

## 19. Creation Evolving

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Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for?

—Robert Browning, *Men and Women and Other Poems*

### Returning Signs

The turning symbols to which we “religiously” turn and return our attention occupy the most essential niches in meaning space. We connect them with elemental experience, with the recurring patterns pervading all. Thus their meanings are inexhaustible, because each time we return to them, the flow of experiencing has changed our habits and expectations in the meantime, investing the text with new implications. This is what Chu Hsi observed about *The Doctrine of the Mean*:

Unroll it, and it reaches in all directions. Roll it up, and it withdraws and lies hidden in minuteness. ‘Its meaning and interest are inexhaustible.’ The whole of it is solid learning. If the skillful reader will explore and brood over it and apprehend it, he may apply it throughout his life, and will find it inexhaustible.

(Chan 1963, 97)

Each part of such a text reveals its meaning only in the context

of the whole, which develops as each part explains other parts. The reader begins to inhabit that context by drawing from memory and collateral observation a provisional map of its dynamic object, and that is the immediate object of the sign. If one has learned anything from the text after reading the whole, the next reading of each part will be enacted in a different context from the first, since the argument of the whole text will modify the provisional map. But the semiotic *process* of learning is a continuous flow, not an accumulation of particular pieces like a coin collection. The bodymind thus informed is not a collector of “learning” but the self-organizing context of each act of meaning; and the same goes for the turning symbol. According to Peirce, ‘every symbol is a living thing, in a very strict sense that is no mere figure of speech. The body of the symbol changes slowly, but its meaning inevitably grows, incorporates new elements and throws off old ones’ (EP2:264).

In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired.

In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped.

— Feng/English, *Tao Te Ching* 48

Under the trees, among the rocks, a thatched hut:  
verses and sacred commentaries live there together.  
I’ll burn the books I carry in my bag,  
but how can I forget the verses written in my gut?

— Ikkyu (Tanahashi and Schneider 1994, 102)

A text that merely adds to the baggage we carry around in our heads is not a turning sign; a guidance system that is cumbersome rather than portable acts as an anchor rather than a rudder. We complete the act of reading scripture by leaving it so that we can live it in practice. No matter how many times we return to it, we are turned by it only if we let the seed-text germinate in our *presence*. Its interpretant grows from it; *interpreting* it verbally is like trying to “grow” the plant by pulling it up from its matrix in the mind ground.

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, it is said, ‘If you explain the meaning of every word and phrase in the

sutras, you slander the Buddhas of the three times – past, present and future. But if you disregard even one word of the Sutras, you risk speaking the words of Mara [the tempter, the demon of distraction from the Dharma].’ Sutras are essential guides for our practice, but we must read them carefully and use our own intelligence and the help of a teacher and a Sangha to understand the true meaning and put it into practice. After reading a sutra or any spiritual text, we should feel lighter, not heavier. Buddhist teachings are meant to awaken our true self, not merely to add to our storehouse of knowledge.

— Thich Nhat Hanh (1998, 64)

The ideal reader is herself a turning symbol, and like any symbol, alive with indeterminacy, questing to determine what she means. The meaning mind is always looking for the *pattern that connects*, as Bateson called it. Peirce called it Thirdness, or Thought, or Generality, or Reason: ‘The work of reason consists in finding connections between facts’ (EP2:91). That is the *ceiving* side of the work; the other side is the *enactive* side, for as Peircean pragmatism reminds us, every symbol is also a legisign.

The very being of the General, of Reason, *consists* in its governing individual events. So, then, the essence of Reason is such that its being never can have been completely perfected. It always must be in a state of incipency, of growth. It is like the character of a man which consists in the ideas that he will conceive and in the efforts that he will make, and which only develops as the occasions actually arise. Yet in all his life long no son of Adam has ever fully manifested what there was in him. So, then, the development of Reason requires as a part of it the occurrence of more individual events than ever can occur. It requires, too, all the coloring of all qualities of feeling, including pleasure in its proper place among the rest. This development of Reason consists, you will observe, in embodiment, that is, in manifestation. The creation of the universe, which did

not take place during a certain busy week, in the year 4004 B.C., but is going on today and never will be done, is this very development of Reason. I do not see how one can have a more satisfying ideal of the admirable than the development of Reason so understood. The one thing whose admirableness is not due to an ulterior reason is Reason itself comprehended in all its fullness, so far as we can comprehend it. Under this conception, the ideal of conduct will be to execute our little function in the operation of the creation by giving a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable whenever, as the slang is, it is “up to us” to do so.

EP2:255

The ideal reader, like Creation itself, is always in ‘a state of incipiency, of growth’ – if we can call that a “state”! – and ‘never can have been completely perfected’ – or in other words, fits Peirce’s description of a *perfect sign* as given in Chapter 13. That description continues:

... the perfect sign is perpetually being acted upon by its object, from which it is perpetually receiving the accretions of new signs, which bring it fresh energy, and also kindle energy that it already had, but which had lain dormant.

In addition, the perfect sign never ceases to undergo changes of the kind we rather drolly call *spontaneous*, that is, they happen *sua sponte* but not by *its* will. They are phenomena of growth.

Such perfect sign is a quasi-mind. It is the sheet of assertion of Existential Graphs. ...

This quasi-mind is an object which from whatever standpoint it be examined, must evidently have, like anything else, its special qualities of susceptibility to determination. Moreover, the determinations come as events each one once for all and never again. Furthermore, it must have its rules or laws, the more special ones variable, others invariable.

