in the appendix. Such a program of future research could for example involve creating a forged letter, written by Charles Peirce and addressed to Victoria Welby, where Peirce admits that his second wife Juliette instructed him in the ways of the hermetic cabala, and that the 1903 classification of ten signs is actually based on the *Sephir Yetzirah* and the tree of life. This apocryphal theoretic transposition could then become the basis of a new semiotic Tarot deck. Fortunately or unfortunately, this sort of research is not likely to gain traction in the academy, and would probably have to be pursued outside of the university. For this reason, if the work of Deleuze and Guattari is to be incorporated to the picture of detotalization, it is advisable to take the other approach, of integrating results from cognitive and life science, through the language of the Peirce-Hjelmslev hybrid, to the project of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

The most pressing work will be to continue to engage the products of Peircean cognitive and biosemiotics, and to challenge their disavowal of structural semiology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and the other classic coordinates of detotalization. Deacon and Stjernfelt for example will no doubt soon release new books. These books may be read through the critical lens of the black pyramid schema and the dici-sinthome, in order to emphasize the element of retroactivity there, and where it is wanting, to introduce it directly, to endanger the text through unexpected rearrangements, and to continue to point out how, no matter how secure the descriptive language may appear to be, the referent is only apprehended by means of inconsistencies and incompatibilities within the text.

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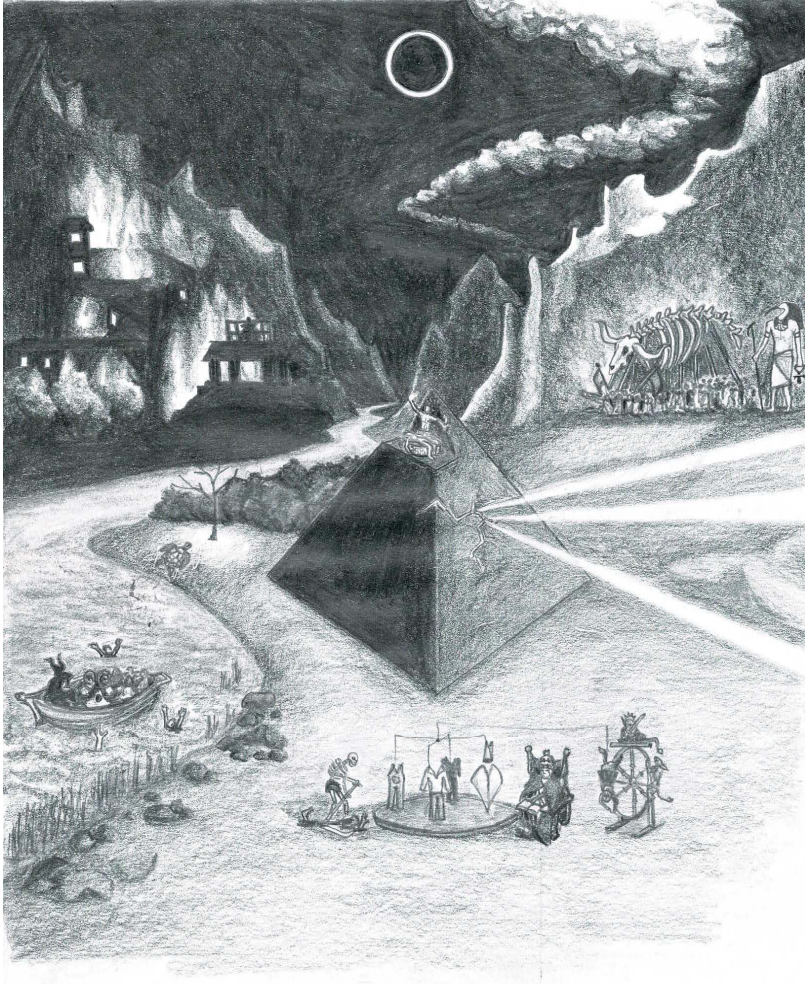
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APPENDIX

Retroactivity 1: Bolaño's Bachelor Machines, circa 2666 C.E.



