

# H A N D B O O K O F S E M I O T I C S



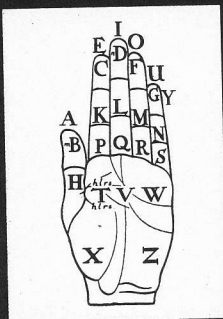
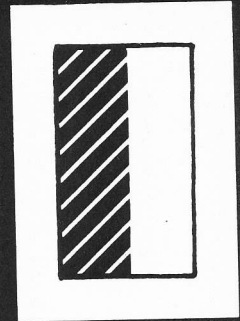
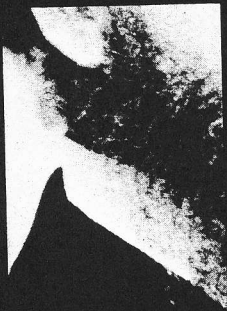
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Hat's coba ss sa ril  
Our Father who art in E

1. (Hat) This Diphthong  
lural amongst the Pronoun  
oth denote that Pronoun to

2. (Coba) Co doth den  
he Letter (b) signifying the  
Relation of Consanguinit  
which is *Direct ascending* 3 na

3. (ss) This Diphthong



# W I N F R I E D N Ö T H

In this handbook, the concept of sign is generally used in its broadest sense of a natural or conventional semiotic entity consisting of a *sign vehicle* connected with *meaning*. Many narrower definitions of the term *sign* have been given during the history of semiotics (cf. Typology 1.) The most important models of the sign are discussed in the chapters on the classics of semiotics (Peirce, Saussure, Morris, and Hjelmslev). In this chapter, a synopsis of these and other sign models will be given based on the standard distinction between dyadic and triadic sign models. A few theoretical and terminological preliminaries deal with various distinctions between signs in the context of related semiotic and nonsemiotic phenomena. Two dimensions of the sign, namely, *sense* and *reference*, are discussed in the chapter on meaning. For further aspects, see Typology and Arbitrariness.

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## 1. Preliminary Distinctions and Theoretical Foundations

The definition of the sign begins with problems of terminology and the ontological question of the nature of the sign and its signifier as opposed to the nonsemiotic world. These are terminological and theoretical preliminaries to a typology of sign models.

### 1.1 Terminological Preliminaries

There is a considerable terminological vagueness in the distinction between the sign, its signifier, and its minimal elements.

#### 1.1.1 THE SIGN IS NOT THE SIGN VEHICLE

The sign is more than its constituent sign vehicle (cf. Peirce's *representamen*, Saussure's *signifier*), but this distinction is often neglected. In everyday language, there are no words to distinguish between sign vehicle and the sign. The word *sign* is ambiguous. It has either the broader sense of a semiotic entity which unites a sign vehicle with a meaning, or it has the narrower sense of a sign vehicle only. Both senses are probably implied when we talk about "traffic signs." (The German language has two words to distinguish between the sign vehicle [*Verkehrsschild*] and the sign [*Verkehrszeichen*].) The narrower definition referring only to the sign vehicle is given in *Webster's Third International Dictionary*: "Sign is a very general term for any indication to be perceived by the senses or reason."

In semiotics, the distinction between sign vehicle and sign was introduced in various terminological versions (see the synopses in figs. Si 1 and 3). But because of the ordinary language usage, this distinction has never been strictly observed. Even Saussure and Peirce did not consistently distinguish between signifier and sign or representamen and sign.

### 1.1.2 THE SIGN IS NOT A PHYSICAL SIGNAL

In information theory, the term *signal* corresponds to the *sign vehicle* of semiotics (cf. Communication 3.1.2). This signal or information vehicle (cf. Nauta 1972: 282, 294) is opposed to the sign since it is only its physical embodiment. According to Klaus's *Dictionary of Cybernetics*, "signals are only *potential* sign vehicles. Insofar as they fulfil the function of signs, this transcends their physical properties. Only those signals are signs which transmit a message" (1969: 569, 721). In linguistics, Hockett adopted the term *speech signal* to characterize the linguistic signifier in its physical form (1958: 115). Roy Harris, in his translation of Saussure (1916e), translates *signifiant* as *signal*. For other definitions of the signal, see Typology of Signs (4).

### 1.1.3 THE SIGN IS NOT A SIGN ELEMENT

In sign systems with a second level of articulation (see Language 4.1), the elements of (the minimal) signs are not signs themselves. Phonemes, for example, are not signs since they mean nothing. Terminologically, this difference is neglected in definitions which extend the term *sign* to include nonsignifying sign elements. Resnikow, for example, states: "A material object which has no sign function of its own, being only one of the elements in the process of designation, is usually also called sign. In this sense, the term 'sign' is also used with respect to phonemes or letters" (1964: 14).

This use of *sign* as a term for *sign element* has even been adopted in the German industrial norm DIN 44 300, which gives terminological recommendations in the field of information technology. It defines *sign* only as the minimal element of a sign repertoire, such as letters, ciphers, etc., and introduces the term *symbol* for the meaningful units of the message (which are signs in the terminology adopted here). For other terminological distinctions between sign and symbol, see also Typology of Signs (3.1).

## 1.2 Ontology of the Sign

What is the mode of existence of the sign and its signifier? Do they have a real existence in

the form of a physical object or event, or do they exist only as the perceptum in an act of semiosis? While this paragraph focuses on the ontology of the signifier, the question of the ontology of sense and reference will be resumed in the excursus on realism, conceptualism, and nominalism in semiotics.