EP2:545 (MS 283:279-83)

The 'rules or laws' of this mind are in themselves legisigns, and in the guidance system, habits. And speaking of Existential Graphs, which constitute a system by means of which we can 'construct a diagram to illustrate the general course of thought' (CP 4.530), Peirce confirms that

In our Diagram the same thing which represents The Truth must be regarded as in another way representing the Mind, and indeed, as being the Quasi-mind of all the Signs represented on the Diagram. For any set of Signs which are so connected that a complex of two of them can have one interpretant, must be Determinations of one Sign which is a Quasi-mind.

CP 4.550 (1906)

## The life of a symbol

The enactive aspect of the 'pattern that connects,' the practice of *making connections*, is called *synthesis* ('putting things together') as opposed to *analysis*. Peirce, in his 'Guess at the Riddle' (1886), referred to the creative work of minds and signs as the highest kind of 'synthetical consciousness.'

This kind of synthesis has not been sufficiently studied, and especially the intimate relationship of its different varieties has not been duly considered. The work of the poet or novelist is not so utterly different from that of the scientific man. The artist introduces a fiction; but it is not an arbitrary one; it exhibits affinities to which the mind accords a certain approval in pronouncing them beautiful, which if it is not exactly the same as saying that the synthesis is true, is something of the same general kind. The geometer draws a diagram, which if not exactly a fiction, is at least a creation, and by means of observation of that diagram he is able to synthesize and show relations between elements which before seemed to have no necessary connection. The realities compel us to put some things into very

close relation and others less so, in a highly complicated, and in the sense itself unintelligible manner; but it is the genius of the mind, that takes up all these hints of sense, adds immensely to them, makes them precise, and shows them in intelligible form in the intuitions of space and time. Intuition is the regarding of the abstract in a concrete form, by the realistic hypostatization of relations; that is the one sole method of valuable thought.

— Peirce, EP1:261-2

What Peirce calls ‘intuition’ here might also be called ‘imagination.’ As the brain scientist Walter Freeman observes, ‘All that we can know comes through the imagination, which allows us to generalize and abstract to create the internal structures with which we act and understand’ (Freeman 1999a, 164). The ‘realistic hypostatization of relations,’ which might also be called the *recognition of real relations*, is an act of imagination as well as a process of symbolic semiosis. Peirce emphasized the creative aspect of that process in a 1909 letter to William James:

The Sign creates something in the Mind of the Interpreter, which something, in that it has been so created by the sign, has been, in a mediate and *relative* way, also created by the Object of the Sign, although the Object is essentially other than the Sign. And this creature of the sign is called the Interpretant. It is created by the Sign; but not by the Sign quâ member of whichever of the Universes it belongs to; but it has been created by the Sign in its capacity of bearing the determination by the Object.

EP2:493

An entity which can be *at once* both determined (by its Object) and determining (its Interpretant) may be called a ‘medium,’ a ‘mind’ or a ‘sign,’ depending on the context. Its creative ‘capacity’ involves its determinability as well as its ability to determine; both are governed by the *telos* or ‘purpose’ which is the general direction in which the process tends. Semiotic *determination* is an irreversible one-way process. Determination of a sign by its object, or of its

interpretant by the sign, cannot be undone, any more than an event can unhappen. But it can also never be *completed*:

for it is impossible that any sign whether mental or external should be perfectly determinate. If it were possible such sign must remain absolutely unconnected with any other. It would quite obviously be such a sign of its entire universe, as Leibniz and others have described the omniscience of God to be, an intuitive representation amounting to an indecomposable feeling of the whole in all its details, from which those details would not be separable. For no reasoning, and consequently no abstraction, could connect itself with such a sign.

CP 4.583 (1906)

‘The “Truth,” the fact that is not abstracted but complete, is the ultimate interpretant of every sign’ (EP2:304) – the unattainable end of its development. The connectibility of signs with one another is inseparable from their indeterminacy; for its connection with other signs – all signifying the form of the relations characterizing the Object – that determines the form of a sign’s interpretant. Since the defining characteristic of a *symbol* is that it *will* be interpreted as representing its object, indeterminacy is of its essence. The meaning of the symbol, its *significance*, is necessarily vague because it is constituted by its role in a living sign-system, one which must be both determinable and capable of recreating that determinability in its interpretant.

A symbol is essentially a purpose, that is to say, is a representation that seeks to make itself definite, or seeks to produce an interpretant more definite than itself. For its whole signification consists in its determining an interpretant; so that it is from its interpretant that it derives the actuality of its signification.

EP2:323

From the reader’s point of view, a symbol creates an expectation that it *will mean* something. It creates a meaning space *to be*

*occupied* by the right form at the right time; 'it is of the nature of a symbol to create a *tabula rasa* and therefore an endless series of *tabulae rasae*, since such creation is merely representation, the *tabulae rasae* being entirely indeterminate except to be representative' (EP2:323). Choose any symbol in the endless series, and it 'represents itself to be represented' even as it represents itself to represent its Object. It presents itself by representing itself continuously.

A *tabula rasa* having been determined as representative of the symbol that determines it, that *tabula rasa* tends to become determinate. The vague always tends to become determinate, simply because its vagueness does not determine it to be vague (as the limit of an endless series). In so far as the interpretant is the symbol, as it is in some measure, the determination agrees with that of the symbol. But in so far as it fails to be its better self, it is liable to depart from the meaning of the symbol. Its purpose, however, is to represent the symbol in its representation of its object; and therefore, the determination is followed by a further development, in which it becomes corrected. It is of the nature of a sign to be an individual replica and to be in that replica a living general. By virtue of this, the interpretant is animated by the original replica, or by the sign it contains, with the power of representing the true character of the object. That the object has at all a character can only consist in a representation that it has so,—a representation having power to live down all opposition. In these two steps, of determination and of correction, the interpretant aims at the object more than at the original replica and may be truer and fuller than the latter. The very entelechy of being lies in being representable. A sign cannot even be false without being a sign and so far as it is a sign it must be true. A symbol is an embryonic reality endowed with power of growth into the very truth, the very entelechy of reality. This appears mystical and mysterious simply because we insist on

remaining blind to what is plain, that there can be no reality which has not the life of a symbol.