Bolaño's Bachelor Machines, circa 2666 C.E.
(2020, pencil on paper, Jorge Luis Flores Hernández)

Retroactivity 2: Dream Combinatorics

By the time I am ready to leave the compound my money has totally run out, but a man invites me into the back room for a complimentary I Ching reading before I go. He has a handmade badge indicating his status as an authentic I Ching reader. After the consultation, he gives me an orange-red translucent marble as a parting gift and wishes me safe travels. Now it's just my father and I, riding motorcycles between northern California and Oregon on the road to Seattle. He's lost an arm at some point, but he keeps the severed limb hanging from his rear-view mirror. After some distance, we pull off the highway into an industrial city and enter a multi-story parking garage. There, we witness a shoot-out between a colorfully dressed all-female biker gang and the local law enforcement, in which the police are at a clear disadvantage. One of the bikers curses violently and spits on the ground when she hears more sirens approaching. My father is excited by this. One scene later, we walk together with the biker gang across some vacant lots. Once we've crossed the border into Washington State, I stop in the city of Olympia. I need to complete some final credits at The Evergreen State College, before I can finish my PhD. My former teacher M.B. has started some new interdisciplinary courses in semiotics here. I enroll right away. The courses involve different modes of transportation. In the first course, I live in a cramped train car with only a small air hole, where it is difficult to breathe. I can't see much through the hole, but I observe that the train is only doing circles. I lose consciousness at times while trying to get a better view, forgetting how long I have been on this cattle car. All the other passengers are covered in lead blankets, like the ones the dentist puts on you before the X-Ray scan. We try to roast a trout over an open fire inside the train car, but this proves to be both difficult and unwise. It is a train for prisoners – this train is only the introduction to Foucault's The Order of Things, I realize, not the whole book. I decide to tell the conductor we are going in circles, but before I can reach him I see another train, which is the whole rest of The Order of Things, rushing down the same tracks toward us. I jump out and push the train car off the tracks onto its side. The other passengers barely escape the car, before the other train demolishes this one completely. The only real loss is the trout, I reflect. The whole thing has a very Italo Calvino feel about it. It was a difficult course. The next course takes place on a sailboat. The secret unpublished last manuscript of Jacques Lacan can only be read on this white sailboat and I am at sea, trying to read it. It reads differently at bow and stern, because it has to be read through these differently shaped distortional glass bowls embedded in the hull, and the sun is so bright out here at sea and magnified in the glare of the bowls that it is painful to look at. Lacan himself is with me on the boat, along with his beautiful wife. He watches disapprovingly as I try to decipher his manuscript. Lacan's wife is so tall, she's wearing a white bikini, and she reads pieces of the manuscript nonchalantly in the sun, working on her tan. Out of nowhere, Lacan douses the manuscript, as well as his wife, with a beaker of molecular acid. I have only the time before the manuscript dissolves to uncover its hidden meanings. He douses himself in the acid as well. The acid is eating through the hull of the boat. Famously, this is how Lacan died. He's pretty calm, but his wife apparently did not expect this when she agreed to come on the boating trip. She shrieks and writhes in rage and agony as the acid burns through her and she dies. I am not sure that I passed this course. After class, we stop off at the university cafe for ice creams. The automated ice cream dispenser has a video display with cute dancing Japanese anime figures and Chinese ideograms. I study the display, but a girl behind me in line scolds me for taking too long. She knows I don't belong, asks what am I doing here. I tell her I study semiotics. She knows semiotics, and she laments that no one here reads the most important semiotician. And who is that? I ask.