### 1.2.1 THE NATURE OF THE SIGN VEHICLE

The signifier of the sign has been characterized as a concrete object, an abstract entity, or both (cf. Pelc 1981a: 2–3). Morris defined the sign vehicle as "a particular physical event or object" (1946: 96, 367). Saussure had the mentalist concept of the signifier as a "psychological imprint." Hjelmslev differentiated with respect to the sign vehicle further between a physical and physiological *expression-substance*, whose study should be the subject of physics and psychology, and an *expression-form*, which is the conceptional structure of the signifier.

In Peirce's semiotics, the sign vehicle or representamen is either a concrete object, a perceptum, or an idea or "thought." In one of his definitions, where he neglected the terminological distinction between sign and representamen, Peirce defined the sign vehicle as "an Object perceptible, or only imaginable, or even unimaginable in one sense—for the word '*fast*,' which is a Sign, is not imaginable, since it is not *this word itself* that can be set down on paper or pronounced, but only *an instance* of it" (§ 2.230; cf. 1.2.3).

### 1.2.2 THE SIGN IS NOT A CLASS OF SEMIOTIC OBJECTS

In everyday language, there is a tendency to identify signs (as opposed to nonsigns) with a class of prototypical signs. These are never employed except as signs and belong to the sign repertoire of a code (cf. the technological definition discussed in 1.1.3). Words, characters, or conventional gestures are such prototypical signs which can be listed as the sign repertoire or lexicon of a code. Against this view, Morris objected that "semiotic is not concerned with the study of a particular kind of object, but with ordinary objects in so far

(and only in so far) as they participate in semiosis" (1938: 4). Every object, event, or behavior is thus a potential sign. Even silence can have the semiotic function of a *zero sign* (cf. Sebeok 1976: 118, Chronemics 4.2.1). Everything can thus be perceived as a natural sign of something else, and by prior agreement between a sender and a receiver, every object can also serve as a conventional sign. This does not mean that every phenomenon of the world is semiotic. It only means that under conditions of semiosis every object can become a sign to a given interpreter.

### 1.2.3 ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL SIGNS, TOKEN, AND TYPE

If, as Morris argued, "something is a sign only because it is interpreted as a sign of something by some interpreter" (1938: 4), it must be concluded that signs cease to exist as signs when no interpreter perceives them. Does this mean that words in a lexicon or the characters of an extinct language are usually nonsigns? Two semiotic concepts have been developed to avoid a simple negative answer to this question, *type* and *potential sign*.

Kamlah & Lorenzen distinguish between *actual* and *potential* signs (1967: 58). Words in a lexicon which are actually not read can thus be described as potential signs. In the world of natural semiosis, the number of potential signs is unlimited (cf. 1.2.1). When signs belong to a code, there are as many potential signs as there are elements in the sign repertoire of the code. Peirce introduced the distinction between *token* and *type*. A sign in its singular occurrence is a token, whereas the sign as a general law or rule underlying its use is a type. An example is the word *fast* in the passage from Peirce quoted above (1.2.1). As a word of the English language it is a type. Every written or spoken instance of it is a token. The linguistic dimensions corresponding to the token-type dichotomy are text and system. In terms of these semiotic categories, signs do not exist only as tokens in actual processes of semiosis. They also exist as types, as the user's semiotic potential of lawful sign use.

## 1.3 The Sign and the Nonsemiotic World

The nonsemiotic world is related to the sphere of semiotics in two ways. One has to do with the process of reference. The other has to do with the delimitation of signs from nonsigns. Before the definitions of the sign are discussed, an outline of the main views of semioticians on the nature of the nonsemiotic world will be given. There seem to be six main approaches to this problem, *transsemiotic agnosticism*, *pansemiotism*, *naive realism*, *pragmatic mediationalism*, *functionalism*, and *integrative holism*. Some of these approaches have parallels in the semiotic approaches to the problem of reference (see Meaning 2.).

### 1.3.1 TRANSEMIOTIC AGNOSTICISM AND PANSEMIOTISM

Orthodox structuralism defends a transsemiotic agnosticism. According to Saussure, the nonsemiotic world is "a vague, uncharted nebula." Since "nothing is distinct before the appearance of language" (Saussure 1916b: 111–12), nothing can be said about the nonsemiotic world. Pansemiotism seems to maintain the opposite view: the whole world is a semiotic sphere. Peirce is the crown witness of this approach: "The entire universe [ . . . ] is perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs" (§ 5.448, fn.). Under quite different premises, pansemiotism was also defended in medieval theology (q.v. 1.3; see also Eco 1973b: 111 for pansemiotic metaphysics). Variants of pansemiotism occur also in information theory (see Information 4.1.1: perception as information), communication theory (see Communication 2.6.2: the metacommunicative axiom), semiotic epistemology (cognition as semiosis; cf. Gutiérrez López 1975), endosemiotics (see Communication 2.2.2), and semiotic views of molecular biology (cf. Prodi 1988 and the discussion of the genetic code in Code 5.1).

The difference between pansemiotism and transsemiotic agnosticism is not as fundamental as it seems. Both refuse to assume a nonsemiotic sphere. An attempt to bridge the gap

between the two approaches is Greimas's theory of a natural semiotics (cf. Meaning 1.3, 2.3.2). In this theory, the nonsemiotic world becomes semiotized in a natural semiotics, and the relation between the semiotic and the nonsemiotic is reinterpreted in terms of intersemioticity.