EP2:323-4

The life of a symbol, or a proposition (the kind of symbol that can be true or false), is inseparable from its indeterminacy. Peirce even found a way to represent this in his system of Existential Graphs: ‘Since no perfectly determinate proposition is possible ... there always will virtually be at least one loose end in every graph’ (CP 4.583, 1906). But that’s another story ...

## Elements of new meaning

The long text quoted just above is ‘from one of Peirce’s most problematic and obscure unfinished writings’ (Houser 2014, 10), namely ‘New Elements’ (Καινὰ στοιχεῖα, 1904), quoted before in Chapter 9. Can such a problematic text work as a turning symbol? Merleau-Ponty explains how this can happen:

People can speak to us only a language which we already understand; each word of a difficult text awakens in us thoughts which were ours beforehand, but these meanings sometimes combine to form new thought which recasts them all, and we are transported to the heart of the matter, we find the source.

— Merleau-Ponty (1945, 207)

This also applies to the kind of text Wallace Stevens called ‘poetry:’

- Poetry must resist the intelligence almost successfully.
- Poetry is often a revelation of the elements of experience.
- Poetry is a renovation of experience.

— Stevens 1957 (171, 177)

Poetry ‘must resist the intelligence’ in order to challenge intellectual habits and thus break through the cognitive bubble. It

often uses common words to make uncommon sense, to provoke a 'renovation of experience.' This 'renovation' is not just a new experience *added* to the old, another bead on the string, but a transformation of *experiencing*, in the way that waking up transforms awareness of the world around you (or a dream transforms the universe of sleep).

Often, as Stevens says, this 'recasting' of all thought is 'a revelation of the *elements* of experience.' Peirce's phaneroscopy aims to discover those same elements, and his semiotic applies that discovery to 'the heart of the matter' of semiosis, the process of meaning or of 'Thought' in the widest possible sense. What we find at 'the source,' at the heart of mattering, is 'the life of a symbol' – which itself originates in one of three ways, according to Peirce.

Every symbol is, in its origin, either an image of the idea signified, or a reminiscence of some individual occurrence, person or thing, connected with its meaning, or is a metaphor. Terms of the first and third origins will inevitably be applied to different conceptions ...

EP2:264

That last point reveals the source of *polyversity* in symbols, which is intimately related to their *living* quality – and to the *originality* of 'a difficult text.' The 'first and third origins' seem to correspond to the first and third in the semiotic trichotomy icon/index/symbol; as *image* and *metaphor*, they also denote two essential elements of poetry. Also, the three aspects of poetry listed above by Stevens correspond vaguely to what Peirce called the 'elements of experience' (or 'of the *phaneron*'). *Renovation*, *resistance* and *revelation* might be called the Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness of poetry.

Let's look into Thirdness first: What does *metaphor* have to do with *revelation* and symbolicity? The term derives from the Greek noun μεταφορά and verb μεταφέρω, which means 'carry over' (transfer, transport). It is often applied broadly to any "figure of speech" which places a familiar term in an unfamiliar context, so that some qualities attributed to some familiar subject are "carried over" to a subject less commonly associated with those qualities.

‘The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5).

We often speak of “metaphorical” or “figurative” meaning as opposed to “literal” meaning, which is supposed to have a tighter grip on reality. But a sign’s reach should exceed its grasp, or what’s a metaphor? Actually these terms vaguely represent the two ends of a single spectrum: “literal” usage is more habitual, while “metaphor” is more spontaneous, more creative, ‘poetic,’ imaginative. Yet metaphor is an element of even the most ordinary language, as you can see from the etymology of almost any word you care to look up. Nor is it limited to language.

Metaphor is not merely an instance of language, a special rhetorical device used for communication and persuasion. Instead metaphor is a fundamental mental capacity by which people understand themselves and the world through the conceptual mapping of knowledge from one domain onto another. The overwhelming ubiquity of metaphor in language, thought, science, law, art, myth, and culture illustrates that metaphor is an integral part of human life.

— Raymond W. Gibbs (1994, 207)

Metaphor is certainly an integral part of philosophical thought, as Peirce affirmed:

Metaphysics has been said contemptuously to be a fabric of metaphors. But not only metaphysics, but logical and phaneroscopic concepts need to be clothed in such garments. For a pure idea without metaphor or other significant clothing is an onion without a peel.

EP2:392

This onion metaphor reflects Peirce’s dictum that ‘thought, like an onion, is composed of nothing but wrappings’ (EP2:460, quoted in Chapter 2).

“Figures of speech” are also called *tropes* (from *τρόπος*, a *turn*, also ‘direction, course, way’ (LSG)). If a trope or metaphor turns an experiencing subject or self in a new direction, it may appear as a

sudden epiphany, discovery and revelation. But it may take years or even lifetimes of immersion in its symbolic context – such as a myth, a scripture, a philosophical system or a theoretical formulation – to create the conditions in which epiphany occurs, and more lifetimes to unfold its implications in practice. Deep reading is never easy.