“JU LI A KRI STE VA, you idiot.” She enunciates every syllable sarcastically. It was still sunny when we got here, but dark clouds now block out the sun, blown by the warm winds of a tropical storm. I open a newspaper on the table. Its moving diagrams show the path of the storm and the general weather pattern, in color-coded circles. It says the storm is being caused by some celestial body passing close to the earth, magnetic disturbances, or solar flares. After all of my courses are complete, I have a student progress review meeting with M.B. She invites me to the most splendid hidden off-campus bistro. Between dishes she tells me she likes the direction I am taking, but I may have to pursue my work independently for some time after graduation. “And you’re not much of a writer,” she says as she shrugs and finishes her glass of pink wine, “but that’s not the most important thing.” The storm has fully moved in, but before leaving Olympia I must visit my ex-girlfriend M.S. and her friend C.M. It’s raining heavily now that night has fallen and we wait together outdoors in a cue to see a long-awaited performance by our favorite rock band. I go on an impassioned monologue to M.S. I expound, the highest secret of occult initiation is that there is nothing evil about it at all. The oath of secrecy is a promise to never deny accusations of wrongdoing. This is why everyone believes Crowley really was evil. So why would anybody swear an oath when they can just figure this out by themselves? I turn back to M.S. and see that her long black locks of hair are moving and curling upwards like the snakes of the medusa. Her eyes are blacker than usual. Behind her, bits of trash swirl slowly and float in midair. Lightning cracks on the horizon. I think I may have crossed the line with her this time. I must get back on the road to Seattle, however C.M. insists on taking me to a rural state fair before I go. He has something to show me that may be crucial to completing my dissertation. By all appearances, the fair is a low-class event. A beer-drinking, gun show kind of event. There are many booths with all sorts of attractions, but C.M. has a specific booth to which he takes me. The vendor offers Tarot card readings. Everything is traditional and old-fashioned, except that there is a holographic display that magnifies and projects what is happening in a small shallow pool of water controlled by the Tarot reader. Inside the pool is a series of interconnected sememe tree diagrams, like from Eco’s A Theory of Semiotics. The man in charge of the booth is covered in low-quality tattoos. He does not want to give me a reading, but after some quiet words with C.M. he consents. He creates the flow of the circles by dripping thick red and black liquids into the shallow pool. The points of intersection of the expanding circles are the places where one card in the Tarot reading is supposed to link up to the next. The circles are like Rorschach ink blots in water. As they expand, the querent may choose to allow the reading to proceed to the next card, or break it off at the current position. I have never seen a method of divination like this. As C.M. chats with a friend on the side, they talk together casually, but I see his hands are shaking as he takes another drink of his beer. The rain only gets worse. It’s really time for me to leave, but C.M. insists that we visit one more place. It’s the hidden western estate of the Charles Peirce Society. The women working behind the counter are dressed up in old-timey costumes, big ruffles in their hooped dresses and large feathers, and they squabble together about something. I think it might be a performance, because they watch me from the corners of their eyes as I inspect an ivory medallion in the case beneath the glass. The medallion depicts two creatures in combat, in the open square of an ancient city. One appears like the Predator from the famous movie, with mandibles and fangs, and wearing the uniform of a cosmonaut. The other is an octopus, but it stands on its tentacles upright. On the back of the medallion the same scene is depicted in three different iterations. I want to make a necklace out of the medallion; I fear that wearing the necklace will invite the Predator god into my mind... “It’s not for sale,” the woman behind the counter brusquely informs, when she sees me coveting the medallion. Next to the medallion are

some Tarot packs. One of the packs only consists of two cards, which are the base sequence of a larger new Tarot that has not yet been constructed. One of its cards depicts a female humanoid creature with a frog's head. The two women at the counter now have stopped talking and are watching me intently. "You have met the frog woman before," one of them says ambiguously. They remind me that none of these decks are complete. I explain that I am interested in creating a new deck that would map the sixty-six types of signs to the seventy-eight cards, using the Sephir Yetzirah of the cabala as the basis for a "Peircean semiotic Tarot" – as I pronounce these last words one of the women finishes my sentence in unison with me. Apparently she had the same idea. Okay, now it's really time for me to get back on the road. At this stage, the arms of the spinning super storm stretch across the entire continent. As I ride over the bridges of Seattle traffic begins to stack up. Everything comes to a standstill and I see the police have erected a barrier and are questioning travelers entering the city. The bridge sways back and forth in the wind. Frustrated people start getting out of their cars. I leave my bike and find some stairs leading off the bridge, just as it starts to collapse in the distance and cars plummet into the water. I escape into the sprawling homeless encampments beneath the bridge. At the immigration and homeless population processing center, a young entrepreneur explains that he has developed an innovative new solution to the population crisis. He has a machine that will sterilize you in exchange for guaranteed shelter and employment, all for a reasonable price, just step inside. Two young people ahead of me accept without scruple. I reject his offer, but I'm funneled into the machine nevertheless. First it scrubs my asshole and balls. Then it declines my credit card. The entrepreneur assures me that an equitable payment plan can be arranged. Instead of accepting this accommodation, I opt to continue on to my old home neighborhood. Of course, we sold our old house here years ago and my father is long dead, but some of our belongings are still here in boxes. The living room has a higher ceiling than before. The old wood stove is larger than it was, and now has a huge flat mantle made of uneven lava rock. The coals emit a powerful heat which is difficult to approach, warming the brass implements. The stove, the objects on the mantle, the hardwood furniture, the old maps in the drawer of the end table, all have a dignified aura from before the decline of the family. One item which I recover after long searching is an oval brass plate that looks like a photo frame, except in the frame there is no picture, just a glowing red-orange space that is so hot and bright that it burns even to look at. I look anyway. My sister joins me here, we sit around the fire in the back yard while some science fiction show plays in the background, and we reminisce about this old show we used to watch together as children, and about our travels. As we talk, it is not clear who is doing the speaking and who is listening. "I am so glad they decided to make new seasons of this show." One of us steps away from the fire. A space shuttle circles overhead and lands in the driveway. Many of our old friends step out of the shuttle and gather with us around the fire. Our father greets us at the door and says something trivial and kind. We have difficulty relating all the details of our trip. "I arrived at Helsinki and transferred from there to one of the distant arms of the delta quadrant. What was the name of that sector? Anyhow, I've been on a lot of trips, but nothing quite like that. For a while I thought I might never make it back..." My sister and I alternate positions rapidly, in flashing oscillations close and away from the fire. "You were out there for a long time. What do you remember? Did you see anything? What did you see?" A long pause, then one of us answers, "There were many underground rooms stocked with emergency supplies, and huge silos filled with grain." It has stopped raining. The clouds have broken. We stare up at the crisp stars, searching for something more concrete. "That's it. That's all I remember."