### 1.3.2 NONSIGNS IN NAIVE REALISM

St. Augustine represents a naive realism (see below, 1.4) in his division of the world into things and signs (*res* and *signum*) (397: 624–25). In *De doctrina christiana* I. 2, he gave the following account of “What a Thing Is, and What a Sign: [ . . . ] I use the word ‘thing’ in a strict sense to signify that which is never employed as a sign of anything else: for example wood, stone, cattle or other things of that kind.” But Augustine also knew that signs are not a class of objects which is ontologically distinct from things (cf. 1.2.2): “Every sign is also a thing; for what is not a thing is nothing at all. Every thing, however, is not also a sign.” Although logically separate, the spheres of things and signs are not epistemologically unrelated, for according to Augustine, “things are learnt by means of signs.”

### 1.3.3 NONSIGNS IN MEDIATIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL THEORIES OF ACTION

Implicitly or explicitly, the theories of semiotic mediation (cf. Mertz & Parmentier, eds. 1985) characterize human interaction with the nonsemiotic world from the point of view of a general theory of perception or behavior. The key to the difference between signs and nonsigns is the dichotomy of mediated vs. nonmediated perception. Whitehead characterizes the world below the “semiotic threshold” as a sphere of perceptive immediacy: “The immediate world around us [is] a world decorated by sense-data dependent on the immediate states of relevant parts of our bodies. [ . . . ] ‘Sense-datum’ is a modern term: Hume uses the word ‘impression.’” In contrast to such “presentational immediacy,” “the human mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs,

emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience” (1928: 16, 9). When Morris defined semiosis as “a mediated-taking-account-of” (1938: 4), he also characterized nonsemiotic behavior as an unmediated interaction with objects of the world.

One of the most explicit theories of semiotic mediation has been proposed by Vygotsky (1930: 137–38; cf. Rissom 1979: 11). Vygotsky distinguishes two elementary forms of human behavior: *natural* and *artificial* or *instrumental* acts. In natural acts, there is a direct associative (conditioned reflex) connection between a stimulus A and a response B. In instrumental acts, “two new connections, A-X and B-X, are established with the help of the psychological tool X.” According to Vygotsky, such a tool X is a stimulus which functions “as a means of influencing the mind and behavior” (ibid.: 141). In other words, the mediating stimulus X is a sign, while direct acts are forms of nonsemiotic behavior.

In the framework of his functional structuralism, Mukařovský also draws a dividing line between signs and nonsigns by means of the criterion of immediacy of action (1942: 41–42; cf. Function 3.3). Nonsemiotic behavior, in his theory, is the immediate (practical or theoretical) interaction with reality, while a sign presupposes a mediated interaction, where the sign is the mediator between two realities.

### 1.3.4 THE PRESEMIOTIC SPHERES IN INTEGRATIVE HOLISM

Some philosophers and semioticians have proposed holistic world models in which the sphere of signs is assigned a place beside a nonsemiotic (or several such) world(s). Popper & Eccles's three worlds are a prominent example of such an approach (1977: 16ff.). World 1, the world of physical objects, is clearly the nonsemiotic sphere. Worlds 2 and 3 are spheres of increasing semioticity. World 2 is the world of subjective experience, and World 3 comprises the products of the human mind. In the framework of his *Evolutionary Cultural Semiotics*, Koch (1986a; b; c) develops a holis-

tic world model in which the dividing line between the semiotic and the nonsemiotic worlds is drawn according to evolutionary principles. Within the presemiotic sphere, the following five "worlds" are distinguished as evolutionary stages: (1) the cosmic, (2) the galactic, (3) the geological, (4) the biological, and (5) the sociological world (1986b: 12).

### 1.4 The Typology of Sign Models

Sign models can be classified according to several semiotic dimensions. Most of the criteria discussed in the context of the typology of theories of meaning are also valid with respect to the typology of sign models. This chapter will survey the major models of the sign on the basis of the distinction between dyadic and triadic models. Criteria of an alternative classification are discussed in the following paragraphs on realism, conceptualism, and nominalism in semiotics. These aspects of the typology of sign models are especially relevant to the history of semiotics. The framework provided by the philosophical distinction between realism and nominalism is coextensive neither with the dyadic-triadic dichotomy nor with the typology of theories of sense and reference outlined in the chapter on meaning (but see Meaning 3.1). For interpretations of sign models in terms of the nominalism-conceptualism-realism tradition, see Wozzley (1967), Kutschera (1971: 31–78, only on realism), Trabant (1976a: 23–27, only on nominalism and realism), Lyons (1977: 109–114), and Jadacki (1986).

#### 1.4.1 DYADIC, TRIADIC, AND OTHER MODELS OF THE RELATA

A standard typology of sign models distinguishes dyadic and triadic models on the basis of the number of relata characterizing the sign in its semantic dimension (cf. Meaning). Triadic models distinguish between sign vehicle, sense, and reference as three relata of the sign. Dyadic models ignore either the dimension of reference or that of sense. Dyadic models are sometimes developed into tetradic models by a further dyadic subdivision of the two into four

components (or planes) of the sign. Hjelmlev's sign model is an example of such an extension of a dyad to a tetrad. Auroux's suggestion that most other semiotic dyads are essentially based on a tetrad (1979: 24) is not very convincing.