All mythology is studded with symbols, veiled in allegory; the parables of Christ pose riddles which the audience must solve. The intention is not to obscure the message, but to make it more luminous by compelling the recipient to work it out by himself—to re-create it. Hence the message must be handed to him in implied form—and implied means ‘folded in.’ To make it unfold, he must fill in the gaps, complete the hint, see through the symbolic disguise.

— Arthur Koestler (1964, 337-8)

There are no foolproof methods or methodologies for unfolding the message of a myth or mythology. Peirce (in *Baldwin’s Dictionary*) defined *Methodology* (or *Methodetic*) as ‘a branch of logic which teaches the general principles which ought to guide an inquiry,’ which is a quest for some part of the Truth. But what guides the quest for the *wholeness* of Truth, for ‘the source’ of it all? As Peirce went on to say, ‘owing to general causes, logic always must be far behind the practice of leading minds.’ Our intimations of that practice, our intimologies, consist mostly of ‘hides and hints and misses in prints,’ often in the metaphoric or parabolic form of a ‘difficult text’ or a mythic symbol.

## The place of life

Take for example Saying 4 of the *Gospel of Thomas*, which you may recall from back in the first chapter:

(1) Jesus said, “The person old in days will not hesitate to ask a little child seven days old about the place of life, and that person will live. (2) For many of the first will be last (3) and will become a single one.”

Suppose 'the place of life' is the Universe of Thirdness (in which symbols grow), and the 'becoming a single one' of the many who 'will be last' is the ultimately intimate *communion of subjects*. Is this a plausible reading? That depends on how consistent it is with its double context, one side of which is the *Gospel of Thomas* itself, while the other is the symbolic aspect of our own guidance system. Does this interpretant symbol help to renovate our experience, or connect with the primordial feelings at the heart of our selves and our mattering, while also connecting with the rest of this gospel?

The theme of unification recurs many times in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Saying 22, for instance, plays a more detailed variation on it, in another difficult text which begins with beginners in life:

- (1) Jesus saw some babies nursing. (2) He said to his disciples, "These nursing babies are like those who enter the kingdom."
- (3) They said to him, "Then shall we enter the kingdom as babies?"
- (4) Jesus said to them, "When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower,
- (5) and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, (6) when you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, (7) then you will enter [the kingdom]."

— Thomas 22 (NHS)

Here, instead of the 'becoming a single one' of *Thomas 4*, we have a description of the *practice* which will take us into 'the kingdom' – a practice of *making* the two into one, making eyes in place of an eye and an image in place of an image. It seems that re-presenting creation is a way of *re-creating oneself*, and thus entering 'the place of life.' This recreation is also the *resurrection* of the bodymind.

This transformation involves restoring one's self to its original Image, refashioning every aspect from the foot

to the hand. This, in fact, is the resurrected body created in the present moment rather than at the end of time.

— DeConick (2007a, 116)

And what is this body being at once created and resurrected? The prophet William Blake answers:

The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is God himself / The Divine Body / Jesus: we are his Members

It manifests itself in his Works of Art ...

The whole Business of Man Is The Arts & All Things Common

— Blake, *The Laocoön* (PPB, 271)

The imaginative arts, for Blake, awaken us to our membership in the Eternal Body, or as we might say today, our common embodiment. If the artist is a prophet, as Blake believed, then ‘Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets’ (*Numbers* 11:29, as quoted by Blake in his inscription to *Milton*). According to Northrop Frye (1947, 19), “‘imagination’ is the regular term used by Blake to denote man as an acting and perceiving being.’ His Eternal Body is creation, manifestation, perception and practice rolled into one continuous process – one Big Current, which we could also call *Nature* as both created and creating. ‘Some Scarce see Nature at all But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers’ (Blake, PPB, 677). Then Nature too is ‘the place of life,’ the Universe of Thirdness in its ‘active power to establish connections.’

Suppose the recreation of The Divine Body as Imagination is referred to in *Thomas* 22 as making ‘the two into one, and the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner.’ This may seem a mystical idea, but it has its practical applications for *community*. The epistles of St. Paul, for example, present the image of redeemed humanity as membership in the body of Christ. *Ephesians* 2:14-16 tells us that the Gentiles who were alienated from Israel

have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

(RSV)

Likewise in *Galatians* 3:28 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (RSV). According to the Valentinian exegesis of Paul's epistles, the elect 'celebrate the resurrection-life (which they received in baptism) as their present experience' (Pagels 1975, 119). For the elect, then, baptism is a turning symbol; and marriage is another:

... we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one." This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church ...

*Ephesians* 5:30-32 (RSV)

Paul is here quoting and interpreting *Genesis* 2:24. Valentinians in turn interpreted the marriage metaphor to mean that even the 'pneumatic' elect could not be truly saved or united in Christ until the spiritual separation was healed between themselves and the ignorant 'psychics.' Pagels (1975, 127) explains how they read the next verse of *Ephesians*:

Paul instructs each 'husband' to 'love his own woman' (5:33); the Valentinians say, indeed that 'whoever does not love a woman so that he joins with her is not of the truth, nor shall he attain to the truth' since the elect themselves cannot enter into the pleroma except in conjunction with their psychic counterparts.

The *wedding* (or *bridal*) *chamber* is a recurring symbol in gnostic texts such as the *Gospel of Philip*; the *Zohar* and other kabbalistic

texts likewise employ the idea of marriage or its consummation to symbolize the mystical union, and read the *Song of Solomon* in the Bible as an elaboration of that same symbolism, indicating the union of God with Israel, or of either with *Shekhinah*. We might likewise read it as the union of Self with Other, or of content with context. However we read it, this metaphor is a common one, recurring several times even in a text as short as the *Gospel of Thomas* (75, 104, 106).