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Detotaliseerimine ja tagasiulatuv jõud: musta püramiidi semiootika

Dissertatsiooni lähtepunktiks on detotalisatsioon, mis märgistab autori vaatepunkti teoreetilise mõtlemise väljal, nagu see on määratletud Daniele Monticelli doktoritöös *Terviklikkus ja selle jäägid: totaliseerimise ja detotaliseerimise teoreetilised protseduurid semiootikas, filosoofias ja poliitikas* (2008: 18). Vaatluse all on semiootika teoreetilised koordinaadid: tavapärase struktuuralse semiooloogia kõrval veel dekonstruktsioon, ideoloogia kriitika ja psühhoanalüüs. Pelgalt nende koordinaatide veelkordse rõhutamise taga on antud töö eesmärgiks vastata Monticelli soovitusel haarata detotalisatsiooni protseduuri Charles Peirce'i semiootika. Seda eesmärki järgides annab käesolev töö esimeses neljas peatükis värske ülevaate ülalnimetatud neljast valdkonnast, seejärel jätkates Peirce'i (de)totaliseerimise protseduuriga ja sobitades tänapäeva semiootika parimad saavutused detotaliseerimise eesmärkidega. Oluliseks vahendiks on siin autori poolt välja töötatud nn "musta püramiidi" skeem-mudel, mis lähtub Saussure'i märgikontseptsiooni edasiarendusest Louis Hjelmslev'1, pidades silmas selle jaotust väljendus- ja sisuplaaniks ning edasi vormiks ja substantiks (*Eelmärkmed keeleteooriale*, 1953). Siit tuleneb ka oluline erinevus autori ja Monticelli lähene-mise vahel. Monticelli dissertatsiooni üks kitsam uurimisküsimus on: kuidas saab Saussure'i puhtdiferentsiaalne, erinevustel põhinev süsteem (internaalne) suhes-tuda välisega (eksternaalsega)? Siit edasi jõutakse semiootika kriitikani selle subjektiivse relativismi tõttu ja Monticelli väiteni, et Hjelmslev' stratifikatsioon ainult süvendab seda probleemi, muutes olukorra semiootika jaoks halvemaks. Antud töös kasutatakse Hjelmslev' stratifikatsiooni, arendades retroaktiivsuse mõistet, mis võimaldab võtta arvesse välist mõju, kahjustamata seejuures kirjel-dava süsteemi teoreetilist terviklikkust. Kõiki nelja semiootika osavalda vaadel-dakse taolise retroaktiivsuse toimimises.