The distinction between dyadic and triadic sign models has been interpreted as being both fundamental and unbridgeable, although there has not always been a clear-cut distinction between these two types of models in the history of semiotics (cf. 2.1.1). Followers of the dyadic tradition have elaborated on the aporias of a triadic theory of the sign (cf. Fischer-Lichte 1979: 38–51), while followers of the triadic tradition have criticized the inadequacy of the dyadic model (cf. Köller 1977: 25–33). It must be emphasized that the option for either one of the two models does not imply the neglect of the pragmatic dimension of semiosis (pace Schaff 1960: 205; cf. Meaning 4.). In any case the interpreter is an additional relatum of the sign (see also Lieb 1981a: 144).

Are there sign models proposing less or more than two or three relata of the sign? A monadic view of the sign which neglects to differentiate between sign vehicle and meaning occurs only outside of the theory of signs. It is characteristic of magic and unreflected modes of sign manipulation. General Semantics warns against this view of the sign with the slogan "The symbol is not the thing symbolized" (Hayakawa 1941: 27; cf. Semantics 1.5). A tetradic model of the linguistic sign has been proposed by Hockett (1977: 82), who argues that the triad of word-idea-thing should be extended by an additional conceptual unit of the "image of the word." (Notice that Saussure's signifier is also a mentalist "acoustic image.")

In linguistic lexicology, K. Heger's semiotic trapezium is a sign model with more than three relata. It extends the classical triad to a trapezium which specifies the following six relata of the linguistic sign (Baldinger 1970: 155–56): (1) *phonic substance*, (2) *moneme* (sum of sememes and phonemes), (3) *sense* or *signified* (sum of all meanings associated with one signifier), (4) *sememe* (one particular meaning), (5)

*concept* or *seme* (a language-independent, elementary meaning), and (6) *reality* (thing). Synoptic surveys of dyadic and triadic sign models from the history of semiotics are given by Eco (1973b: 30), Nattiez (1979: 391), and Faltin (1985: 30).

#### 1.4.2 REALIST MODELS OF THE SIGN

Semiotic realism in its most genuine form originates from the philosophy of Plato (cf. History 2.2.2). The correlates of the sign are assumed to be nonmental entities. The extreme realist believes that both sense and reference (cf. Meaning 2.–3.) exist in themselves and would exist even if there were no minds to be aware of them. In a mindless world, they would be available for discovery, even if there were nobody to discover them (cf. Woolzley 1967: 194–95). Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Bolzano, and Frege are counted among the realists in the history of semiotics. For Husserl's semantic realism, see Meaning (3.1).

#### 1.4.3 CONCEPTUALIST MODELS OF THE SIGN

In semiotic conceptualism, the semantic dimension of the sign is assumed to be mind-dependent. For the conceptualist, meanings exist in the mind in a subjective sense, such that if there were no minds, there could be no meanings (cf. Woolzley 1967: 195). Conceptualism raises the question of the referential correlate of the sign and its reality only insofar as this "reality" provides the sense data to the mind. The main representatives of conceptualism are the British empiricists Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. John Stuart Mill and Franz Brentano are modern (nineteenth-century) conceptualists in logical semantics. See also Meaning (3.2) for mentalism in modern semantics.

#### 1.4.4 NOMINALIST MODELS OF THE SIGN

Semiotic nominalism rejects the idea of a reality of general concepts or referents (cf. History 2.2.2). Nominalists acknowledge only the existence of singular objects and deny the reality of universals, i.e., the property predicated of all

the individuals of a certain class, such as "redness." In its extreme form, nominalism argues that objects having the same quality have nothing in common but their name (Lat. *nomen*, therefore: nominalism). William of Ockham, for example, taught that universals are only signs without an existence of their own, standing for individual objects or sets of objects (cf. Geyer, ed. 1951: 576 and Woolzley 1967: 203). These signs are thus only names without any correlate in reality.

According to Jadacki, "recent tendencies to 'semiotize' all areas [ . . . ] concerned with the formal or empirical aspects of meaning and reference, can be interpreted as expressing the fact that nominalism today is, more or less, the dominant school of thinking: everything conceptual only exists in the use of its sign" (1986: 1136). Modern semiotic nominalists, according to this interpretation, are thus the structuralists, and semioticians in the line from Saussure to Hjeltmslev, Greimas, and Eco. However, this modern semiotic nominalism tends to be still more nominalist than the traditional one which acknowledged at least the referential reality of individuals.

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## 2. Dyadic Models of the Sign

The most general dyadic characterization of the sign is given in the medieval formula *aliquid stat pro aliquo*, "something stands for something else." According to Eschbach (1980: 44), one of the first explicit quotations of this formula is in the writings of Albert the Great (thirteenth century), but the Scholastics usually used a different formulation, *supponit aliquid pro aliquo*, "something serves in place of something else" (cf. Kneale & Kneale 1962: 250). Definitions of the sign using the *aliquid pro aliquo* formula may be dyadic or triadic. If the *aliquo* is subdivided into sense and reference (see Meaning), the definition is extended from a dyadic to a triadic one.

## 2.1 Aliquid pro Aliquo

The representative function (*stare pro*) of the sign has been a criterion of the definition of the sign from Augustine to Jakobson. What is the nature of the relata and of the relation?