## The source

But we digress; let us return to the infants in *Thomas* 4 and 22. Perhaps they represent the “innocence” or ‘beginner’s mind’ open to the *originality* – the Firstness – of turning signs.

The First presents itself as original, immediate, fresh, unsubjected to anything that went before or stands behind, and is therefore spontaneous and free. ... The instant that freshness is distinctly asserted, it has lost its characteristic innocence. The idea of prime precedes all assertion, all differentiation. There is no synthetical unity in it, no wholeness nor consistency; it is the sheer wonder and manifold of first impressions. In itself, however, it is not manifold; it has no parts; but because it has no wholeness nor consistency, the understanding analyzes it into an infinitely varied manifold. Kant talks inaccurately of the manifold of sense; in fact the first impression has no parts, any more than it has unity or wholeness; yet it may be allowed to be potentially a manifold, if we say that all that the intellect evolves from it lies involved within it. The pure First is essentially vivid, present, and conscious; for that which is dead or remote is as it is only for him who may perceive it. What the world was to Adam on the day he opened his eyes to it, before he had drawn any distinctions, or had become conscious of his own existence,—that is first.

This 'first impression' appears to be the Firstness of the *phaneron* (to use the term that Peirce invented later). However, we can have no *distinct* idea of what Adam's world was like 'before he had drawn any distinctions,' or what the *phaneron* is before 'the intellect evolves from it' the myriad things that lie 'involved within it.' The intellect does this 'evolving' by a process akin to the focussing of perception; Peirce called it *precisive abstraction*, 'ἀφαίρεσις, leaving something out of account in order to attend to something else.'

Experience is first forced upon us in the form of a flow of images. Thereupon thought makes certain assertions. It professes to pick the image into pieces and to detect in it certain characters. This is not literally true. The image has no parts, least of all predicates. Thus predication involves precise abstraction. Precise abstraction creates predicates. Subjectal abstraction creates subjects. Both predicates and subjects are creations of thought. But this is hardly more than a phrase; for *creation* and *thought* have different meanings as applied to the two.

— Peirce, letter to E.H. Moore, 1904 (NEM III/2, 917-18, as quoted in Stjernfelt 2007, 253)

Goaded by the element of 'brute' Secondness in the *phaneron*, thought carves it up into *qualities* (logical *possibilities*) and *things* or events which can bear those qualities or actualize those possibilities. 'Subjectal abstraction' is the flip side of propositional *denotation*, which 'essentially takes a part for its whole' (EP2:322). Yet by creating things and their qualities as subjects and predicates of propositions, and conjoining them (in marriage, as it were) as parts of itself, thought renders reality intelligible.

The mode of being of the composition of thought, which is always of the nature of the attribution of a predicate to a subject, is the living intelligence which is the creator of all intelligible reality, as well as of the knowledge of such reality. It is the *entelechy*, or perfection of being.

Neither the Firstness nor the Secondness of the phaneron is intelligible in itself, but 'Thought' as the Thirdness of the phaneron mediates between them, establishing *relations* between the now-distinct events and entities which have emerged from the flow of images. As the evolution of Thought continues, these relations themselves can appear as forms, objects, subjects or systems.

All of this can be involved (or concealed) in *Thomas* 4 and 22, with the infants symbolizing the Firstness of it all. But as we have heard from *Thomas* 39, 'entering' into this knowledge requires us to be not only innocent as doves but also 'wise as serpents.' Post-experience 'innocence' is not like pre-experience innocence. Once the primal "symmetry" has been broken, once we have the Secondness of this to that, self to other, outside to inside, the differences cannot be unmade. But the very making of a difference also creates a new *relation* between entities: now they can *exist* in reaction to one another, but also *interact* as parts of a newly differentiated whole. Perhaps we can rediscover or recreate the parts *in their relation* to the whole as well as to one another. Perhaps we can recover the source of their very presence, of their *appearing*, by *representing* them, 'as were they, *isce et ille*, equals of opposites, evolved by a onesame power of nature or of spirit, *iste*, as the sole condition and means of its himundher manifestation and polarised for reunion by the symphysis of their antipathies' (FW2, 73).

The resurrection of the body is not only a reunion of the 'polarised' but also a *recreation* of the bodymind. In phaneroscopic terms, the *quality* of such recreation or representation might be called the Firstness of Thirdness. Peirce explains this in one of his 1903 Lowell Lectures, showing that the three 'elements of experience,' though all irreducible, are not all elementary in the same way.

Secondness is an essential part of Thirdness though not of Firstness, and Firstness is an essential element of both Secondness and Thirdness. Hence there is such a thing as the Firstness of Secondness and such a thing as the Firstness of Thirdness; and there is such a thing

as the Secondness of Thirdness. But there is no Secondness of pure Firstness and no Thirdness of pure Firstness or Secondness. When you strive to get the purest conceptions you can of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness (thinking of quality, reaction, and mediation), what you are striving to apprehend is pure Firstness, the Firstness of Secondness — that is what Secondness is, of itself — and the Firstness of Thirdness. ...

A Firstness is exemplified in every quality of a total feeling. It is perfectly simple and without parts; and everything has its quality. Thus the tragedy of King Lear has its Firstness, its flavor *sui generis*. That wherein all such qualities agree is universal Firstness, the very being of Firstness. The word *possibility* fits it, except that possibility implies a relation to what exists, while universal Firstness is the mode of being of itself. That is why a new word was required for it. Otherwise, “possibility” would have answered the purpose. ...