Inim- ja sotsiaalteaduste lõhestumine või fraktsioneerumine on aidanud kaasa nende ebakindlale seisundile akadeemilises maailmas. Poststrukturealism klassi-kaline kolmik – marksism, feminism ja postkolonialism – dikteerib, et tööjõu huvid ja probleemid ei ole samaväärsed soo ja rassi omadega ning seetõttu ei ole esimese puhul kasutatavad meetodid teise ja kolmanda puhul asjakohased. Lisa-gem sellele kõrgema järgu probleemi – nende teaduste eraldatus täppisteadustest. Katsed selgitada sotsiaalseid probleeme bioloogilise ja füüsilise reaalsuse abil on andnud traagilisi tulemusi. Samas, jälgides kogu seda keha ja vaimu dualismi ületamise diskursust, peab olema mingi mõistlik viis käsitlemaks nende ühisosa. Semiootika oli algselt mõeldud pakkumaks sellele probleemile lahendust ja retro-aktiivsuse mõiste abil on võimalik rüütada see lahendus ka sobivasse termino-loogiasse. Just retroaktiivsus on printsiip, mis ühendab mittereduktiivselt eri-nevaid *sinthome*'i (Lacani mõiste, mida arendatakse teises peatükis) teoreetilisi koordinaate.

Esimene peatükk algab laialtlevinud väärarusaama kummutamisega nii semio-loogia kui ka semiootika osas: semiooloogia ei huvitu ainult tekstidest ja keelest

ning semiootika ei ole eelkõige pühendunud liikidevahelise ja multimodaalse kommunikatsiooni uurimisele. Algselt eeldati, et semioloogia aktsepteerib tähendust kui keeleprobleemi, et ei ole midagi väljaspool teksti, sest iga uuring ja sellele järgnev kommentaar on jälle tekst. Märgi tähendust ei määratlenud mitte seos referendiga, vaid võrdlus teiste samale referendile osutavate märkidega. Hiljem langes semioloogia põlu alla, keelelise pöörde vahetas välja kehastumise (*embodiment*) pöörde. Tähenduse probleeme ei seostatud enam verbaalse keelega ja keelepõhiseid deskriptiivseid süsteeme hakati süüdistama logotsentrismis. Semiootika püüdis vältida logotsentrismi stigmat, kuid see oli viga, sest logotsentrismi mõisteti valesti – justkui oleks tähendus alati verbaalse keele funktsioon. Samas on logotsentrism pigem usk, et tähistatul on loomulik side referendiga ja et kuigi erinevates keeltes kasutatakse erinevaid tähistajaid, on nende tähistatavad siiski samad kõigis kultuurides. Semioloogias ei ole (vastupidiselt levinud arusaamale) idee, et verbaalne keel on ainuke tähistaja ja tähistatava ühendaja, sugugi ainuvaldav. Põhimõtteliselt võivad tähistaja ja tähistatav suhestuda ükskõik mis-suguses modaalsuses ja erinevate vahendite abil. Semioloogia tegelik ülesanne on kategoriseerida ja korrastada tähistatavaid sõltumata olemasolevatest sümbolsüsteemidest ning semioloogia vaid tõstab esile verbaalset keelesüsteemi, kuna see on nii enesestmõistetav. Logotsentrism on probleem igasuguse modaalsuse jaoks, kuid raske on ette kujutada logotsentrismi kriitikat, mis ei kasuta esmajoones verbaalset keelt. Selles peatükis selgitatakse ka “musta püramiidi” keskset skeemi, mis lähtub Hjelmslev’ stratifikatsioonist, koos Derrida, Lacani ja Barthes’i hilisemate täienduste ja laiendustega. Nagu jooniselt näha, ei ole siin väline sarnasus püramiidiga esmatähtis, tegemist on metafoorilise kujundiga. Püramiidi keskmes asuvat ruutu tuleks vaadelda kui püramiidi alust, kolmnurgad, mis alusest tõukuvad referendi ja tõlgendi poole, on selle küljed. Kui alus viitab strukturaallingvistilisele lähenemisele, siis kolmurgad omakorda viitavad Peirce’i triaadilisusele. Püramiidi kujund on valitud ka silmas pidades selle üldisemat sümboolset tähendust: see on kui iidse tsivilisatsiooni poolt saadetud märguanne oma laialdastest teadmistest astronoomia vallas ja mida see meile ütleb aja lineaarsuse mõiste ja progressi idee kohta. Sellesse mõtteseosesse lülitub ka Derrida ja Lacani käsitlus egiptuse hieroglüüfist kui universaalsest ja samas mitte-algebralise keelest. Aga miks on püramiid must? Eelkõige selleks, et rõhutada mitteteadvuse rolli retroaktiivsuse protseduurides. Kuid see ei ole kogu vastus. Need ja teised seosed tõstatuvad käesoleva väitekirja erinevates kohtades ikka ja jälle.