### 2.1.1 DYAD OR TRIAD IN THE HISTORY OF SEMIOTICS

One of the earliest explicitly dyadic models of the sign was proposed by the Epicureans (see History 2.1.4), who rejected the Stoic *lekton* as the third correlate of semiosis. The *aliquid pro aliquo* formula of medieval semiotics suggests a dyadic model with the two correlates of the sign vehicle (*aliquid*) and its referent (*aliquo*). However, a closer look at the definitions often reveals reference to a third correlate. In Augustine's definition (*De doctrina christiana* 2.1.1; cf. History 2.1.5), "a sign is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself" (397: 636). Markus (1957: 71–72) and Simone (1972: 16) have interpreted this definition of the sign as a triadic one, consisting of (1) the sign vehicle, (2) its referent, and (3) the mind to whom the sign stands for the object. However, the model is not triadic in the tradition of a systematic distinction between sense and reference (cf. Meaning), as it was postulated by the Stoics (see 3.2). The focus is on the sign vehicle and the referent. The interpreter is a necessary prerequisite of any sign model even though it may not always be mentioned explicitly. The decisive difference between triadic and dyadic models remains the distinction between sense and reference, which seems to be of no concern to Augustine.

The Scholastics developed the theory of *stare pro* further in their theories of representation (cf. Kaczmarek 1986) and supposition (see History 2.2.3). Ockham's definition of the sign is still very similar to Augustine's: "A sign is that which makes something else come to one's mind" ("ille, quod aliquid facit in cognitionem venire," quoted in Geyer, ed. 1951: 578). Almost the same definition is used by Peirce: "A sign is something that makes

something other than itself present to knowledge" (1632: 25).

The question whether this *aliquid-aliquo* dyad involves a semiotic dyad or a triad has been interpreted differently in the course of the history of medieval semiotics. Coseriu gives evidence for a triadic conception in early medieval semiotics consisting of the three terms *vox-conceptio-res*. He quotes Boethius (480–524) as follows: "The voice (*vox*) signifies the concepts (*conceptiones*) of soul and intellect, but the same intellect conceives of the things (*res*) and is signified by the voices" (1970: 153). (See also History 2.2.4.) In early Scholastic semiotics, this Stoic triad was broken up into two dyads. Thus, Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) distinguished two semantic relations, *significatio* and *appellatio* (Pinborg 1972: 43): *appellatio* is the relation between word and thing, while *significatio* is the relation between word and its conceptual content. In the later development of the semiotics of the Modistae, there was a shift from the triad to a word-thing dyad, although the mediating role of the intellect was still acknowledged (cf. Bursill-Hall 1971: 97, Ebbesen 1983: 73, Gabler 1987: 48).

### 2.1.2 ALIQUID PRO ALIQUO IN MODERN SEMIOTICS

With reference to H. Gomperz, Bühler resumes the *aliquid pro aliquo* formula as an element in his theory of representation (1933b: 93–96). He describes the *aliquid* (the sign vehicle) as a *concretum* which can stand for (function as a representative of) the *aliquo* only by a process of abstraction. Bühler calls this the principle of *abstractive relevance*. Jakobson follows this tradition when he states, "Each and every sign is a *referral* (*renvoi*)" (1975: 22). Even Peirce accepts the *aliquid pro aliquo* formula, although his general semiotic framework is triadic: "A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (§ 2.228).

### 2.1.3 THE RELATA

The *aliquid pro aliquo* formula is open to both dyadic and triadic interpretations. The following relata of the "*stat pro*"-relation are characteristic



of different types of sign models (cf. Meaning 2.–3. and Wiegand 1970: 249–51): (1) signifier-referent (the “nomen significat rem-” theory of Roman grammarians; cf. Padley 1976: 164), (2) (Saussure’s) signifier-signified (sense), (3) the unity of signifier plus signified-referent, (4) a triad as a coupling of two dyads (cf. 2.1.1 and Locke in 2.3), and (5) the (triadic; see 3.) signifier-signified-referent model.

## 2.2 The Relation of “Standing for”

Peirce’s specification that the “standing for” must be “for something in some respect” has the advantage of precluding a common misinterpretation. It says clearly that the relation of “standing for” is not one of substitution (cf. Wells 1977: 6, pace Morris 1946: 84). The more precise nature of the “standing for” relation depends, of course, on the nature of the relata. The class of natural signs, where the interpreter relates the sign vehicle (the symptom or index) to its referent by means of an inference, raises the question whether it is still appropriate to call this relation one of “standing for.”

### 2.2.1 SIGNIFICATION AND DESIGNATION

If the *aliquo* is the referent, the relation is one of *designation* or *reference*; if it is sense, the relation is one of *signification* (see Meaning 1.2). The medieval distinction was between *appellatio* and *significatio*. If the signifier refers to the referent via the relatum of sense, this triadic relation is one of *mediation* (see 1.3.3). For representation as a semiotic relation, see Meaning (1.2.3). The nature of the *aliquid-aliquo* relation can furthermore be specified as being *arbitrary* (symbolic) or *motivated* (iconic or indexical; cf. Peirce 3.2).

In the framework of their triadic sign model, Ogden & Richards specify the relation of the sign vehicle (“symbol”) and the referent as being without any “relevant relation other than an indirect one,” while they see relations of psychological or social “causality” between the relata sign vehicle-sense (“thought or reference”) and sense-referent (1923: 10–11). Today, the concept of causality is certainly

inappropriate in this context. A modern successor is the concept of inference.