To express the Firstness of Thirdness, the peculiar flavor or color of mediation, we have no really good word. *Mentality* is, perhaps, as good as any, poor and inadequate as it is. Here, then, are three kinds of Firstness, qualitative possibility, existence, mentality, resulting from applying Firstness to the three categories. We might strike new words for them: primity, secundity, tertiality.

CP 1.530-33 (1903)

At one point in his ‘Guess’ (EP1:275), Peirce identifies Firstness with indeterminacy, which (as we’ve seen above) is a necessary character of symbols. This *creative* aspect of tertiality (and of mentality) often appears as artistic “inspiration,” but the breathing metaphor at the root of that word is not the only one frequently connected with it. Another common metaphor evokes what Peirce called ‘the form of a flow of images’:

... the pure inspiration flow leaves one with a sense of gratitude and wonder, and no sense of ‘I did it’ – only

the Muse. *That* level of mind – the cool water ... This is just the clear spring – it reflects all things and feeds all things but is of itself transparent. Hitting on it, one could try to trace it to the source; but that writes no poems and is in a sense ingratitude. Or one can see where it goes: to all things and in all things. The hidden water underground.

— Gary Snyder (1969, 56-7)

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.

— Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan'

... the central literary tradition, like the river Alpheus, goes underground for long periods and resurfaces unpredictably.

— Frye (1990, 49)

Regardless of the site we choose for our excavation, we shall always hit at the same ancient underground river which feeds the springs of all art and discovery.

— Koestler (1964, 391)

And if we listen closely, we can also hear it in the Talking Heads' 'Once in a Lifetime' (1980) ...

## The evolution of creation

Poetry gives us in metaphor what Peirce tries to explain in logical or semiotic terms. But Peirce also tells the story in cosmological terms, as ancient myth and modern physics also do; in 'New Elements' he combines all these terms to account for the evolution of an intelligible universe. In the beginning, he says, there must have been Nothing, pure indeterminacy; but develop it must, on the principle that 'the vague always tends to become determinate.' He sums it up this way:

A chaos of reactions utterly without any approach to

law is absolutely nothing; and therefore pure nothing was such a chaos. Then pure indeterminacy having developed determinate possibilities, creation consisted in mediating between the lawless reactions and the general possibilities by the influx of a symbol. This symbol was the purpose of creation. Its object was the entelechy of being which is the ultimate representation.

EP2:324

Thanks to advances in neuroscience and other sciences since Peirce's time, we can now fill in some details of this vague account and add a few more fibers to the cable of its reasoning – while also tracing its development to much more ancient sources.

According to Arthur Waley (1939, 66-7) *The Way of Taoism* is to recover (discover, recreate ..... ) the simplicity of the uncarved block, a 'state of pure consciousness' without objects, also symbolized by Chuang Tzu as a 'god' whose name (Hun-Tun) translates to 'Chaos.' Not coincidentally perhaps, Walter Freeman's model of brain dynamics casts 'chaos' in the same role as the substrate of the undifferentiated feeling carved up by the process of perception. In Peircean terms, the Firstness of the *phaneron* is just such a primeval chaos, from which all percepts emerge. Neural populations (cell assemblies, modules, ..... ) create form, or rather form emerges from the chaos of their interaction, by means of attractors in state space; but they 'cannot stay at a point attractor, because that can occur only when the neurons are silent, and inactive neurons atrophy and die' (Freeman 1999a, 116).

The brain cannot rest with a static percept because life is a restless quest for equilibrium, which is made unattainable by its own dynamic. Thus the human mind is notoriously restless; if there is not enough action in the scene before us, we call on imagination to supply some, just as our eye muscles supply saccades to induce some *difference* in the visual field. This happens involuntarily, of course, but Leonard Talmy's study of 'fictive motion' finds a 'cognitive bias toward dynamism' in the full spectrum of 'ception' (from perceiving to conceiving), a bias strong enough that we regard perception of a static pattern in events as 'a special and valued achievement.'

Thus, an individual who suddenly ceives all the components of a conceptual domain as concurrently co-present in a static pattern of interrelationships is said to have an 'aha experience.' And an individual that ceives a succession of one consequent event after another through time as a simultaneous static pattern of relationships is sometimes thought to have had a visionary experience.

— Talmy (2000, I.172)

Fauconnier and Turner account for such revelatory experience in terms of a network of ideas created by 'conceptual blending.' Here too the river is underground, i.e. unconscious, until it makes the jump into conscious meaning space.

The moment of tangible, global understanding comes when a network has been elaborated in such a way that it contains a solution that is delivered to consciousness. That delivery in nonroutine cases can produce the 'Eureka!' or 'aha!' effect ... We suggest that in the case of blending, at the moment of solution, the entire integration network is still active in the brain, even if unconsciously, while in the case of step-by-step analysis, at the moment of solution we have already lost most of the structure of the preceding steps.

— Fauconnier and Turner (2002, 57)

One manifestation of the emergence of 'underground' thought into consciousness is the act of *naming*. According to one translation of Lao Tzu,

The unnamable is the eternally real.  
Naming is the origin  
of all particular things.