Teine peatükk käsitleb enamjaolt retroaktiivsuse esimest vormi – ideoloogilis-konnotatiivset süsteemi. Ideoloogiasemiootikast on kirjutatud hulganisti uurimusi, siin käsitletakse nende autoritest olulisemaid: Lukács, Adorno, Eagleton, Jameson, Žižek ja Eco. Ideoloogiasemiootika on valdkond, kus relativismi probleem tõuseb esile kõige teravamalt. Ideoloogia kriitika elas 1980ndate lõpus üle mõõna-perioodi ja näiteks Eagleton süüdistas selles semiootikateooria mõju. See, mil moel semiootika problematiseerib referenti ja välist kutsub esile relativismi ja subjektiivsuse, mis õhnestab klassivõitluseks vajalikku solidaarsust. Marksistlikus kirjanduskriitikas väljendub see vaidluses realismi ja ekspressionismi vahel ja tõstatab

küsimuse, milline kirjandus on kõige tõhusam agiteerimaks klassiteadvust. Lukács pooldab sotsialistlikku realismi, Adorno ja teised varase Frankfurdi koolkonna esindajad toetavad aga algselt ekspressionismiks nimetatud, kuid nende jaoks eelkõige modernistlikku kirjandust. Jameson ja Žižek kasutavad Marxi suuresti detotaliseeriva lähenemise vaimus. Eco arusaamad koodivahetusest on kasulikud selgepiirilise semiootilise sõnavara väljatöötamisel mitteidentse kriitika jaoks ja Adorno on standardiks marksistliku kirjanduskriitika puhul. Näide sellest, kuidas tema kirjutusviis teeb võimalikuks uute tõlgendite genereerimise mitte-identsele objektile, antakse selle peatüki lõpus.

Kolmas peatükk võtab vaatluse alla retroaktiivsuse teise vormi – esteetilis-metakeelelise sekundaarse süsteemi. Erinevalt teistest peatükkidest keskendutakse siin ainult ühele autorile, kelleks on Umberto Eco. Eco saab erikohtlemise osaliseks, kuna ta on ainuke, kes vaatleb võrdses mahus nii struktuurilist semiooloogiat kui ka Peirce'i semiootikat ning püüab luua teatud Peirce'i ja Hjelmslev' hübriidi. Samuti on Eco ainuke, kellel on ühtaegu soliidne panus nii semiootika-teooria kui ka kirjanduse vallas. See on oluline, sest siin on tegemist kahe teineteisest sõltuva retroaktiivsuse vormiga. Semiootika keerukaimat teooriat saab juurutada vaid romaani esteetiliste fabuleeringute kaudu ja esteetika kõrgeim saavutus võib aset leida teoreetilise ja filosoofilise teose raames, nagu selleks on *Semiootika teooria* (Eco 1979[1967]). Siin võtab esteetilis-metakeeleline retroaktiivsus ülitiheda metateooria vormi. Selles raamatus viib Eco sisse veel ühe elementaarse eristuse – märgifunktsiooni ja märgiproduktiooni vahel. Vahetege mine selle vahel, mis on signifikatsiooni diferentsiaalne semiootika ja mis on empiirilisel orienteeritud kommunikatsiooni semiootika, jääb loogilise argumentatsiooni varju, kuid antud opositsioonis endas on käsitlematu ebakõla: ei ole olemas signifikatsiooni kommunikatsioonita ja vastupidi. Rõhutatakse Eco teksti hermeetilisi ja dekonstruktiivseid aspekte, et juhtida tähelepanu retroaktiivsuse ülimuslikkusele semiootilises mõtlemises. Tema teise romaani *Foucault pendel* (Eco 2001[1986]) omakasupüüdlik eksegees algatab diskussiooni retroaktiivsusest kui okultsest praktikast ehk juhuslikustamise rollist psühhoanalüüsis, mida jätkatakse järgmises peatükis.