### 2.2.2 THE DYAD IN NATURAL SIGNS

According to Augustine’s definition of the natural sign, natural signs are the object of unilateral observation, in contradistinction to signs in bilateral communication. The sign vehicle (A) and the referent (B) in this type of natural semiosis are related in two ways. At an extrasemiotic level, the level of natural events, A is the effect of the cause B. At the semiotic level, the effect A becomes an index or symptom which an interpreter connects by inference to B. Hobbes explains the genesis of natural signs (and moreover of signs in general) as a process of interpreting the consequent as an effect of its antecedent or vice versa:

When a man hath *so often* observed like antecedents to be followed by like consequents, that *whensoever* he seeth the antecedent, he looketh again for the consequent; or when he seeth the consequent, maketh account there hath been the like antecedent; then he calleth both the antecedent and the consequent *signs* of one another, as clouds are signs of rain to come, and rain of clouds past. (1640: 4.9)

Later, Wolff was to divide this field of natural signs into demonstrative, prognostic, and rememorative signs depending whether the referent is a present, future, or past event (1720: §§ 953–54; cf. History 3.4.1). For a more recent theory of natural signs, see Clarke (1987).

### 2.2.3 INFERENCE AND SEMIOSIS

Is the inference by which an interpreter connects the antecedent with its consequent a sign relation (cf. Pelc 1984b)? Critics of a broad concept of the sign have argued that clouds do not *mean* rain and that therefore the distinction between indication and signification, indices and symbols is a fundamental threshold from non-signs to signs (cf. Savigny 1974: 1788, Clarke 1987). From a pragmatic point of view, Alston argues that “there is a sharp distinction between the two groups of facts. One is a matter of certain *de facto* correlations holding and not a matter of

the *x*'s being used in a certain way. The other is a matter of the way the *x* in question is used and not a matter of correlations in which it stands with the *y*" (1967: 440). Clarke proposes to exclude inferences from natural evidence from the definition of signs (1987: 49–50): "Clouds may signify rain [ . . . ], but they clearly do not refer to anything at all. To assign them a reference to the rain is to collapse the crucial distinction between the significance and reference of a sign." According to his own proposal, a natural sign should "be defined as an event having significance for an interpreter which is not produced for the purpose of communication and whose interpretation does not require an inference from a linguistic generalization." This proposal is an attempt to mediate between two ancient rival theories of the sign, those of Stoic and Epicurean semiotics.

The Epicureans defended a realist view of the natural sign. According to Sextus Empiricus (*Against the Logicians* II: 269–71), natural signs can be apprehended by direct observation and do not require the mediation of language. Even animals can thus interpret natural signs. This view of natural semiosis has been accepted in the pansemiotic tradition from Augustine to Peirce and Morris.

An early nominalist view of natural semiosis was the Stoic theory of signs. The nominalist Eco (1976: 17; 1984b: 31) sympathizes with this view because it makes natural semiosis depend on a criterion of "cultural recognition." According to the Stoics, the natural sign is not the association between a natural event A ("smoke") and a physically related event B ("fire"), but the result of a process of hypothetical reasoning. Instead of being events, A and B become propositions. The sign A is the antecedent of a hypothetical reasoning ("If there is smoke . . .") and B is its inferred consequent (" . . . then there must be fire"). This rationalist view of natural semiosis is untenable within the larger framework of general semiotics. Its consequence would be the exclusion of zoosemiotics and large sectors of anthroposemiotics (for example, the semiotics of music) from the semiotic field.

### 2.3 The Dyadic Sign: A Synopsis

A clear-cut distinction between dyadic and triadic sign models is not always possible (see also 2.1.1). There is a zone of vagueness whenever a third correlate is mentioned but not systematically incorporated into the semiotic theory. Saussure's model is the prototype of a dyadic model. Although he mentions the "chose" in addition to the signifier and the signified, he rejects it as a third correlate of the sign. Hjelmlev, while discussing reference in the domain of content-substance, also remains essentially dyadic in his concept of the sign. Furthermore, there are semioticians who postulate two aspects of the sign but consider the relation between sign vehicle and meaning to be the third component.

Major dyadic definitions of the sign from the history of semiotics are summarized in the synopsis of Figure Si 1. The definitions on which this survey is based are as follows:

1. Augustine, see 1.3.2, 2.1.1, and History (2.1.5).
2. Albertus Magnus and the Scholastics, see 2.1.1.
3. Hobbes, see 2.2.2 and History (3.2.2).
4. Locke (1690) distinguishes two types of signs, (I) ideas as signs of things and (II) words as signs of ideas (see also Meaning 3.2): (I) "For, since the things the mind contemplates are none of them, besides itself, present to the understanding, it is necessary that something else, as a sign or representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it: and these are *ideas*" (Locke 1690: IV.21.4). (II) "Words [ . . . ] stand for nothing but the *ideas in the mind of him that uses them*. [ . . . ] That then which words are the marks of are the ideas of the speaker" (Locke 1690: III.2.2). See also History (3.3.3).
5. Port-Royal (= Arnauld & Nicole 1685), see Rey (1973: 112), Auroux (1979: 22), Swiggers (1981), and History (3.1.2).
6. Wolff (1720: § 293; cf. Coseriu 1967: 98 and Trabant 1976a: 17): "Thus, if two things occur always simultaneously or one always after the other, then one is always a sign of the

other. Such are called *natural signs*." See also History (3.4.1).