— *Tao Te Ching* 1 (Mitchell 1988)

If we read that second sentence as a metaphysical proposition, it would appear to be an extreme form of *nominalism* – much more extreme than the statement in *Genesis* that 'whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof' (*Genesis*

2:19). In that universe, the origin of the creature is the Creator, and Adam is only the author of its *name*. The *Tao Te Ching* conflates naming with creating. But if we allow the text the vagueness common to turning symbols, this bit of the *Tao Te Ching* can make a sounder sense. To unfold it a bit more: The 'uncarved block' of the Tao, like Peirce's 'phaneron,' is undifferentiated in its Firstness. When it is carved up by attention or intention, so that particulars within it 'stand out' (*ex-ist*) from a background in their Secondness, those things can then be *denoted* or *designated*, i.e. can serve as objects of signs. *Naming* as a 'speech act' is the actualization of their *namability*, their potential to be subjects of propositions and thus objects of signs. Psychologically, this naming is already a creative act, a semiotic manifestation of Thirdness. But naming can also sow the seed of inquiry into whether the *object* denoted by the name is also a *thing*, a subject existing independently of anyone's naming or knowing of it, and into its *relations* to other subjects in the universe. In that case it is the beginning of the quest for the '*entelechy*, or perfection of being.'

A turning symbol can transform the guidance system when it recreates the original act of naming. For you as the reader, borne along in a continuous stream of experience, lifting something out of it *creates* an object (as such) that can be held above the stream as long as it has a name. This is how your experience recreates the world before you. Turn this inside out and you see the face you had before the world was born: and upon this world the act of recreation bestows the water of life, drawn from the sacred river of interbeing.

This, by the way, helps to explain how a symbol can originate in 'a reminiscence of some individual occurrence, person or thing,' as Peirce told us earlier.

A proper name, when one meets with it for the first time, is existentially connected with some percept or other equivalent individual knowledge of the individual it names. It is *then*, and then only, a genuine Index. The next time one meets with it, one regards it as an Icon of that Index. The habitual acquaintance with it having been acquired, it becomes a Symbol whose Interpretant represents it as an Icon of an Index

of the Individual named.

EP2:286

A proper name, then, is not literally an index, but merely a finger of speech. Moreover, as argued in Chapter 14, ‘remembering is more like recreation than retrieval.’ ‘Reminiscence’ is symbolic, although memories involve both iconic and indexical signs.

If our view of memory is correct, in higher organisms every act of perception is, to some degree, an act of creation, and every act of memory is, to some degree, an act of imagination.

— Edelman and Tononi (2000, 101)

## Cosmic creativity

What is now proved was once, only imagin’d.

— Blake (Erdman 1965, 36)

We have heard from Einstein/Infeld (Chapter 9) that ‘physical concepts are free creations of the human mind.’ In the context of conversation with nature, and thus of the whole semiotic cycle, they are signs determined by their dynamic objects to determine interpretants which in turn guide human interactions with the physical universe. But in their original Firstness as abductions, before they become scientific (testable) hypotheses, they appear spontaneously. Their “freedom” as “creations” is the spontaneity of their occurrence to the mind as images which *determine* that mind to an interpretant. So we might say that their Creator is Imagination, the Firstness of Thought, which draws upon sources running deeper than human consciousness. The more primal the source (the less accessible to consciousness it is), the more we experience its manifestation as a discovery, or a revelation, rather than an invention “made up” by the human mind. Its *truth* manifests itself as a symbol, but the source of its *life* is its iconicity.

Each Icon partakes of some more or less overt character of its Object. They, one and all, partake of the most overt character of all lies and deceptions — their

Overtness. Yet they have more to do with the living character of truth than have either Symbols or Indices. The Icon does not stand unequivocally for this or that existing thing, as the Index does. Its Object may be a pure fiction, as to its existence. Much less is its Object necessarily a thing of a sort habitually met with. But there is one assurance that the Icon does afford in the highest degree. Namely, that which is displayed before the mind's gaze — the Form of the Icon, which is also its object — must be *logically possible*.

CP 4.531 (1906)

The phaneron itself is proof of the *possibility* of anything that emerges from it into a conceptual universe, whether factual or fictional.

A concept is the living influence upon us of a *diagram*, or *icon*, with whose several parts are connected in thought an equal number of feelings or ideas. The law of mind is that feelings and ideas attach themselves in thought so as to form systems. But the icon is not always clearly apprehended. We may not know at all what it is; or we may have learned it by the observation of nature.

— CP7.467, 1893

Whatever we have learned from nature is grounded in our belief in the intelligibility of the universe, just as whatever we learn from turning signs and scriptures begins with our trust in their meaningfulness. Of course, there is always a risk in such trust. Sometimes our quest for meaning overshadows our common sense, and 'epiphany' turns out to be *apophenia*. This term was defined in Wikipedia (accessed in 2011) as

the experience of seeing patterns or connections in random or meaningless data. The term was coined in 1958 by Klaus Conrad, who defined it as the "unmotivated seeing of connections" accompanied by a "specific experience of an abnormal meaningfulness".

In statistics, apophenia would be classed as a Type

I error (false positive, false alarm, caused by an excess in sensitivity). Apophenia is often used as an explanation of some paranormal and religious claims. It has been suggested that apophenia is a link between psychosis and creativity.

However, the risk is worth it; we need not succumb to apophenophobia. If 'the logic of human discovery parallels the divine logic of creation' (Raposa 1989, 127), and all creation is a continuous evolution, it would follow that physical processes must share the inherent creativity of semiotic processes. Hence Peirce's insistence that causation itself must be regarded as analogous to reasoning – otherwise it makes no sense to try to make sense of the physical universe. Hulswit and Romanini (2013, 104), in their study of 'Semeiotic Causation and the Breath of Life,' develop this Peircean line of thought further:

Peircean processes are creative in a triple sense: (1) each event involved in the process contains an element of irreducible novelty; (2) the end state of a process can be reached in different ways; whenever one way or line of causation be blocked, it may originate new lines; and (3) the end state toward which a process tends, may evolve spontaneously.