Signomantia (*signomancy*) on neologism, mis on loodud märgistamiseks retroaktiivsuse põhivormi erinevates ettekuulutuse vormides. Neljandas peatükis kasutatakse Freudi, Lacani, Jungi ja Kristeva psühhoanalüüsi arendamiseks “musta püramiidi” põhist lähenemist unenägude seletamisele, tuleviku ennustamisele Tarot' kaartide ja I Chingi abil. Seda tuleb mõista kui “ennustamist ratsionaalses skepsises”, sest “musta püramiidi” vaatepunktist ei ole Tarot' kaartides mingit universaalset sisu ja kaartide segamise protseduur ei vii kontaktini mingi üleloomuliku jõuga. Mõistmaks retroaktiivsuse radikaalselt mitteidentset produkti on sobilikud vaid kõige ekstreemsemad näited. Pelgalt kirjanduslikud troobid siin ei aita ja just seetõttu on arendatud signomantia mõistet, et aru saada, kuidas igas signifikatsiooniaktis on kohal juhuslikkuse element. Selgitatakse ka psühhoanalüüsi puuduvat põhilist vääritimõistmist: mitteteadvus ei ole mitte ihad ja instinktid, vaid ainult katkestus sümbolilisuse tasandil. Ainult tänu sellele arusaamale on psühhoanalüüsil võimalik asetuda oma õigele kohale *sinthome*'is.

Viienda peatüki esmaeesmärk on astuda vastu arusaamadele Peirce'ist kui naiivsest realistist, vastandades sellele tõdemuse Peirce'i kohta, mis sisaldab retroaktiivsuse põhimõtet. Sellel eksegeesil on kolm ülesannet: esiteks, anda ülevaade nn taksonoomilisest lähenemisest märkidele ja arutleda selle nõrkuste üle; teiseks, kohandada Peirce'ist inspireeritud märgiliike ideoloogia kriitika vajadustele ja, kolmandaks, näidata, et taolise kriitika meetod on lahutamatu seotud esteetikaga, pöördudes tagasi teise põlvkonna semioloogia retroaktiivsete tekstistrateegiate juurde. Olles varustatud Peirce'i objekti detotaliseeritud mõistega, antakse siin lühiülevaade mõnede biosemiootika valdkonna teadlaste töödest, kes on püüdnud omal moel realiseerida Peirce'i semiootika detotaliseerivat potentsiaali.

Monticelli dissertatsiooni põhiküsimus on tõsiseltvõetav: kuidas saab semiootika tegeleda välisega, kahjustamata enda teoreetilist terviklikkust? Kuidas saab semiootika end kaitsta süüdistuste eest relativismis, kui väljaspool teksti midagi ei ole? Heauskne vastus sellele küsimusele võib tõesti kooruda ainult Charles Peirce'i semiootikast ning sellele järgnevast kognitiivsest ja bioloogilisest semiootikast. Viienda peatüki teine osa integreeribki kognitiivsemiootika ja biosemiootika semiootika-kui-detotaliseerimise pildile. Nii näitab Terrence Deacon, et artikulaatorne maatriks on bioloogiline reaalsus, aga ka seda, mil moel retroaktiivsus, mis on tavapäraselt kasutusel ainult kunstist ja kirjandusest rääkimisel, võib kinnitust saada ka bioloogias ja füüsikas. Oma raamatus *Ebatäielik loodus* (Deacon 2012a) selgitab ta, kuidas vaimu tekkimist materias võib seletada mitte-reduktiivselt, kui meediumi piirangute (*medium constraints*) säilitamist ja edastamist iseorganiseeruvate süsteemide tootmisel. See on retroaktiivsuse embrüonaalne vorm. Deaconi emergentse dünaamika ideed vastustab teine peirceanliku kognitiivsemiootika ja biosemiootika liider Frederik Stjernfelt. Stjernfelt väidab, et Deacon kasutab Peirce'i mõistestikku liiglightsustavalt. Selle vaidluse jälgimise käigus kerkivad taas esile dissertatsioonis eelnevalt juba käsitletud teemad. Nii näiteks kordab Stjernfelt paljuski Eco mõtteid Peirce'i kohta ja jätab kõrvale teise põlvkonna semioloogide pakutud lahenduse välise, ekster-naalse, arvestamise võimalustest. Kui aga Stjernfelti lugeda rööpselt detotalisatsiooni protseduuriga, siis võib tema õpetus Peirce'i *dicisign*'ist leida endale koha koos *sinthome*'iga (Deaconi emergentse dünaamika kõrval), pakkudes kokkuvõttes mittereduktiivse ja empiirilise vastuse relativismi probleemile semiootikas, kompromiteerimata seejuures selle teoreetilist terviklikkust.

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