7. Degérando (1800: I, 63), cf. History (3.3.4).

8.–9. See Saussure and Hjelmslev.

10. Cassirer (1922–38: 175; cf. Krois 1984b: 440): "Under the term symbolic form should be understood each energy of human spirit through which an intelligible content and meaning is joined with and internally adapted to a concrete sensible sign." On Cassirer's theory of the sign and symbol, see History (3.6.2) and Typology (1.2.2).

11. Bühler (1933b; 1934), cf. 2.1.2.

12. Bloomfield (1933), cf. Meaning (4.1) on behaviorism in semiotics.

13. Buysens (1943: 12, 34–41), cf. System (4.2).

14. Jakobson (1959a: 260; 1961: 575; 1975: 10ff.; cf. Waugh 1976: 38–53).

15. Goodman (1968: xi, 5) does not differentiate between sign and sign vehicle. His term *symbol* "covers letters, words, texts, pictures, diagrams, maps, models, and more." His referential view of the "symbol" is apparent in this quote: "The plain fact is that a picture, to represent an object [footnote: I use 'object' indifferently for anything a picture represents, whether an apple or a battle], must be a symbol for it, stand for it, refer to it." See also Image (3.4).

Goodman's *representation, description, exemplification, and expression* (1968: 256) are not

	Sign	Correlates of the Dyad	
		① sign vehicle	② meaning
(1) Augustine (397)	sign	sign (as thing)	(other) thing(s), something else
(2) Albertus Magnus and Scholastics (13th cent.)	signum	aliquid (vox)	aliquo (res)
(3) Hobbes (1640)	sign	antecedent experience	consequent experience
(4) Locke (1690)	sign (1) sign (2)	idea word	thing idea
(5) Port-Royal (Arnauld & Nicole 1685)	sign	idea of the representing thing	idea of the thing represented
(6) Wolff (1720)	sign	one thing	another thing
(7) Degérando (1800)	sign	sensation	idea
(8) Saussure	sign (signe)	signifier (signifiant)	signified (signifié)
(9) Hjelmslev	sign	expression	content
(10) Cassirer (1923ff.)	symbol(ic) form	concrete sensible sign	content, meaning
(11) Bühler (1933b)	sign	representative (concrete thing)	meaning
(12) Bloomfield (1933)	linguistic form	speech sound, signal	response in hearer
(13) Buysens (1943)	seme	semic act	meaning, signification
(14) Jakobson (1959ff.)	sign(um)	signans	signatum
(15) Goodman (1968)	symbol	[words, pictures, models, etc.]	denotatum, object

Fig. Si 1. Synopsis of dyadic models of the sign. (See also the synopsis M 3 on meaning, and History of Semiotics.)

variants of *sense* (see Meaning 3.), as Faltin claims (1985: 30), but four types of referential function.

### 3. Triadic Models of the Sign

Triadic sign models comprise a nonhomogeneous group of semiotic theories distinguishing three correlates of the sign, sign vehicle, sense, and referent (cf. Meaning). In some cases, there is no clear-cut distinction between dyadic and triadic models (cf. 2.1.1). For surveys of triadic sign models see Gomperz (1908: 76–91) and Lieb (1981a).

#### 3.1 Some Types of Triadic Sign Models

The nonhomogeneous character of these sign models can be illustrated in a tentative typology of triadic models. The basic distinction will be between triads that are reducible to dyads and genuine triads.

##### 3.1.1 TRIADS REDUCIBLE TO DYADS

Some triadic sign models are actually reducible to two dyads. These may be either subsequent or alternative dyads. Locke's definition implies two subsequent but still potentially independent dyads: words are signs of ideas and ideas are signs of things. Anselm's distinction between *significatio*, the relation between word and concept, and *appellatio*, the relation between word and thing, implies two alternative dyads. In modern semantics, too, the distinction between sense and reference is sometimes taken to be a matter of alternative dyads. This is the theory that words have *either sense or reference* (cf. Meaning 1.). Others have postulated a genuine triad claiming that there is always some sense *and* reference in signs.

##### 3.1.2 GENUINE TRIADS AND THE SEMIOTIC TRIANGLE

Genuine triads are based on the concept of mediation (cf. 1.3.3): a third correlate is related to a first via a second. After Gomperz (1908: 77), Ogden & Richards (1923: 11) have repre-

sented the triadic structure of the sign by means of a triangle. This diagram (cf. Fig. Si 2) has become known as the *semiotic triangle* (cf. Lyons 1977: 96, Lieb 1981a). It shows the three correlates of the sign in the order (1) sign vehicle, (2) sense, and (3) referent (Ogden & Richards use different terms; cf. synopsis in Fig. S 3). The dotted base line indicates the indirect nature of the relationship between the sign vehicle and the referent and thus the path of mediation from (1) to (3). However, the order of the relata in the process of triadic mediation has been interpreted in different ways.

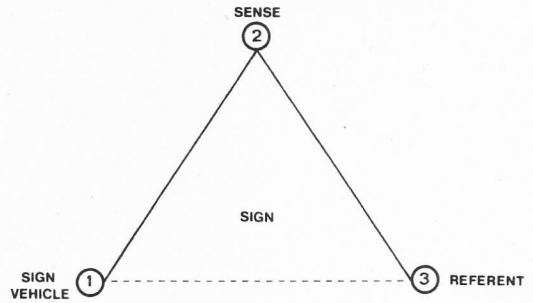


Fig. Si 2. The semiotic triangle (cf. text).