Sandra Rosenthal (1994, 124) sums it up very succinctly:

Cosmic creativity, as free creative activity, as emergence, arises within the dynamic interrelation of the three Peircean categories. Human creativity, which has been seen to be evinced in abductive activity, in the play of imagination, in metaphor, and in fact to permeate all levels of epistemic activity, can be understood as a uniquely specialized, highly intensified instance of the free creative activity characteristic of the universe within which it functions, and the conditions of possibility of human freedom in general, as self-directedness rooted in rationality, are to be found in the conditions that constitute the

universe at large and within which rationality emerges.

—

In their practice of this creativity, there is no great difference between the scientist and the artist. It is in their application of it, their development of theoretical or imaginative symbols, that they differ. The scientific explorer maps previously unknown but existing territory, using the conventions that will enable other members of the scientific community to read the map – including instructions on how to get there so they can see for themselves. The artistic explorer uses physical media to create a new context or micro-universe in which a previously unrealized *possibility* can be represented to others. Either scientific mapping or artistic creation can produce a turning symbol, if its interpretant changes our way of life. And the creativity doesn't stop there: you continue creating the space you inhabit by living the time.

To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.

— Thoreau, *Walden*, chp. 2

## The Arts & All Things Common

Only by conceiving art as a special direction, a new orientation, of our thoughts, our imagination, and our feelings, can we comprehend its true meaning and function.

— Cassirer (1944, 169).

We don't make sense of fictional worlds in the same way that we make sense of factual worlds. For one thing, we assume that all given details in a fictional world are significant in some way, because they have been included in the fiction *intentionally*: there are no *accidents* as there are in the busy world of existing things bumping into each other now and then. We expect a *fable* to have a "moral," a relatively simple guidance value, but we do not expect that of an ordinary sequence of everyday events. Fictions are typically *fabulous* in this respect even when nothing extraordinary

occurs in them. People get impatient and refuse to play along if too many irrelevant details enter a fictional scenario. But when this happens in the workaday world, we ignore them when we can and “work around” them when we can’t.

Actions performed in play and drama are disconnected from the consequences that would ensue if those acts were ‘taken seriously’ in ‘the real world.’ This is a parallel to the REM stage of sleep, in which we dream while physically paralyzed except for eye movements. But some cultures take their dreams (or rather the recalled contents of their dreams) very seriously indeed, and likewise, fictions can be more purely meaningful than facts, because they are more purely iconic. They reflect the structure of meaning space (the *possibilities* of experience) without the ‘noise’ of irrelevant details or the extra effort of reality checking. Recognition of their meaning is therefore more immediate than is the case with facts.

Fictions and other consciously artistic creations emerge from a creative process more playful than worklike, because it serves no purpose considered ‘practical’ by the workaday world. The experience of such a creation is a kind of *adventure*, as Gadamer says.

But what is an adventure? An adventure is by no means just an episode. Episodes are a succession of details which have no inner coherence and for that very reason have no permanent significance. An adventure, however, interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. Thus an adventure lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength. Here lies the fascination of an adventure. It removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain.

But at the same time it knows that, as an adventure, it is exceptional and thus remains related to the return of the everyday, into which the adventure cannot be taken. Thus the adventure is “undergone,” like a test or trial from which one emerges enriched and more mature. There is an element of this, in fact, in

every *Erlebnis* [experience]. Every experience is taken out of the continuity of life and at the same time related to the whole of one's life. It is not simply that an experience remains vital only as long as it has not been fully integrated into the context of one's life consciousness, but the very way it is "preserved and dissolved" (*aufgehoben*) by being worked into the whole of life consciousness goes far beyond any "significance" it might be thought to have. Because it is itself within the whole of life, the whole of life is present in it too.

— Gadamer (1960, 60)

'The whole of one's life,' or rather its wholeness, is its involvement in the holarity of nature, of a universal process whose purpose is its own, as there is no Other whose purposes it could serve. It is a text without a context, a pattern which creates what it connects and connects what it creates. We have seen it before; Peirce calls it 'love': 'The movement of love is circular, at one and the same impulse projecting creations into independency and drawing them into harmony' (EP1:353).

All the sacred games of art are only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-creating work of art.

— Friedrich Schlegel, quoted by Gadamer (1960, 105)

And so are the symbols which turn up in sciences and scriptures, and turn us to the imaginative vision of reality.

'Reality' always stands as a horizon of desired or feared or, at any rate, still undecided future possibilities. Hence it is always the case that mutually exclusive expectations are aroused, not all of which can be fulfilled. The undecidedness of the future permits such a superfluity of expectations that reality necessarily lags behind them. Now if, in a particular case, a context of meaning closes and completes itself in reality, such that no lines of meaning scatter in the void, then this reality is itself like a drama. Likewise, someone who

can see the whole of reality as a closed circle of meaning in which everything is fulfilled will speak of the comedy and tragedy of life. In these cases, where reality is understood as a play, emerges the reality of play, which we call the play of art. The being of all play is always self-realization, sheer fulfillment, *energeia* which has its *telos* within itself. The world of the work of art, in which play expresses itself fully in the unity of its course, is in fact a wholly transformed world. In and through it everyone recognizes that that is how things are.

— Gadamer (1960, 112-13)

In other words, we get the point.

Next chapter: The Point • <http://gnusystems.ca/TS/pnt.htm>

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