Aristotle's definition of words as signs of the soul, and the latter as likenesses of actual things, gives the outline of the standard order of the triad: (1) sign vehicle-(2) sense-(3) referent (Fig. Si 2). Sense is the mediator of the referent. In medieval semiotics: "*Vox significat rem mediantibus conceptibus*" (cf. Lyons 1977: 96). This is also the order of Ogden & Richards's triad and of Vygotsky's mediational view of the sign. Peirce's definition of the sign (§ 2.228) enumerates the three relata representamen-interpretant-object in the same order, but within his categorial system, the object is a phenomenon of secondness, and the interpretant is one of thirdness.

In contradistinction to this standard order of the triad, Plato's and Aristotle's sign models also suggest a different interpretation of the sequence of the relata (cf. Schmidt 1969: 13). Since in the Platonic tradition, ideas are "likenesses" of actual things, this early picture theory of meaning (cf. Image 2.2) assigns the object in a way the first place within the triad:

the thing (1) evokes the idea (2) which names the word (3). A still different order is suggested by Husserl's phenomenology of meaning (q.v. 3.1.3). Husserl's theory of the "meaning endowing act," in connection with his Platonic view of sense, assigns the first place within the semiotic triad to sense: sense (1) "gives life" to a "name-Thing" (2) which refers to the object (3). More generally, the order (1) sense-(2) sign vehicle-(3) object is the order of semiosis from the point of view of sign production, while the order (1) sign vehicle-(2) sense-(3) referent is the order of semiosis from the point of view of the interpreter.

### 3.2 The Triadic Sign: A Synopsis

The semiotic triangle (Fig. Si 2) is the framework of the following synopsis of major triadic definitions of the sign (Fig. Si 3). The synopsis is based on the following definitions:

1. Plato: *Cratylus* (cf. Arbitrariness 1.1.1, Meaning 3.1.1, Gomperz 1908: 79, Schmidt 1969: 19, Coseriu 1970: 46, Schmitter 1987: 28, 32). The Greek terms are name—*ὄνομα*,

*νόμος*, idea, notion—*εἶδος*, *λόγος*, *διάνοημα*, sound, voice—*φθόγγος*, *φθέγμα*, and thing—*πᾶγμα*, *οὐσία*.

2. Aristotle: *De interpretatione* (16a trans. J. L. Ackrile; cf. Lieb 1981a): "Now spoken sounds (*φωνῆ*) are symbols (*σύμβολα*) of affections (*πάθηματα*) in the soul (*ψυχῆ*), and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of (*σημεῖα*)—affections of the soul—are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of—actual things (*πράγματα*)—are also the same."

3. The Stoic sign model is described by Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus mathematicos* 8.11–2; cf. Kretzmann 1967: 364): "The Stoics [. . .] said that three things are linked together: (1) what is conveyed by the linguistic sign (*τὸ σημαίνον*) (2) the linguistic sign itself (*τὸ σημαῖνον*) and (3) the object or event (*τὸ τυγχάνον*) [. . .] Two of these are corporeal—viz. the sound and the object or event—and one is incorporeal—viz. the matter of discourse conveyed by the linguistic sign, the

	Sign	Correlates of the Triad		
		① sign vehicle	② sense	③ referent
(1) Plato (ca. 400 B.C.)	name	sound	idea, content	thing
(2) Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.)	[sign]	sound	affections	thing (pragma)
(3) Stoics (ca. 250 B.C.)	[sign]	sēmaínon	sēmainómenon, lektón	object or event
(4) Boethius (ca. 500)	[word]	voice	concept	thing
(5) Bacon (1605)	[word]	word	notion	thing
(6) Leibniz (ca. 1700)	[sign]	sign character	concept	thing
(7) Peirce	sign	representamen	interpretant	object
(8) Husserl (1900)	sign	expression	meaning	thing
(9) Ogden & Richards (1923)	—	symbol	thought or reference	referent
(10) Morris	sign	sign vehicle	significatum	denotatum

Fig. Si 3. Synopsis of triadic models of the sign. (See also the synopsis of Meaning (Fig. M 3) and History of Semiotics.)

lekton.” Cf. Robins (1967: 16): “The Stoics formalized the dichotomy between form and meaning, distinguishing in language ‘the signifier’ and ‘the signified,’ in terms strikingly reminiscent of de Saussure’s *signifiant* and *signifié*.” See also Robins (1951: 26ff.) and Eco (1984b: 29–33) and History (2.1.3).

4. Boethius: see 2.1.1: voice-vox, concept-*conceptio*, thing-res.

5. Bacon: see Universal Language (2.2.1).

6. Leibniz; see Poser (1979): sign-signum or *character*, concept-*conceptio* (also *notio*, *cogitatio*, *idea*), thing-res.

7. See Peirce.

8. Husserl; see Meaning (3.1.3).

9. Ogden & Richards (1923: 11; cf. Lieb 1981a).

10. See Morris.

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Winfried Nöth is Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Kassel, Germany. Nöth is the author of several books and numerous articles in the fields of linguistics and the semiotics of art, literature, and the media.

ADVANCES IN SEMIOTICS  
Thomas A. Sebeok, General Editor

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS  
BLOOMINGTON & INDIANAPOLIS

ISBN 0-253-20959-5



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